

5) DEPOSIT CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK LOCAL PLAN (BALLATER)

PETITION OPPOSING HOUSING ALLOCATION FOR BALLATER H1

ANALYSIS OF PETITION

A) Summary

A petition was raised at a public meeting on 30th September 2008. Signed by more than 750 Ballater residents, it requires the CNPA to: a) reserve, for recreational/ community use, land currently allocated for housing at the north east of Monaltrie Park; b) remove the land from the housing allocation; c) eliminate the proposal for 250 new houses in Ballater from the Local Plan, and d) focus attention on the provision of affordable housing for local people. The petition was developed in two phases: through October 2008, and from mid-December 2008 to mid-April 2009.

Throughout both phases, the percentage of residents signing has been consistent, at 80+% of those contacted. As of 15th April 2009, over 750 Ballater residents have signed the petition, of which more than 650 are on the electoral roll. The petition has therefore received the support of more than 50 per cent of the population of Ballater.

B) Background to the Petition

A public meeting was convened on 30th September, to which all residents of Ballater were invited. The purpose was to enable people to become updated on the status of the Deposit CNP Local Plan, with particular focus on the housing proposals for Ballater site H1, and to allow residents to air their views on this issue.

At only 3 days' notice, 155 residents attended the meeting in the Albert Memorial Hall in Ballater, which culminated in 108 residents pledging their signatures to the following petition text, developed and agreed collectively during the meeting:

"The Deposit Cairngorms National Park Local Plan indicates allocation of land north east of Monaltrie Park, Ballater, for 250 new houses. This land should be reserved for recreational/community use. We, the undersigned, require the CNPA to remove this area of land from the housing allocation and eliminate the proposal for 250 new houses in Ballater from the Deposit Local Plan. We request a realistic assessment of the needs of local people for affordable housing and the best means of meeting those needs".

The petition format is shown at the end of this document. The petition development was split into 2 phases, as described below.

C) Collection Methods for Signatures – 1st October to 28th October 2008

The initial intent was to collect as many signatures as possible, in order to assess and demonstrate the strength of feeling within the community. Owing to the compressed initial time scale, there was little opportunity to structure the campaign.

Signatures were collected mainly through door-to-door visits by a small group of volunteers. This effort yielded approximately 380 signatures. The remaining 150 (approximately) were collected at the Hut on The Green, which was opened for this purpose every Saturday in October between 10.00 to 12.00 and 14.00 to 16.00.

While it was preferential for signatories to be either resident in the village or in the near vicinity, we did not “police” this with absolute rigour. During the period 1/10/08 to 28/10/08, a total of 533 signatures were collected. In addition, there remained around 10 pledged signatures yet to be collected. The addresses of the 533 signatories were distributed as follows:

- 484 were living within the village boundary (Ballater Residents)
- 25 were living just outside the village eg Glen Muick, Glengairn, Cambus O’May, Crathie (Rural Residents)
- 26 lived in Dinnet, Aboyne, Braemar or further still from Ballater (Non Residents). These were people who declared a strong affiliation for Ballater, such as close relatives living there or a long history of regular visits, often with an intention to retire to Ballater.

D) Rate of Accumulation

Over the 4 week period 1st to 28th October, the rate of accumulation was:

- Week 1 (1-7/10/08) 254
- Week 2 (8-14/10/08) 144
- Week 3 (15-21/10/08) 88
- Week 4 (22-28/10/08) 47

The high initial accumulation rate resulted from an initial ‘flush’ of signatures from pledges at the meeting on 30th September. Thereafter, the fairly rapid rate of decline (almost 50% per week) was due mainly to deteriorating weather conditions and collectors’ fatigue, combined with their other commitments. The main underlying impediment to accumulation of signatures was residents not at home (at work or on holiday - October mid-term break).

During door-to-door collection, the average “hit rate” on contact (ie once the door was answered) was consistently over 80%. This did not seem to vary greatly between different parts of the village, nor over the collection period. At the end of October, some areas of the village remained still to be visited for the first time. Although the rate of accumulation fell quite rapidly (by nearly 50 per cent per week) it seemed highly likely that, because of the

consistently high “hit rate” (more than 80%) there would be many more residents willing to add their signatures to the petition, given a suitably sensitive approach (eg, by avoiding poorly targeted repeat visits).

The signature collection effort was suspended from end-October until mid-December for a number of reasons: deteriorating weather, collector fatigue, holidays and other commitments.

E) Statistical Significance of Initial Petition Response

As of 1st December 2008, the electoral roll for Ballater indicated a total electoral population of 1289 within the village boundary. Focusing on the village signature count and population, the signature count of 484 Ballater residents at end-October appeared to represent some 37.5 per cent of population, a very significant proportion over a short period, despite the fact that it was not known how many of the 484 Ballater signatories were on the electoral roll.

F) Further Development of the Petition

In mid-December, signature collection was re-started, with the specific intent of obtaining the support of the majority of Ballater population. At this point, the effort in collecting signatures from “rural residents” was held in abeyance for a number of reasons: Difficulty in locating rural addresses; weather conditions and the sheer magnitude of the overall task. This was felt to be most regrettable, as rural residents are very much part of the community, and it was hoped that, when the Ballater target had been reached, effort could be re-directed to the Ballater hinterland. Nevertheless, those rural residents we spoke to about this all seemed most understanding.

