



Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan

Consultation and Engagement Process - Stage 1

Community Engagement & Results – Ballater

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 Ballater community, the people who participated in the engagement process and the feedback and results that they provided.

Engaging with the Ballater 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. A community drop-in event was run to enable people in Ballater 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.

The drop-in session was part of a wider community event where people could come along and find out about the work of a range of organisations operating in and around Ballater. The event was held at the Victoria Hall in Ballater on Tuesday 12th September from 12pm to 4pm. CNPA staff Adam Streeter-Smith and Sandra Middleton ran the event with assistance from Community Liaison Officer Jean Henretty.

Drop-in Event Promotion

The event was advertised as part of a wider event in the Deeside 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 and leaflets were distributed around the village by Ballater Royal Deeside who advertised the wider event.

Drop-in Event Format

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 60 people attended the event and a total of 36 questionnaires were completed at the event, 19 of which were for Ballater. A number of people took questionnaires away to complete in their own time. There was no formal evaluation of the event although generally the feedback from people was positive.

Participants in the Engagement Process

Throughout the 3 month period a total of 34 questionnaires were completed for the Ballater settlement, questionnaires were received at events across the Park, by post and from the CNPA website. To help the CNPA gauge whether or not the process successfully engaged with a wide enough cross section of the community, the questionnaires asked people to provide information on their gender, age group and where they live. The results are shown below.

Participants by Gender

Male	59%	Female	41%
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Participants by Age Group

Under 16	0%	16 - 24	0%	25 - 34	20%	35 - 44	47%	45 - 64	20%	65 - 74	0%	Over 75	13%
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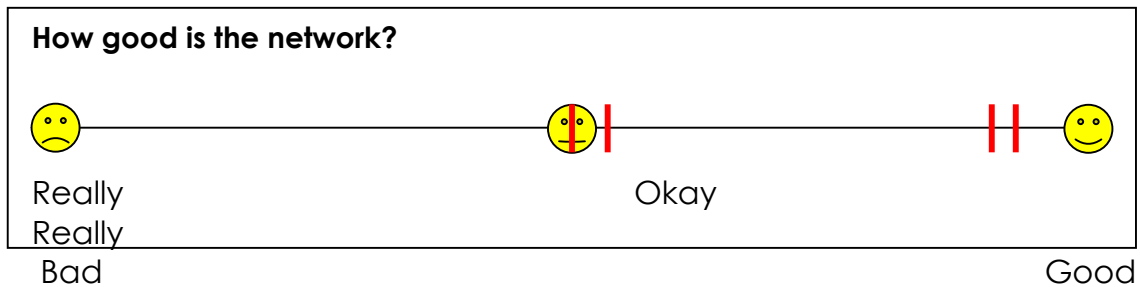
		24		44		64		74		
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Where people came from

% of people from each place who completed questionnaires					
Ballater	72%	Ballater Community Council area	3%	Elsewhere	24%

Results of the Engagement Process

At the drop-in event people were asked their views about the path network in and around Ballater. Participants were asked to place a mark on a line to show what they thought of the network. The results are shown below.



People were also asked what they think is good and bad about the network and what could be improved. The results are shown below, the comments are recorded exactly as written by participants.

Comments on the Ballater Network		
What is bad about the network?	What is good about the network?	How the network could be improved?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access from Pannanich Hill to Ballater blocked by gate. • Access to shops for disabled • Hawthorn Place and road crossing • Off road horse riding • Too many barriers, e.g. gates locked • Not a good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of walking options • The scenery • Meeting people to speak to • Plenty of opportunities for everybody • Good surfaces and well sign posted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More emphasis on cycling for all abilities • More visual signage and route choices • Provide a path alongside the Pass of Ballater • Walkway – Old line to Dinnet need attention at Ballater end. • Kerb not dropped at start of Old Station Place • Improve info on level/grade of paths for all abilities • Cinder Path through to Pass of Ballater needs to be cut back • Keep down the number of

network outwith village • Golf course path very poor for wheel chairs • Poorly maintained • Dog mess • Not good enough info for visitors	• Fresh air • Good networking in and around village.	signs • Teach map reading • Any proposed path following Ballater Burn to the Old Line should come off Pass at the burn not over field • Improve wheel chair access • Audit of wheelchair access across pavements required • Separate routes for horse riders
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In general discussion with people the issues over water access at Loch Kinord and problems of fires and litter were raised on a number of occasions.

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 34 questionnaires were received for the Ballater area. The responses to each of the questions are outlined below.

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

Activity	% of respondents who undertake the activity
Low level walking	88%
Dog walking	24%
Hillwalking	64%

Running	12%
Getting about in a wheelchair*	12%
Walking with a pushchair	3%
Cycling on-road	39%
Cycling off-road	36%
Horse-riding	3%
Watersports	9%
Wintersports	15%
None	3%
Other**	9%

* Comment: 'taking mother'

** Other activities identified were 'Natural History/Archaeology', 'Feeding & caring for our 3 highland ponies/PB horse on 17 acres of ground. 3 miles W of Ballater Bridge', and, 'Up Craig Coillache Craigendarroch'.

Why do you do these activities?

Reason	% of respondents who identified the reason
To keep fit/healthy	88%
Enjoying the Countryside	94%
Travel to work/school	12%
Getting about	55%
Other*	21%

*Other reasons identified were 'Natural History', 'Geology/Archaeology', 'Mountain Bike Guiding', 'Quality of Life', 'Feeding animals horse/cow', 'running a stud' and, 'showing visiting friends around'.

