

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: EXISTING DEVELOPMENT PLANS WITHIN THE
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

Prepared by: NORMAN BROCKIE, PLANNING OFFICER (Local
Plan/Policy)

Purpose

This report is the first in a series relating to development plans within the Cairngorms National Park. The purpose of this paper is to summarise the plans as existing on the 1st September 2003. A development plan is the combination of a structure plan, which sets out the broad policy framework for an area, and the local plan which fleshes out the policies in area-specific detail.

The Park area crosses the boundaries of four Local Authorities: Highland, Morayshire, Aberdeenshire and Angus. Planning applications within each Authority area have to be determined under the policies of the relevant development plan; this means that similar applications may be assessed differently in each of the four Local Authority areas of the Park. A summary of cross-plan policy comparisons will be the subject of the next development plan paper.

The CNPA has a statutory duty to provide a National Park Local Plan to cover the whole Park area; this report will discuss the issues and procedures for initiating this process, based on the fast-track prototype being tested in Wester Ross by Highland Council. The procedure itself be the subject of a future development plan paper.

The Aberdeenshire Local Plan Inquiry, mentioned briefly in this paper, will also be the subject of a future development plan paper.

Recommendations

- The Board supports the intention to proceed with the formulation of a single new local plan in 2004 to cover the whole Park area.
- The Board supports research into the fast-track process currently being developed for the Wester Ross Local Plan.
- The Board supports the principle of a Leader+ funding bid to finance a community worker to organise the public participation process.

Executive Summary

The four existing structure plans are all less than 4 years old from adoption, and are therefore well within their 10-year lifespan. The Local Plans however are not so; in particular the Badenoch & Strathspey Local Plan 1997 is seriously out-of-date and already causing

problems. Aberdeenshire Local Plan (if adopted in 2004, post-inquiry) will also be close to needing reviewed. These issues, and the need for consistency of policy across the Park, will require the CNPA to initiate the Local Plan process as soon as possible, potentially in January 2004. It is recommended that a single Local Plan be established to cover the Park, to ensure consistency of approach and to help establish the identity of the area.

An issue for the CNPA is the amount of public and statutory consultation that will be required to formulate various plans and policies over the next few years (Local Plan, Park Plan, Core Paths Network etc.). One way to synchronise/optimize the consultation process is to have a dedicated community worker employed specifically to fulfil that role. The key to a successful planning consultation is to maximise the public's involvement in, and ultimately ownership of, the resultant plan. Towards this community aim it is proposed that Leader+ funding be applied for to part fund the community officer.

EXISTING DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Background

1. The four structure plans are all relatively up-to-date, with adoption from April 2000 to October 2002.
2. Angus and Morayshire have reasonably up-to-date local plans, although the recommended lifespan of a Local Plan is 5 years (SPP1: The Planning System, states that Local Plans should be reviewed and revised within 5 years of the plan being adopted. By this guidance the B&S Local Plan is considerably out of date). Morayshire are already reviewing and monitoring their plan, with annual reports.

Aberdeenshire Local Plan was started in 1998 and is currently heading for a Public Inquiry; the earliest that the plan could be adopted would be late summer 2004, by which time it will already be out-of-date itself. Badenoch and Strathspey is the most problematic plan, covering as it does over two thirds of the Park's population but being severely out-of-date; although adopted in 1997 it was actually begun in the early 1990's.

3. Chart of development plan adoption/progress:

Local Authority	Structure Plan adoption date	Local Plan adoption date
Highland Council	March 2001	Badenoch & Strathspey Local Plan Sept. 1997 Aviemore North Development Brief Feb. 2000
Morayshire Council	*April 2000	*April 2000
Aberdeenshire Council	North East Scotland together: Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001-2016: June 2002	Finalised Draft August 2002; Inquiry to run from Nov. 2003 - April 2004
Angus Council	Dundee & Angus Structure Plan 2001-2016. Oct. 2002	Angus Local Plan Nov. 2000 (currently under review)

* Morayshire adopted the Structure and Local Plans jointly as their 'Development Plan'.

