



Cairngorms
National Park Authority
Ùghdarras Pàirc Nàiseanta a'
Mhonaidh Ruaidh



NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Performance Assessment

Cohort 3

April 2025

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Scoring matrix used within this document:

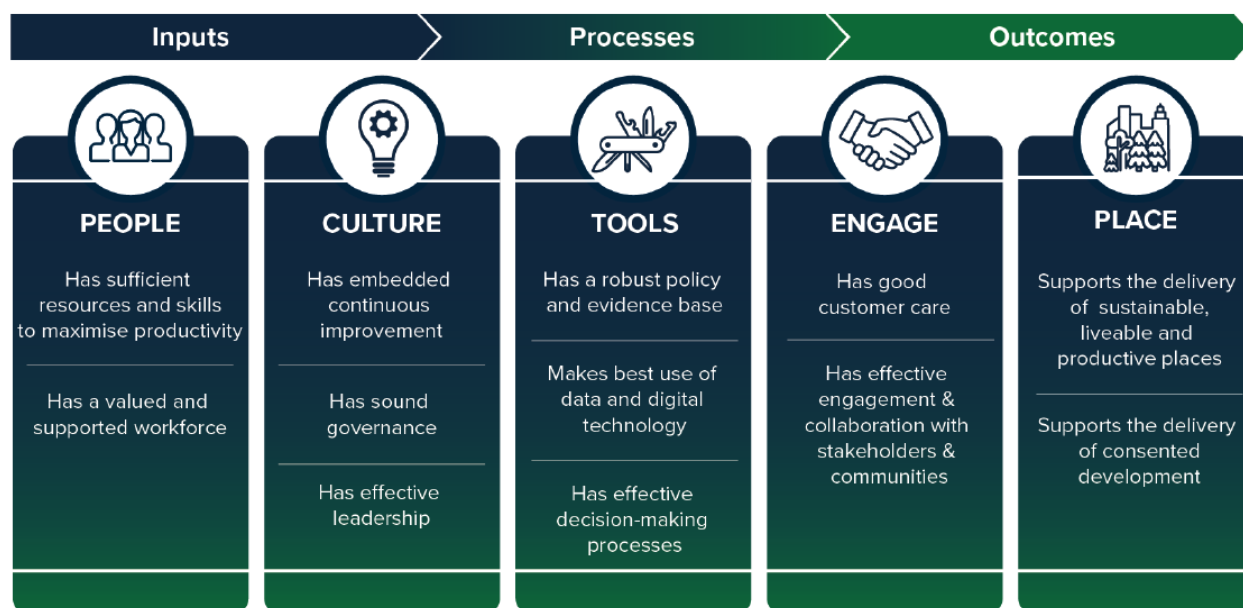
☐	1	Making excellent progress	Consolidate Share learning with others
☐	2	Making good progress	Build upon Increase ambition in targets Share learning with others
☐	3	Making fair progress	Develop Increase ambition in targets Review and improve implementation
☐	4	Making limited progress	Review Review ambition Review approach taken Inform NPI Learn from others
☐	5	No progress	Prioritise Prioritise fundamental review and revisit approach taken. Engage with NPI Learn from others

Introduction

The Cairngorms National Park Authority is delighted to share this National Planning Improvement Framework as part of the third cohort for this pilot project led by the Improvement Service.

The National Planning Improvement Framework replaces the Planning Performance Framework reports which were previously submitted to Scottish Ministers on an annual basis. The National Planning Improvement Framework aims to better measure how planning authorities improve by incorporating attributes that better assess impacts, outcomes achieved, and the quality of the service provided, and by recognising that planning authorities depend on others to deliver a high-quality service.

As part of this National Planning Improvement Framework, the National Park Authority's planning service has undertaken a performance assessment and identified areas for improvement focused on the attributes of a highly performing planning authority. These attributes are grouped around the following five themes:



The process has also involved a peer review, including our partner local authority Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and a range of other stakeholder representatives. The National Park Authority is grateful for the input of everyone who participated in the peer review process to help us refine our improvement actions and priorities.



A high performing planning authority needs to have the right number of people to do the work expected of it with the rights skills set. It also needs to have a strategy to ensure that it retains and recruits the right staff in the future. It supports staff to upskill and to be prepared for changes in policy, legislation, and new circumstances.

ATTRIBUTE 1: THIS PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS SUFFICIENT RESOURCES AND SKILLS TO MAXIMISE PRODUCTIVITY

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the sufficient level of staff to carry out all activities within the required timeframes?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current budget?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current income?
- Does the planning authority received responses from consultees within the prescribed timescale when assessing planning applications?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to access the appropriate advice, expertise, evidence and data it requires?