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	42%
Dog walking	9%
Hillwalking	9%
Running	6%
Getting about in a wheelchair	24%
Walking with a pushchair	15%
Cycling on-road	18%
Cycling off-road	12%
Horse-riding	12%
Watersports	9%
Wintersports	6%
None	3%
Other*	18%

*Other reasons identified were, 'Nordic Walking trails', 'try to complete circular routes "off-road" ', 'more cycle routes that do not involve going on the roads much, Traffic is very fast and dangerous, particularly for children and novice riders', 'Some paths suitable for heart/lung problems in varying high winds' and, 'Competitive cycling - off road e.g. Fort William'.

Would better opportunities for these activities encourage you to;

Reason	% of respondents who identified each activity
Walk to work/school	15%
Cycle to work/school	12%
Try new activities	15%
Get fit	21%
Get outdoors more	58%

Other*	9%
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*Other reasons identified were 'Maintain paths once that have been upgraded, Enforcement of litter & dog fouling rules' and, 'Economic Development'.

Summary

During the public engagement process it was found that there is a need for safe off-road links to neighbouring communities and the wider path network, particularly in the Pass of Ballater and on the South Deeside Road to access Glen Muick and the 7 Bridges Walk. There is also a requirement for attention to specific parts of the path network to make the wider network accessible to wheelchairs and powered scooters.

The most popular path identified was the Old Deeside Line (55% of respondents) closely followed by the golf course path, 7 Bridges walk and the paths around Craigendarroch hill (approx. 50% of respondents). There was high demand for an off-road route along the section of the 7 Bridges Walk which follows the South Deeside Road.

Most activities proved popular in the area although low-level walking was by far the most popular, followed by hill-walking and then cycling both on and off road. Most people doing activities did so to enjoy the countryside and also to keep fit and healthy, a lot of people also did them just to get about but few people do so to get to work or school. There was some demand for better low-level walking routes and a comparatively high demand for better opportunities for wheelchair users and pushchairs.

Reflections

The drop-in was part of a wider event and was generally well attended, however, overall the questionnaires failed to capture any data from the under 24 age groups throughout the engagement period and as such there is a requirement to re-target these groups in the second round of consultation. This was the first event to be done and in general feedback was positive, feedback sheets to be developed for future events.

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

1 March 2007

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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 (as written by respondent)
1	Off-road path required for bridges circular walk. For this stretch of road.
2	Dangerous crossing point on road at blind bend
3	To make a circular route from Dinnet and old line
4	There are some existing paths missing from the map i.e. around the golf course, old curling ponds, along bottom of Craigendarroch Hill, behind Monaltrie House. <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i>
5	A path at a suitable point from the Craigendarroch 'Round' walk down into the Pass of Ballater would be useful.
6	To Braemar
7	To Gairnshiel
8	To Aboyne
9	Polhillock Bridge
10	Gap in the path due to deer fence
11	Path to cemetery from railway line path
12	Small gap between roads could be improved for all ability access. A yard or two joining Craigendarroch Walk & Monaltrie Avenue for motorised invalid carriages.
13	A yard or two to improve Cinder Paths at the junction of Provost Craig Road for motorised invalid carriages.
14	Tullich church yard and cemetery
15	Very dangerous road, with heavy lorries, and no footpath for walkers. Important for residents of timeshares to safely walk in the area.
16	Good & Flat
17	Unsafe to walk on main road
18	Linking along river Polhillock Bridge
19	Either/or (route either side of road) to stop need to walk on road
20	Better access on to Glen Muick Estate
21	Needs safe route on road

22	Consideration needs to be given to needs of people with powered scooters driving around Ballater. <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i>
23	Well known access problems here.
24	Qn's Hut I do not think this is a through track.
25	Note: OS not accurate on paths/tracks e.g. paths around golf course missing <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i>
26	House of Glenmuick main drive. There are likely to be access issues with this Estate – now run by a trust in Derbyshire.
27	I am a walk leader with Paths to Health in Ballater and my group frequently uses 2-3 mile walks in and around the village. Since the majority of our walkers are in their 70's the conditions underfoot are of prime concern, especially as we walk all year round. <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i>
28	Footpath needed on l/h side of A93 to white bridge. Currently you have to access road – means unsuitable for children and dangerous ideally cycle path!!!
29	All village pavements are important <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i>
30	Where is the golf course path <i>(not numbered on map in Annex 2)</i>
31	Pass of Ballater urgently needs pavement + cycleway drivers are <u>mental</u> on this road.
32	The section of the Seven Bridges walk from the Royal Bridge to Dalylfour is presently on road and is potentially very dangerous. A separate path would remove the danger and increase the pleasure.

In addition to the above comments, a member of the public dropped into the CNPA offices in Ballater to suggest that a path around Craigendarroch Hill would be useful to avoid dangerous traffic. A path along the River Gairn was also suggested although it was noted that this would require a new footbridge.

Correspondence relating to Ballater was also passed on to CNPA from Aberdeenshire Council who received it as part of their consultation. The correspondence noted the quality of the existing paths and raised concern over the use of paths and pavements by cyclists and concern that paths should not all be made too 'easy' as it will spoil them for the more adventurous.

