
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: MINECRAFT PLANNING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

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Purpose

To update the Planning Committee on the planning youth engagement project undertaken by the CNPA planning service with the Cairngorms Youth Action Group.

Background

1. The Cairngorms National Park Authority has a planning service improvement priority focused on engaging young people in the planning system:

“Develop and deliver a youth engagement / involvement programme – Roll out a program of work to engage young people, including the involvement of the Cairngorms Youth Action Group, in the planning system.”

2. The COVID-19 restrictions of the last twelve months and uncertainty around future social distancing measures have made engagement difficult, particularly with young people. In spring 2020 officers therefore identified a need to explore options that did not rely on meeting face to face but would be engaging activities in their own right.

What is Minecraft?

3. Minecraft was chosen as a potential mechanism for engagement as it is a popular game for many ages of player, and is recognised as a potential learning platform as well as being fun. It is an open world single or multiplayer game that promotes creativity, collaboration and problem solving in an immersive environment where the only limit is the imagination of the user. The game focuses on allowing the player to explore, interact with, and modify a dynamically-generated or purposefully designed map made of one-cubic-meter-sized blocks
4. Minecraft has been used as a learning platform that offers educators a transformative way to engage students and ignite their passion for learning. Minecraft: Education Edition for example, is an educational version of Minecraft specifically designed for classroom use. It has been used to engage children and youth in city planning where

the creative and building aspects of the game allow players to build structures together. It has been used by UN-Habitat¹ for this purpose, who found that using Minecraft as a community participation tool for public space design helped promote improved civic engagement².

5. It was hoped that if it could be tailored to the Cairngorms National Park, that Minecraft could be used to engage young people in the Park's environment and built form and give them an introduction into the world of plan and policy making.

The Cairngorms National Park Minecraft Map

6. Minecraft maps of real world places have been created for numerous places, including a map of GB by Ordnance Survey³, Scotland by Immersive Minds⁴ and Denmark by the Danish Government⁵. The map created for the Cairngorms National Park was created using open source tools and open data from Ordnance Survey and Scottish Forestry / Forestry and Land Scotland. The Minecraft map could not be created perfectly to scale because Minecraft limits the height of maps to 265 blocks. However, this has led to a compression of features that means recognisable features of the Cairngorms such as the Lairig Ghru, the Cairngorms plateau and individual summits are closer together and easier to explore.
7. The map has generated a lot of interest from Minecraft players keen to play within it, especially after the BBC covered its use with Youth Action Group⁶ in February. The Cairngorms National Park Minecraft map will be available from 23 April 2021 for anyone to download and use in Minecraft via the CNPA website at <https://cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/education/learning/minecraft/>.

The Youth Engagement Project

8. The concept of the youth engagement project was to use Minecraft as an interactive tool to encourage people to think about place, the planning system and the different actors involved. Members of the Cairngorms Youth Action Team were 'dropped' into the Cairngorms National Park Minecraft environment and asked to work as a team to collaboratively create a community that represents the sort of place they would like to live in.
9. The Cairngorms Youth Action Team were asked to build their community while keeping them in accordance with the four aims of the National Park. The Minecraft environment has few limits to what players can do, so in order to foster cooperation and constructive relationships the players were asked to follow three practical rules to:

¹ <https://unhabitat.org>

² A case study: <https://thecityateyelevel.com/stories/using-minecraft-for-children-participatory-public-space-design/#:~:text=UN%2DHabitat's%20experience%20using%20Minecraft,design%20of%20public%20space%20projects>.

³ <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/blog/2015/08/minecraft-maps-continue-to-grow/>

⁴ <https://www.immersiveminds.com/build-it-scotland>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-27155859>

⁶ [Cairngorms recreated in video game Minecraft - BBC News](#)

- a) Don't damage other people's things.
 - b) If you break something by accident, fix it; and
 - c) Don't deliberately kill other players
10. Beyond those guidelines, players had the freedom to use the Minecraft environment to achieve whatever they wished. This meant that they could think about the impacts of creating and applying policies or rules; could actively plan their development and consider the impacts of their development, their use of resources and what things they might change in their approaches with experience.
11. CNPA officers facilitated regular meetings with the Youth Action Group members participating to discuss what they had done and to reflect on their decision making process. The group was asked to create policies and set out land allocations with design criteria.
12. The final element of the project is being undertaken at this Planning Committee meeting, with members of the Cairngorms Youth Action Group observing the Committee meeting and real decision-making being undertaken before presenting some of their own experiences of the project to the Planning Committee.

Conclusion and Next Steps

13. The Minecraft Planning Engagement Project has been an interesting project to undertake during the restrictions of COVID-19. Our initial conclusions are that:
- a) The Cairngorms National Park Minecraft map is a fun and engaging environment for Minecraft players of all ages; and
 - b) The map and Minecraft provide an easy and engaging way for young people to consider issues that are relevant to land use planning and to land management choices.
14. Officers will undertake a full evaluation of the exercise after this Planning Committee meeting and will bring another report to the Planning Committee in due course. The Cairngorms National Park Minecraft map is now available for anyone to download to play with or to use for educational purposes. We expect that people will enjoy using it and hope that other organisations with more direct involvement with young people will make use of it for educational purposes.

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April 2021
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