
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: TIMETABLE FOR THE PARK PLAN AND LOCAL PLAN

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Purpose

To set out a joint timetable for the completion of the Park and Local Plans and how we intend to feedback to those who have contributed to recent consultations.

Recommendations

That the Board:

- a) Notes the arrangements in place for delivering the final phases of the two plans and providing feedback to consultees;
- b) Reaffirm their wish to submit the Park Plan to Ministers by the end of 2006; and
- c) Agrees to postpone putting the draft Local Plan on deposit until Ministers have approved the Park Plan and the May elections have taken place.

Executive Summary

Over the last three years, we have been developing the National Park Plan and the Local Plan in parallel, and both are now well advanced. The two plans are closely related and this paper discusses the merits of receiving Ministerial approval on the Park Plan before placing the Finalised Version of the Local Plan on deposit for formal consultation. Due to the elections in May 2007, this would mean submitting the Park Plan by the end of 2006 in the expectation that Ministers will want to approve before the start of the election purdah in March 2007; and then putting the Local Plan on deposit in late May or early June 2007.

We are aware of the need to communicate more clearly with stakeholders, in particular on the timetable for future consultations, how we have used previous consultation responses, and how the plans, including the Core Paths Plan, relate to one another.

TIMETABLE FOR THE PARK PLAN AND LOCAL PLAN - FOR DECISION

Background

1. Members have considered the overall timetable for the National Park Plan and Local Plan on a number of occasions. This paper seeks to set out in more detail the sequence of events over the coming months; explain how the development of the two plans will interlink, including the use of consultation responses and feedback to consultees; and seek a decision on the timing of the submission of the Park Plan to Ministers and placing the draft Local Plan on deposit.

Progress on the National Park Plan

2. The formal consultation on the Park Plan finished at the end of June. We are currently analysing the responses and will report back to the Board on 8th September, highlighting in particular the more significant issues which we will be bringing to the informal Board workshop on 22nd September.
3. During the consultation, the Convenor met the Chairman or Chief Executives of the main public sector bodies which will have to have regard to the approved Park Plan. They were broadly supportive of the draft and of the opportunity to support the presentation of the final version to Ministers.
4. Once we have had the opportunity to analyse the responses to the consultation in full, we will have a clearer picture of the amount of change and negotiation required to finalise the plan. From an early reading however, and from initial discussions with the main stakeholders, we are confident at this stage that we can finalise the plan for submission to the Board by the end of 2006.

Progress on the Local Plan

5. The Consultative Draft of the Local Plan was published for consultation between November 2005 and end of February 2006. A report on the results of this consultation was brought to the Planning Committee on 30th June 2006 and the views expressed by a wide range of stakeholders and individuals will contribute to the next, Finalised Version of the Local Plan that will eventually be placed on Deposit for another round of consultation.
6. The Board on 19th May 2006 considered a paper on the *Preferred Strategic Direction for Affordable Housing*. The Board's resolutions following consideration of this paper are informing the further development of Local Plan policy and allocations.
7. The focus of much of the current activity on the Local Plan is directed at housing policy, including the issue of residency/occupancy criteria. Meetings are taking place with partner local authorities with a view to reaching a common understanding of

population and household projections following the work done for CNPA by Manchester University. This, along with the Heriot Watt *Cairngorms Housing Systems Analysis*, will help to give a more detailed picture of the future housing needs of settlements across the Park. A series of meetings with local authorities and Communities Scotland to discuss the Housing Priorities for Action in the Park Plan has provided a further raft of information that will inform the Local Plan, including details of a whole range of mechanisms that are contributing to delivery of affordable housing.