Narrative

Background to planning in the Cairngorms National Park

In the Cairngorms National Park, more than in any other part of Scotland, there is a partnership approach to planning. The National Park Authority and the five relevant local authorities that cover the National Park¹ all play a key role in making the planning system work effectively. The National Park Authority sets the planning policy for the National Park through the development of the National Park Partnership Plan and the Local Development Plan. All planning applications in the National Park are determined with reference to this policy background. Planning

¹ Aberdeenshire Council, Angus Council, Moray Council, Perth and Kinross Council, and The Highland Council

applications are initially submitted to the relevant local authority, and they are decided by either the local authority or the National Park Authority. The National Park Authority is notified of all planning applications within the National Park boundary, and 'calls in' and determines the larger and most significant / sensitive applications (typically this accounts for just under 10% of all planning applications within the National Park). The rest (most of the applications) are determined by the relevant local authority. This unique status in comparison with other planning authorities shapes both the structure and the operating processes of the Park Authority's planning service.

National Park Authority's planning structure

The National Park Authority's planning service sits within the wider Directorate of Planning and Place. As well as planning, this includes the following service areas: visitor services; transport and infrastructure; outdoor learning and engagement; rangers; and Cairngorms 2030.

The planning service includes the development management, development planning and planning support teams. The following summaries provide additional information on the general activities undertaken by each team.

The development planning team is responsible for producing the Park Authority's Local Development Plan, as well as supplementary and non-statutory planning advice and guidance. In addition, they provide project management support in the development of the National Park Partnership Plan, which acts as the Regional Spatial Strategy for the National Park (as well as the Regional Land Use Framework and Economic / Sustainable Tourism Strategy). The team also monitors delivery of the Local Development Plan's policies and proposals, as well as supporting external partners to develop Community Action Plans and Local Place Plans.

The development management team is responsible for processing the planning applications which the National Park Authority calls-in for determination, as well as providing pre-application advice on development proposals that the Park Authority is likely to call in for determination. The team also monitor and resolve planning enforcement issues for any cases in which the Park Authority granted planning permission or, in cases where development is undertaken without planning permission, where the Park Authority would have dealt with any planning application for that development.

The planning support team are responsible for providing technical and administration support for the whole planning service. They have particular responsibility for maintaining planning registers, issuing decision notices, providing support for planning committee meetings, and monitoring planning performance indicators. In addition, they co-ordinate with partners at Loch

Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority to ensure effective operation of our planning IT systems.

Staffing resources

A description of the overall arrangement of the Park Authority’s Planning Service is provided below.

The development planning team is managed by the Forward Planning and Service Improvement Manager, supported by a Senior Planner. The Forward Planning and Service Improvement Manager has line management responsibility for the Senior Planner and a Planning Officer, whilst the Senior Planner is responsible for line management of a Graduate Planner and a Planning Technical Assistant.

The development management team is managed by the Development Management Manager, supported by a Senior Planner. The Development Management Manager is responsible for line management of the Senior Planner, two Planning Officers and a Planning Ecological Advice Officer, whilst the Senior Planner has line management responsibility for a Graduate Planner and a Monitoring and Enforcement Officer.

The planning support team is managed by a Planning Systems Officer, who reports to the Development Management Manager and has line management responsibility for a Planning Support Officer.

The overall planning service is managed by the Head of Planning, who since late 2024 is the Chief Planning Officer for the National Park Authority. A restructure during 2023/24 re-allocated some of the functions for which the Head of Planning was previously responsible in order to free up capacity and allow the post holder to focus on planning activities. The functions that have been re-allocated, which include visitor services and transport infrastructure, remain within the wider Planning and Place Directorate. This ensures that close co-operation between these important services is retained.

The table below provides a summary of the number of staff within the planning service that were members of the Royal Town Planning Institute during the 2023/24 financial year, including details of whether they were chartered, licentiate or affiliate members.

RTPI Membership Status	Number of Staff
Chartered Member	4
Licentiate Member	3
Affiliate Member	2

Overall, the planning service has a structure which, when fully staffed, is effective and well-designed to carry out the Park Authority's planning activities and responsibilities. However, in common with other planning authorities, particularly in rural areas, the Park Authority experiences challenges with recruiting appropriately qualified and experienced planning professionals. This sometimes results in vacancies within the planning service being unfilled for prolonged periods, which can in turn have a bearing on timescales for carrying out planning activities and responsibilities. A strategy has been developed to help mitigate and address this issue, and this is discussed in more detail under Attribute 2 below.

Budget and finance

The Head of Planning has overall responsibility for planning service budgets, and the budgets for the relevant teams are also monitored regularly by the Development Management and Forward Planning Managers.

