



Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan

Consultation and Engagement Process - Stage 1

Community Engagement & Results – Strathdon

Introduction

The core paths plan process targeted four main interest groups to engage with, these included; communities, land managers, people who recreate in the National Park (visitors and residents including businesses, national organisations and clubs e.g. Ramblers, Scottish Canoe Association, Cairngorm Club etc.) and visitors to the National Park (those who may not specifically come to the Park to recreate but may do so whilst they are here). The following report details how the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) engaged with the Strathdon community, the people who participated in the engagement process and the feedback and results that they provided.

Engaging with the Strathdon Community

The engagement period ran from 1st September to 30th November 2006. Questionnaires for the community were made available on the CNPA website, through contacting the CNPA directly and at a drop-in event. The community drop-in event was run to enable people in Strathdon and the surrounding area to find out more about core paths planning and to advise the CNPA of the routes, paths and areas that are important to them and why. People were also given an opportunity to find out about work that has already been carried out in planning for and creating a local path network. A feedback report for the wider Upper Donside area is also available.

The drop-in session was part of a wider Strathdon event, a Silver Circle coffee morning. The event was held at the Lonach Hall in Strathdon on

Saturday 25th November 10am to 1pm. CNPA staff Wendy Rogerson and Sandra Middleton ran the event.

Drop-in Event Promotion

The event was advertised as part of a wider community event in the Donside Piper and was also the subject of a press release. Invitations were sent out to all local land owners/tenants and the community council. An email invitation was sent out to a wide range of local activity providers, businesses and individuals. Posters were displayed around the village a week in advance of the event and fresh posters were put up on the day of the meeting including a large board outside the event.

Drop-in Event Format

People attending the event were advised about similar work carried out previously in the area and how the core paths planning process builds on from that work. Participants were provided with a core paths planning leaflet which included details of the core paths plan process in the Cairngorms National Park and Frequently Asked Questions. The leaflet was made available to participants along with questionnaires and maps to record their views. A questionnaire containing a map was available for each settlement in the National Park as well as for the wider areas of the National Park. Large maps of the wider area were also available to help people identify routes outwith settlements. There was also an opportunity for people to record their views on the path network in the area in relation to what they thought was good or bad about it or what could be improved, this was recorded in an 'H-Diagram' format.

Drop-in Event Feedback

Approximately 100 people attended the coffee morning and many got involved in the core paths planning event. A total of 23 questionnaires were received for Strathdon, 5 were completed at the event and another 18 received by post. Although many participants did not complete questionnaires, many of them got involved in discussion about the local path network and welcomed the opportunity to discuss access issues in their local community.

Participants in the Engagement Process

<p>safe paths from Roughpark to Bellabeg v. dangerous bends children walking to school in dark</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good forest tracks but frequently blocked by fallen trees • Needs a bridge over river to Waterside for pedestrians to reduce car-use • Doune paths too rough for Kids / Pushchairs / wheelchairs • Too rough • They are not that safe, they have potholes • Not way-marked for visitors • Flat walking would be good for a lot of people • Access needed to the river to enjoy this aspect of Upper Donside Paths too rough unless you are two legged and able – no pushchairs or bikes means access with children/disabled is limited 	<p>more or less circular which is useful for short sharp walks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The path network reflects the current local use and is well used especially by people with dogs and children • Wonderful access to forests – keep tracks cleared of fallen trees • Scenery stunning, clean, quiet • Good access but many paths been blocked for ages with blown down trees. Better management would very much be appreciated. 	<p>people around the village (very spread out) off main road (esp. Lonach Games), Newe to Roughpark</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More cycle routes (2 notes) • More available information, better signs • Links to longer distance paths • We need suitable footbridges for cyclists, pushchairs, pedestrians etc. at various locations over the River Don i.e. at Waterside, Newe, Candacraig for instance • Suggest a leaflet promoting walks in the area. Large boards required detailing walks. • More pavements around Bellabeg (especially to school) • A flat circular walk from Doune along to Bridge of Newe and back by Waterside • Some existing tracks have locked gates – no problem for walkers to climb but not possible for cyclists, riders, pushchairs etc. • Paths so that able to walk main road safely i.e. school route • Longer distance paths need to be better marked v. easy to lose bearings on long walks through trees. • It would be great if the
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		path near to Strathdon school could continue into school
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In general discussion with participants at the event, people were positive about the work done at the Doune but were keen that it was more accessible to more people. There was also support for safer routes in the area.

Map Results

People were asked to identify the paths that are important to them on a map in the questionnaire, they were also asked to identify any new routes or areas that they would like to have easier access to and were encouraged to make comments. Participants at the event were given the opportunity to annotate large maps highlighting their popular routes in detail and also adding comments. Where someone made a comment on the maps this has been listed in a table shown in Annex 1, the routes identified can be viewed on a map in Annex 2. Each comment has a number attributed to it to enable cross-referencing with the map in Annex 2 (only where the comment is specific to a geographic area). The routes shown in a solid line are those which people identified as being important to them. The dashed lines are proposed routes that people identified.

Questionnaire Results

A total of 23 questionnaires were received for the Strathdon area. The responses to each of the questions are outlined below.

What outdoor activities do you currently do in and around Strathdon?