8. Development of Local Plan housing policy will consequently be seeking to identify the housing needs at sub-area and settlement level where possible and then make recommendations on the most appropriate means of addressing those needs. This exercise will include consideration, where it is thought to be appropriate and justified, of the possible use of residency/occupancy criteria. The legal and other implications of using such criteria will be fully considered as will the case for other delivery mechanisms. This work has to be progressed to a position where some fundamental decisions can be taken by the Board when it meets on 6 October 2006 to discuss housing policy.
9. The other area that is the focus of ongoing consideration and discussion with a range of bodies relates to the economy of the Park. The consultation to date has not yielded a lot in the way of information relating to site specific needs and detailed policy direction required to make the economy diversify and prosper.
10. One factor that has complicated Local Plan preparation has been the absence of detailed information from Scottish Water on capacity for water and sewerage. In recent months a series of meetings has taken place with Scottish Water and we now have most of the information we require. We are also discussing the development needs of the Park, particularly in relation to housing, so that Scottish Water can prioritise its investment over the next 4 years in the first instance and then over the remainder of the Q&S III period until 2014.
11. We wish to make progress on the Sustainable Design Guidance (SDG) in parallel with the Local Plan so that the former can inform the policies on the latter and to allow for them to be the subject of consultation at the same time. The SDG will then form Supplementary Planning Guidance that will support Local Plan policy and avoid the need for lengthy and detailed statements relating to such issues within the policies. The end result will be a shorter, more cohesive and user friendly Local Plan. The departure of the principal member of staff pursuing this piece of work has caused an inevitable delay, but a replacement has been recruited and it is envisaged that the SDG can be brought before Members early in 2007.

A Joint Timetable

12. The Board has agreed on previous occasions that we should aim to submit the finalised Park Plan to Ministers in the autumn of 2006 and put the Local Plan on deposit in the same time frame.

13. The Board took an early decision that we should progress the Park Plan and Local Plan in tandem as both were early priorities; and working simultaneously at a strategic and local level was helpful to inform and test ideas in both plans. This has worked well and will yield plans that are well aligned in content.
14. We knew at the start of both plans that we were in new territory – Park Plans are new to Scotland, and their relationship to Local Plans and our unique arrangements to share development control work with adjacent planning authorities is untested. Equally, we did not know in the absence of precedence how best to manage the more advanced stages of both plans.
15. It now seems clear, and this is supported by advice from the Scottish Executive, that we should finalise the Park Plan before putting the draft Local Plan on deposit. There had been a point when the latter was perceived to be proceeding in advance of the Park Plan, a situation that was giving rise to a degree of confusion and occasional concern. What the Board needs to decide now, informed of course by our operational ability to deliver, is the timing.
16. There are a number of significant factors to take into account:
 - a) Assuming we gain the active support of the main public bodies, and broad acceptance by other stakeholders, we estimate that we can bring a final Park Plan to the Board for its approval by 1st December 2006.
 - b) Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority aim to submit their finalised Park Plan to Ministers by the end of October 2006.
 - c) We estimate that Ministers will welcome the opportunity to approve both the Park Plans before the election purdah period begins in March 2007, though this will depend on the quality of the plans, how much support they can demonstrate and whether there are any politically contentious elements proposed in the Plans.
 - d) If Ministers consider either plan to be contentious or inadequate they have the options to reject the plan, delay approval or approve with modifications.
 - e) Assuming no modifications by Ministers to the Park Plan, we estimate that we will have a draft Local Plan ready to be considered by the Board for Deposit by April 2007. It is difficult to forecast the impact of any Park Plan modifications on the Local Plan.
17. Taking these factors into account there are two main options on the timing for both plans.

Park Plan

- a) *Option 1* – Submit the Park Plan by the end of the 2006 in the expectation that Ministers will welcome the plan and approve quickly.
 - b) *Option 2* – Delay submission of the Park Plan until after the May election.
18. There is a general expectation that both Park Authorities would submit Park Plans within 3 years of their formation. Option 1 would be broadly in line with this

expectation though bearing in mind that Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Park Plan has already taken 4 years.