The National Park Authority is able to recover 60% of the application fee from the relevant local authority for all planning applications that it calls in for determination. Planning fee income for the 2023/24 financial year was £67,155. In common with other planning authorities across Scotland, this fee income does not cover the full cost of processing the planning applications that the Park Authority deals with, and the balance is therefore met from other budgets.

Planning is one of the Park Authority's two statutory functions (the Park Authority is also the statutory access authority for the National Park). The costs associated with running the planning service are therefore prioritised within the annual budget setting process, and appropriate budgets are assigned to ensure effective delivery of the service's key functions. This includes both core staffing costs, as well as costs for engaging specialist advice where required (eg external legal advice). It also includes budget allocations to undertake / commission relevant appraisals and assessments to support preparation of the new Local Development Plan, as well as costs associated with statutory processes such as the upcoming gatecheck for the Evidence Report.

Consultees and specialist professional advice

Consultees play a key role in assisting the production of the new Local Development Plan and providing advice and comments on planning applications. As the National Park Authority deals with a wide range of planning issues and processes a diverse caseload of planning applications, a large number of consultees are involved in supporting the effective delivery of planning activities. These include other teams within the Park Authority, colleagues in the five local authorities within the National Park, and a wide range of external consultees.

The Park Authority has positive working relationships with consultees and, for the most part, responses are received in appropriate timescales to enable timely and effective planning decisions. It is recognised, however, that consultees also have their own financial constraints, and often experience similar challenges to the Park Authority in terms of staff recruitment and the ability to attract and retain suitably experienced professionals. This can result in delays to consultation responses. Where it is not possible for consultees to respond within normal timeframes, the Park Authority will work with them as appropriate to agree alternative timescales.

In addition to consultees, the Park Authority also has appropriate working arrangements to draw on other specialist expertise and advice where required. This includes contractual arrangements with external legal advisers and landscape consultants, who can be called upon as appropriate where Park Authority staff need additional specialist advice in these areas.

ATTRIBUTE 2: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS A VALUED AND SUPPORTED WORKFORCE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a workforce planning strategy in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to support staff development and upskilling and send staff on relevant courses?
- Does the planning authority have a deliverable commitment to support staff health and wellbeing?

Narrative

Workforce planning strategy

The Park Authority recognises and acknowledges that its workforce represents its most valuable asset. Whilst the planning service does not currently have its own workforce planning strategy, there is a Workforce Management Strategy for the Park Authority as a whole. This highlights any key risk areas within the Authority's workforce (workforce demographic trends, absence levels etc) and identifies actions to manage and mitigate them (succession planning etc). It includes specific actions for each directorate and team within the organisation. For the planning service, the strategy acknowledges the challenges that are often faced in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified planning professionals. It therefore identifies measures to

address this, including creating several career-graded posts (such that appointees may be either relatively recent graduates or experienced officers) and the introduction of two specific Graduate Planner posts within the team. These posts enable newly qualified planning professionals to obtain experience across both development management and development planning, as well as providing the Authority with an opportunity to 'grow our own' experienced planning staff.

Staff development and skills

The Park Authority values the high level of specialist skills and expertise of its employees and is committed to supporting and developing these qualities. In view of this, the Authority has a policy of reimbursing the professional fees of its employees where this is either an essential requirement to carry out their role or where performance in their role would be enhanced by membership of an appropriate recognised professional body. The Park Authority therefore pays annual membership subscriptions to the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) for staff within the planning service. In addition, it ensures that licentiate RTPI members have access to appropriate mentor support and training to enable them to work towards chartered membership, and that chartered RTPI members have access to appropriate continued professional development.

The Park Authority places a high priority on supporting staff development and training. Although Park Authority budgets have increasingly come under pressure, a training budget remained available in 2023/24. This enabled members of the planning team to undertake a diverse range of training to ensure they have the appropriate skills and expertise to deliver an effective planning service. Training courses attended during 2023/24 covered topics including: design and placemaking; the Place Standard tool; the planning appeals process; implications of National Planning Framework 4; carbon literacy; water, wastewater and drainage; the role and function of an Ecological Clerk of Works; as well as practical skills such as 4x4 driver training to enable officers to safely undertake site visits in remote areas of the National Park.

Planning team members also actively participate in Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) and its various sub-committees to share good practice and experience with other planning colleagues and peers across Scotland. This includes the HOPS Development Planning and Development Management Sub-Committees. Since 2021, our Monitoring and Enforcement Officer also chairs the Scottish Planning Enforcement Forum.