Activity	% of respondents who undertake the activity
Low level walking	65%
Dog walking	65%
Hill walking	43%
Running	0%
Gettina about in a	0%

wheelchair	
Walking with a pushchair	13%
Cycling on-road*	39%
Cycling off-road	22%
Horse-riding	9%
Watersports	0%
Winter sports	26%
None	4%
Other	0%

*Comment 'Not Safe'.

Why do you do these activities?

Reason	% of respondents who identified the reason
To keep fit/healthy	70%
Enjoying the Countryside	87%
Travel to work/school	22%
Getting about	17%
Other*	9%

*Other reasons identified were 'tidying up rubbish along the main road', 'Its fun'.

What activities would you like to see better opportunities for in and around the area?

Activity	% of respondents who identified the activity
Low level walking	39%
Dog walking	48%
Hill walking	35%
Running	0%
Getting about in a wheelchair	26%
Walking with a pushchair	35%

Cycling on-road	17%
Cycling off-road*	39%
Horse-riding	13%
Watersports	9%
Winter sports	22%
None	9%
Other**	13%

*Comment, 'Safe routes'.

**Other activities identified were, 'Way marking e.g. in the forestry & hillwalking up the hills', 'suitable for cycles, pushchairs, wheelchairs e.g. the new walk from Bellabeg which goes up behind the school', 'Downhill mountain biking'.

Would better opportunities for these activities encourage you to;

Reason	% of respondents who identified each activity
Walk to work/school	14%
Cycle to work/school	19%
Try new activities	33%
Get fit	52%
Get outdoors more	62%
Other*	5%

*Other reasons identified were 'Do shorter circular walks with my children'.

Summary

During the public engagement process it was found that there is a need to maintain tracks, particularly where trees have blown down and there is demand for safe off-road routes providing for a wide range of users, particularly for access to the school and for people with push chairs and wheelchairs. Paths in the area need better signage, way-marking and promotion. The most popular paths identified were the Ben Newe Woodlands, the path to the north-west of the Doune at Bellabeg and the track to Lost.

Activities carried out in the area were fairly limited with walking and dog walking being equally popular followed by Hillwalking and then

on-road cycling. Most people doing activities did so primarily to enjoy the countryside and also to keep fit and healthy. There was a demand for better dog-walking routes and improved low-level walks and off-road cycle routes. There was a comparatively high demand for better wheelchair and pushchair access. A large proportion of respondents indicated that better opportunities for different activities would encourage them to get outdoors more.

Reflections

The event engaged with a good number of people although many just made passing comments on the way to the coffee morning rather than getting fully involved. There was a good distribution of participants by age group with the majority of people coming from Strathdon itself. The under 16 age group was well represented thanks to strong contributions from the primary school. People seem generally happy with the network existing network for recreation but there is a need for more functional routes which provide for a wider range of users.

Next Steps

The issues raised and the information gathered throughout the process will be used to inform the development of selection criteria for core paths. The selection criteria will then be used to select core paths for the Cairngorms National Park. The selection criteria and maps of the selected paths will be drawn up into an Interim Draft Core Paths Plan which will be completed by the end of March 2007. This Plan will then be made available for the public to make comment.

Cairngorms National Park Authority

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Annex 1 - Comments received on maps at the events and in the questionnaires

Where the comment relates to a geographic area on the map the number of the comment has been written on to the map in Annex 2.	
No.	Comment <i>(as written by respondent)</i>
1	Require bridge over river Don at Candacraig, Waterside and Heugh-head/Newe to promote more circular walks for children. This might encourage families to stop in the area. There used to be bridges at these sites.
2	A footpath from Waterside to Roughpark and Candacraig for children who are no longer entitled to free transport to and from school.
3	My personal interest in paths is for walking, dog walking and horse-riding. Also I have two holiday cottages to let and facilities for visitors are important too <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i> .
4	Strathdon is well served with paths for recreation, mostly in forestry <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i>
5	Clearing and maintaining paths when they are blocked by fallen trees is usually carried out by the Forestry Commission on main tracks but not side tracks. But other woodlands e.g. Ben Newe not regularly cleared and many paths now inaccessible.
6	Way-marking would be useful for visitors at car parks and entrances. A local leaflet would be good too <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i> .
7	It is important to keep open longer distance paths that go out into the hills beyond this map e.g. out to the Cabrach for Glenbuchat, up the Nocht to the Ladder, Up Ernan Water to Glenlivet and south of the Don to Corgarff <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i>
8	A new path that would provide benefit to residents and visitors would be between the Doune Court Bridge and the Bridge of Newe, either side of the river. Although Strathdon takes its name from the river there are few places to access it for walkers, Mainly due to close planting of blocks of conifers on the banks and farmers fences stopping access. A new river path would be flat enough for every age group to use. At different points along it people who want longer walks could strike off to north or south to the hills. A footbridge that used to be approximately opposite the hotel could be re-instated to add variety to a choice of routes.

9	Another new path would be a footpath to enable children to walk from Roughpark and Bellabeg to school. This would reduce the need for parents to get their car out and promote exercise for their children. Especially now that school transport is reduced to children living at least 3 miles away.
10	We do a lot of walking but we live outside the area of this map <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i> .
11	My area of interest is Roughpark to Corgarff & Ladder Hills.
12	Entrance to Doune and path not for wheelchair or pushchair.
13	Footpaths from Bellabeg to Strathdon School for children who have to walk
14	No proper path round the Doune or proper access for disabled or pushchair
15	From the War memorial to the edge of the Doune is perfect beyond very rough