19. Assuming we have gained the active support of the main public bodies, there is no compelling argument to delay the submission of the Park Plan, and indeed the sooner it is complete, the sooner we can progress its implementation; take forward the Local Plan; and use both as material considerations in planning decisions. The main risk associated with meeting this timetable is that it depends on other public bodies agreeing to our proposals.
20. **We recommend that Board agree to Option 1, subject to gaining stakeholder support, thereby reconfirming its previous direction.**

Local Plan

- a) *Option 3* – Place the Local Plan on deposit as soon as possible after the submission of the Park Plan to Ministers.
 - b) *Option 4* – Wait until Ministers have approved the Park Plan (with or without modifications) before putting the Park Plan on deposit.
21. The decision on the timing of the Local Plan hinges on whether we want to push on formally with the Local Plan or whether we consider it more appropriate to delay.
 22. The two main risks of Option 3 are that Ministers will modify the Park Plan and thus render some parts of the Local Plan inappropriate; and/or the consultation on the Deposit draft Local Plan will be caught up in the campaigning for the May elections. The latter becomes more likely if some of the material within the draft Local Plan is contentious, a possibility given some of the reaction to our proposals on housing policy particularly residency/occupancy criteria.
 23. In contrast, Option 4 will mean further delay. Given the lead in time from agreeing the final text of the Park Plan following Ministers' approval or modification, the finalised draft Local Plan would mostly likely be put on deposit following the May elections. The only real risk associated with this delay relates to the continued absence of a body of planning policy that has CNPA ownership and the impact that this may have on planning decisions in the meantime. The consequence of this is that planning decisions will continue to be taken principally on the basis of the existing local plans with the aims of the Park as a material planning consideration. In the overall scheme of events it is considered that a few months delay can be justified if the end result is a better Local Plan and one that is truly fit for purpose. There is also the issue of stakeholder expectations for a late 2006/early 2007 deposit, but it is considered that this can be dealt with through dialogue with the reasons for delay being made clear to all parties.
 24. It is possible that Ministers' will reject the Park Plan and thus delay further the Local Plan. However, we have no indications that this is at all likely, and so have not considered it further at this stage.

25. On balance, and giving particular weight to the need to have a measured discussion on some difficult policy topics, particularly housing provision, against a strategic context already approved by Ministers, Option 4 seems more appropriate.
26. **We recommend that the Board agree to Option 4, thereby delaying putting the draft Local Plan on deposit, most probably until late May/early June 2007.**

Summary of Proposed Timetable

27. The following table summarises the recommended sequence of events:

July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse Park Plan consultation responses and identify significant outstanding issues. Analyse Local Plan consultation responses and identify significant outstanding issues and continue work on developing a housing policy and sustainable design guidance
Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify options for dealing with main Park Plan issues arising from consultations and discussions with partners. Correspondence with stakeholders to explain how their input into the CNPA plans has been used, and what consultations are coming up. Park Plan consultation responses feed in to Local Plan process
Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8/9 Board receives report on Park Plan consultation 22/9 Informal workshop with Board to discuss NPP main issues and options. First round of Community consultation on core path plans begins.
Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6/10 Board further considers housing policy including residency/occupancy criteria.
Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3/11 Board considers NPP options and agrees areas for change.
Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1/12 Board approves text of finalised Park Plan and submits to Ministers. First round of Community consultation on core path plans ends.
Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ministers approve Park Plan</i>
Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board approves draft Local Plan for deposit Second round of Community consultation on core path plans begins.
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Plan is printed Park Plan is published
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Plan is put on deposit, accompanied by published Park Plan.

Using Consultation Responses and Feeding Back to Consultees

28. Over the past three years, the CNPA has followed a very inclusive approach to the development of its plans for the Park. This has included a range of meetings and workshops with different stakeholders to discuss issues and seek their views on

proposals, some as part of our on-going work and some as part of statutory consultations.