Staff health and wellbeing

The Park Authority and the planning service have a focus on the wellbeing of the workforce and recognise the responsibility as an employer to provide avenues of support for both the physical

and mental health of employees. There are various initiatives, promoted and accessible through the Authority's intranet site, where employees can find a wide range of information and organisations to contact for support. These include access to early intervention assistance through an Occupational Health Service and an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). EAP is the Scottish Government's employee help service, which gives access to a team of trained welfare and counselling practitioners offering confidential, independent and unbiased information for a wide variety of health and wellbeing issues.

The Park Authority also has a range of policies to promote positive health and wellbeing. These include (but are not limited to) a flexible working policy incorporating hybrid working arrangements, as well as policies on lone and remote working, mental health first aid, neurodiversity, and reasonable adjustments.

A Mental Health First Aiders scheme has been introduced within the Authority, which brings together a group of qualified mental health first aiders from within the staff team. This includes a number of members of the planning service. Mental Health First Aiders are available to support any member of staff with issues or concerns, to listen without judgement and to help guide them in choosing next steps.

The Park Authority also recognises the positive health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering and giving back to the local community through a Volunteer Cairngorms initiative. This encourages employees to participate in voluntary activities by giving them time away from their normal duties, with each employee being granted up to three full days of paid leave per calendar year for volunteering purposes. This helps to support workforce development as well as contributing to the wellbeing of employees.

The Park Authority has a Staff Consultative Forum, which has been established to offer staff an opportunity to shape and influence the policies and strategies of the wider organisation. It also operates a Make a Difference (MAD) suggestion scheme, through which all staff are encouraged to submit ideas, suggestions, improvements and solutions which are passed to the senior management team for consideration. These initiatives enable staff to have a level of influence and ownership over the policies and processes that affect them on a day-to-day basis.

Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity	3
2. The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce	2

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Work with the human resources team in their update of the current Workforce Management Strategy to consider and review the specific challenges around recruitment to the planning service, and develop further measures to address this within the context of current recruitment constraints.	Head of Planning and Chief Planning Officer in conjunction with Human Resources team	Medium	Medium	Staff time
Monitor and review the effectiveness of the Graduate	Development Management and	Medium	Medium	Staff time

Planner posts as part of the 'grow your own' approach to addressing planning recruitment challenges.	Forward Planning Managers			
Carry out a skills audit within the planning team, relative to the new expectations and requirements in NPF4, to identify gaps in knowledge and inform specific training programmes, and to identify any areas where additional external support may be required.	Development Management and Forward Planning Managers	High	Short	Staff time



A high performing planning authority has a positive culture through ensuring it has sound governance, effective leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement. The authority has an identified chief planner, who is supported by a strong leadership group to advise on decision-making, policy and operational management.

ATTRIBUTE 3: THIS PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EMBEDDED CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority undertaken an annual assessment of its performance and acted upon areas previously identified as in need of improvement?
- Has the planning authority achieved recognition at relevant awards or through performance accreditation frameworks?
- Has the planning authority engaged in peer review, good practice exchange or improvement activities?
- Has the planning authority addressed any complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and have evidence of this and that it has learned from valid cases?

Narrative

Performance assessment

The planning service has undertaken annual assessments of performance and identified annual service improvement priorities for many years – in particular through the former Planning Performance Framework process. Our Planning Performance Framework for 2022/23 identified six service improvements to be undertaken during 2023/24. A summary of progress against the identified service improvements during 2023/24 is provided in the table below:

Committed improvements and actions	Progress update
Review and improve approach to	An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out as part of the preparation of the next Local Development Plan. The approach

conducting Equality Impact Assessments to improve outcomes for people with protected characteristics through the planning system.	follows a new corporate template and analyses and documents a wide range of data to inform its conclusions. The assessment also incorporates a Fairer Scotland Impact Assessment. This allows for a better understanding of the intersectionality between the characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 and broader socio-economic factors. The impact assessment is now used as an example of best practice within the National Park Authority. https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/230626LocalDevelopmentPlan3EqFSIA.pdf
Improve approach to early community and stakeholder engagement on the Local Development Plan to ensure that the Evidence Report benefits from a broad range of views.	The participation statement within the Development Plan Scheme for the next Local Development Plan sets out the Park Authority's commitment to engagement on the Local Development Plan. A broad range of online and in-person engagement has been and continues to be undertaken. This has included online engagement on the evidence base as well as in-person engagement with specific interest groups, such as children and young people, people with disabilities, and Gypsy and Travellers. Awareness raising has been carried out at events within the National Park, including agricultural shows, highland games and Cairngorms 2030 events. Engagement on the evidence report has also been integrated into work on updating the community action plans within the National Park, allowing ground-up issues, priorities and actions, to be fed directly into the evidence base. https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/241122DevelopmentPlanScheme2024.pdf
Increase the involvement of planners in the Community Action Planning process to help communities create plans that are more spatially focused and may lead	Engagement on the Evidence Report has been fully integrated into the process of updating the community action plans within the National Park. Planners now attend all community action planning events and are there with engagement material to provide information on how planning and the action plans relate. One of the key aims of this engagement is to make the action plans more spatial in nature, with information collected at the events and online surveys used to create maps of spatial priorities for each updated action plan. There have been no local place plans prepared to date,