4. As of 1st September 2003 the CNPA became responsible for the Aberdeenshire Local Plan Inquiry, in so far as it applies to the Park area. We are currently discussing with Aberdeenshire Council a joint approach to the Public Inquiry, commencing in December 2003, whereby they will deal with objectives relating entirely to policies and proposals which apply outwith the Park boundary. We will deal with those which apply only within the Park and jointly we may deal with topics which have 'cross-boundary' significance. As a rough measure of the balance of responsibilities, it is worth noting that only 25 out of 2000 objections are specific to areas within the Park.

Plan Issues

5. Within each of these four local plans we have a different set of policy criteria for each issue; this is problematic in that a planning application (for example a new house in

the countryside) may be assessed differently depending upon which of the Park's four Local Authority zones it is situated within. For consistency, we need single policies to operate Park-wide; this can be met in the short term by 'supplementary planning guidance' (for problem issues) and will be met in the longer term by the production of the new CNP Local Plan.

6. The first issue for determination is whether to embark upon a single local plan for the whole Park area or several, based upon socio/geographical sub-divisions which have a distinct local identity. An argument in favour of the latter approach is that it might assist in making each plan more specifically relevant to the communities it covers and, thereby, encourage their participation in the process. However, it would undoubtedly be more demanding on staff resources and delay the objective of having an integrated framework of policies and proposals for the Park as a whole. On balance therefore, we recommend that a commitment be made to the production of a single 'Park-wide' Local Plan. This arrangement would make the best use of limited staff resources and, if linked to the community participation initiative described below, will achieve the objective of securing strong public participation in the process.
7. A consultant has prepared a report for us on how policies compare across the four Local Plans; this identifies the particular policy areas where there is a lack of consistency, and grades their importance relative for the need to provide supplementary planning guidance as interim cover. This will be the subject of a future paper. Typical issues that will require urgent attention are: development affecting designated sites, affordable housing, telecom developments and hill vehicle tracks.
8. Another problem with the existing policies is that from the 1st September 2003 the four aims of the National Park are now an equally important determining factor in assessing planning applications.
9. The boundary of the Park is also (naturally) missing from the Local and Structure Plan's proposals maps; this will of course be rectified when each plan is eventually reviewed. In the meantime it will be up to the new Local Plan, and Park Plan, to establish the CNP as a geographical and organisational entity.
10. **Wester Ross Local Plan:** this is currently being developed using a new 'fast-track' pilot concept in local planning by Highland Council, along with a similar scheme in South Lanarkshire. I am meeting with the WRLP planning team shortly to discuss their progress and procedures, with a view to adopting them for the CNP LP. One of the greatest failures of the development planning system is the length of time it takes to prepare and adopt a plan, and then (in theory) keep it up to date with regular monitoring and review. This is the reason the two prototype areas are being tested, and the CNP LP has a huge opportunity to be at the forefront of developing the new, streamlined and 'up-to-date' system. One of the keys to the process is to maximise the community participation at the early stages, to hopefully avert later conflicts.
11. **Community participation:** this really is the key to a successful plan, the more public ownership can be generated, the more successful will be the delivery of sustainable planning.

12. **LEADER+ funding:** there is an opportunity to apply for (part-) funding for a community-based initiative; the idea is to engage a community worker(s) to organise the community participation/consultation on the ground, and encourage people to take a more active interest in the planning process. There is a traditional distrust of the planning system, and general apathy, which we must try to overcome. An 'independent' community worker could build the necessary bridges, as well as helping to compile data and update a dedicated Local Plan website. The Community Councils will be the key points of contact for the Local Plan process; I addressed the CCCG in Tomintoul on the 30th September on this issue and will be attending their meetings regularly.

Conclusions

13. It is imperative that the CNP Local Plan process be initiated as soon as possible, to address the inconsistency of policy across the Park, and to replace the out-of-date plans, whilst addressing the four aims of the Park.
14. In future reports we will address the issues surrounding the impending Aberdeenshire Local Plan Public Inquiry, a 'cross-plan' policy assessment and a review of the Wester Ross Local Plan prototype.

Norman Brockie
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normanbrockie@cairngorms.prestel.co.uk