29. These discussions have yielded a large amount of information and opinion which continues to help us in our work. However this is not a one-way street, and it is important that we continue to feedback to all our stakeholders what changes we propose to make in response, and what consultations are likely in the near future. This is part of building trusting and mature relationships that will help to deliver the long term vision for the Park.
30. As we develop and finalise individual plans, we will prepare accompanying reports that show what comments we have received and how we have responded to them. We must also find ways to feed this information back to stakeholders, particularly local communities, in a way that is meaningful to them.
31. Over the coming month, we propose to publicise details of the timetable for the Park Plan, Local Plan and Core Path Plans via Press Releases, Notices in the Press and on the CNPA web site. These notices will clearly set out the relationship between these plans and show critical dates with regard to each. The availability of reports and consultation documents will be publicised along with an explanation of how the key messages arising from previous consultations are being taken forward to inform the next stages.
32. Letters will be sent to Community Councils and other stakeholders to the same effect, but these will also reflect stakeholder perspectives and/or local circumstances and comments made within that particular area. Details will be given of the need for ongoing dialogue and the contribution that everyone can continue to make.
33. Working with the Community Co-ordinators we will, where appropriate, arrange meetings with Community Councils and other interested parties where there are localised issues that require more detailed discussion in order to make progress.

Relationship between the National Park Plan and Local Plan

34. Discussions around the two plans have highlighted different interpretations about the relationship between the Park Plan and Local Plans, and how much weight both should have in determining development control decisions not called in by the Park Authority.
35. The Planning Division of the Scottish Executive has reconfirmed the explanation provided in the draft Park Plan, namely:

“The Park Plan provides a significant element of the strategic context for planning and development control within the National Park. Some of the objectives of the Park Plan will be delivered through the Local Plan, which will guide and control the development and use of land at a detailed level within the Park. The Park Plan, and the aims of the Park, will be a material consideration in planning decisions.”

36. We are currently convening a meeting between the Planning Division of the Scottish Executive and the 4 planning authorities to ensure a common understanding and application in both development control and development planning work in the Park.

Consultation

37. This paper is the result of internal discussions between SPPM, PDC, VSR, ESD and COMMS.

Policy Context

38. The Park Plan and Local Plan are key outputs for the 2005-08 Corporate Plan.

Delivering Sustainability

39. Sustainability is an important outcome for both plans, and both have benefited from Strategic Environmental Assessments.

Delivering a Park for All

40. This is build into the process of developing both plans and is embedded within the policies that they contain.

Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

41. The recommendations above are designed to balance the need for an efficient development of the plans with the most effective outcome.

Implications

Financial Implications

42. There are no additional financial implications for the Park Plan.
43. The 2006/07 Operational Plan contains £20,000 for Local Plan production costs and £25,000 for community consultation. This was based on publication of the Finalised Deposit Version in Autumn 2006. Although the revised timetable may still require a small element of that expenditure to take place in this financial year, the majority will not now be required until 2007/08.
44. It also contains £70,000 for the production, distribution and dissemination of the Park Plan, including the possibility of a DVD about the Park and its future to every school in Scotland. Given the timetable recommended above, we now estimate that we are only likely to spend half of this allocation in 2006/07, with the remainder required in 2007/08.

Presentational Implications

45. Some stakeholders may be disappointed in the proposed delay to the Local Plan deposit stage. This is a legitimate concern but, given the impact of some of the proposed policies in the Local Plan, our message is that this concern is outweighed by the importance of having a consultation that is not politicised during election campaigning and, above all, having a Local Plan that is thoroughly evidence based and fit for purpose.

Implications for Stakeholders

46. In the overall scheme of things any delay in the Local Plan will only be a matter of months. Whilst it may prolong uncertainty amongst some stakeholders, particularly if the content will have a bearing on investment decisions or their own policy, this is not considered to be significant. As soon as the Board takes its decision we will communicate with stakeholders on the revised timetable and they can then plan accordingly.

Next Steps

47. The next steps are set out in the timetable above.

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