With the resumption of signature collection in mid-December, a spread sheet was set up to record basic data for each signature – surname, initial, date signed, road name, house name, house number, petition sheet number, location (i.e. Ballater or other place). The primary purpose was to assist in avoiding duplicate signings and irritation to residents of duplicate visits. Initially, the “hit rate” on contact was, to our astonishment, around 95 per cent, demonstrating a strong appetite for expression of views on this issue. As in October, the main impediment to accumulation was difficulty in catching people at home.

In January 2009 a copy of the edited electoral roll for Ward 15 was procured from Aberdeenshire Council ERO. The data for Ballater were supplemented by information taken from the full electoral roll dated 1st December 2008, held in Ballater library, to give better guidance on names and addresses of potential signatories in the Ballater population, plus some basis for determining the overall adult population numbers. The aim was to demonstrate that the petition signatures represented the majority of the population and to present this at the public inquiry planned for early 2009.

G) *Modus Operandi* for Ongoing Development and Analysis

Until late January, signatories had been approached on a random basis, in that there was no reference to their status on the electoral roll. After establishment of the electoral list, these names were targeted preferentially for the following reasons:

1. The electoral roll offered the only precisely measurable and current account of the adult population.
2. While there is evidence that the number of “holiday homes” or second homes in settlements in this part of Scotland is around 20%, this was not exactly verifiable for Ballater, nor does it lead to a reliable estimate of the overall population (holiday household sizes might be expected to be somewhat smaller than permanently populated households). A better means for estimating the overall population, it was believed, would be to take the first *tranche* of 500 Ballater resident signatures (collected at random, with no mention of the signatory’s status on the electoral roll) and check the percentage which were on the electoral roll, then use this factor to “upgrade” the electoral roll total to a new overall total population. This approach in fact indicated that almost exactly 15 per cent of the total population, during October 2008, were not on the electoral roll. This could be slightly higher than the annual average due to the October mid-term holiday.
3. Although the majority of signatories seemed to be very honest about their status as residents, the actual residency status of an individual not on the electoral roll is difficult to define and can cover a range of circumstances.

As a general point, the odds were always stacked against successful accumulation of signatures, for a number of reasons:

1. If the person answering the door (the “gate keeper”) says “no”, then the same is assumed for all members of the household, with no further questions.
2. Conversely, if the “gate keeper” says “yes” then this could not be taken for granted for others at that address.
3. There are many names on the electoral roll which we would term “forced abstentions” in the form of: a) adult children away at university and therefore unavailable to sign; b) residents of care homes, one of which has closed and one where the care management declined to allow residents to be approached, as they were deemed not to be able to comprehend the details of the petition, or liable to become distressed by the discussion; c) individuals in occupations of sensitivity which precluded them from signing, irrespective of their opinions, such as magistrate, GP, solicitor, and of course, their spouses and other family members . The numbers involved in each of these 3 categories are estimated as follows: a) 70-80; b) 21, and c) at least 6. Thus, up to 100 names could, it is believed, justifiably be

deducted from the total of the population for the purpose of target setting, being categorised as “forced abstentions”.

H) Establishment of Justifiable Targets

The full voting electoral register of 1st December 2008 for Ballater contains 1289 names, of which 21 are deducted for St Andrews and Craigard care homes, plus a further 6 for sensitive occupations, thus reducing the total to 1262; this dictates a minimum target of 632 electoral roll names for a majority of public support to the petition. No deduction will be made for adult student absentees, as numbers cannot easily be validated. Nevertheless, some deduction is justified, and so it is proposed that an unquantifiable “credit” is allocated to the final size of the majority of the signatures. Similarly, a further unquantifiable credit can be allocated for the factors described above, in relation to the built in disadvantage due to the bias in our reactions to the responses of the “gate keepers”.

Based on the estimated 15% of the population which is not on the electoral roll, as described above, the **total** adult population of Ballater can be estimated as $1262 / 0.85 = 1485$. Thus, a total number of valid signatures needed is 743 (validity being based on Ballater village addresses, no duplications).

I) Conclusion

So, in order to demonstrate that an overall majority has been achieved, a total of at least 743 valid signatures would be required for people with a *bona fide* address in Ballater, of which at least 632 would have to be on the electoral roll for Ballater. As of 15th April 2009, a total of 753 Ballater signatures have been collected, of which 652 are on the electoral roll.

Thus, the petition has received the support of more than 50 per cent of the population of Ballater, excluding any unquantifiable “credit” as mentioned above. The overall “hit rate” has been consistently 80+ per cent of the residents contacted, despite a hiatus in the campaign from end-October to mid-December. We estimate that there are some 550 residents whom we have not yet contacted. Subject to time constraints, it is our intention to continue with collecting signatures, at least until the commencement of the public inquiry on 18th May 2009 and to report latest data to the Reporters at the appropriate time, if permitted to do so.

In the mean time, we would like to congratulate the people of Ballater for their consistent and enthusiastic support for this expression of concern on the most critical issue of housing – especially with reference to the need for adequate affordable housing for local people. We apologise to those whom we have not been able to contact yet, and thank those who declined to sign the petition for their civility, tolerance and good humour.

Phil Swan 15th April 2009