to the preparation of Local Place Plans.	however the additional work on community action plans allows the action plan to fulfil a similar role.
Work jointly with the local authorities that cover the National Park area on open space and play sufficiency assessments to help inform the next Local Development Plan and help deliver the local authorities' Open Space Strategies.	Work on open space and play sufficiency is ongoing and is dependent on the timescales of the local authorities. To-date, work is complete on both open space and play sufficiency in the Moray area of the National Park, is complete on open space sufficiency in the Aberdeenshire area of the National Park, and is in progress in the other areas of the National Park. The information collected during this process will be summarised in the Local Development Plan's Evidence Report.
Deliver carbon literacy training to all planners to help embed awareness of the carbon costs and impacts of development in the decision making process and help the National Park contribute towards reaching net zero.	One planner has been trained in carbon literacy and is now qualified to deliver training to the remainder of the planning team.
Deliver ongoing specialist training to committee members on landscape in relation to wind farm developments - and with continued reviews to monitor	Member training on landscape issues has been completed. Further training is ongoing as part of our continued member training programme.

gaps in members knowledge to deliver suitable additional training as required.	
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Awards

The Park Authority's planning service has a positive track record in terms of recognition for high performance. The Authority has previously received Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning and has also been shortlisted for Nature of Scotland Awards for innovative approaches to engaging young people in planning through Minecraft mapping.

Although the planning service did not win any awards during 2023/24, a range of innovative work was undertaken during the period. One notable example included working alongside researchers from the University of Edinburgh to develop a 'gamification' approach to help increase engagement during production of the next Local Development Plan. The game has been designed to generate discussion between local residents on their priorities for the future development of the National Park, and it will be rolled out during 2024/25 as part of the community engagement to be undertaken on the new Local Development Plan.

Good practice exchange

As noted earlier, planning team members actively participate in Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) and its various sub-committees to share good practice and experience with other planning colleagues and peers across Scotland. This includes the HOPS Development Planning and Development Management Sub-Committees. Since 2021, our Monitoring and Enforcement Officer also chairs the Scottish Planning Enforcement Forum.

We also have strong links and shared service arrangements with colleagues at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, who provide support services and expertise with respect to Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and our online planning systems.

Complaints

Due to the nature of the planning system, it is inevitable that complaints occasionally arise. Whilst complaints may sometimes be driven by unhappiness at a particular planning decision or outcome, there may be occasions where complaints relate to more fundamental matters – for example, if we have failed to provide an appropriate service or adhere to our standards for processing planning applications.

The Park Authority believes that all complaints have a right to be heard, understood and respected, and we work hard to be open and accessible at all times. Wherever possible we seek to learn from legitimate complaints and to make service improvements where necessary. The Park Authority operates a two stage internal complaints process. Stage 1 (frontline resolution) aims to quickly resolve straightforward complaints that require little or no investigation. Stage 2 (investigation) deals with complaints that: have not been resolved at stage 1; are complex in nature and where it is immediately apparent that detailed investigation is required; and/or involve members of senior management. If complainants remain dissatisfied having gone through our two stage complaints procedure, they can appeal to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

During 2023/24, four complaints were received about the planning service. Three of these were dealt with at stage 1 (frontline resolution) and one was escalated to stage 2 (investigation). That complainant remained unsatisfied and referred the matter to the SPSO, although the SPSO did not take the complaint forward to investigation.

ATTRIBUTE 4: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS SOUND GOVERNANCE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an effective scheme of delegation in place?
- Have all councillors who exercise a planning function undergone statutory training and is there evidence of ongoing training for members?
- Have more than x % of officer recommendations have been overturned by councillors at committee or Local Review Body.

Narrative

Scheme of delegation

Given the National Park Authority's unique statutory basis, and our status as a 'call-in' authority for planning applications, it is not possible to have a scheme of delegation to enable planning applications to be determined by officers. As a result, every planning application that the Park Authority calls-in for determination is considered by Planning Committee. The Planning Committee meets on a regular basis (approximately every 6 weeks), and to ensure appropriate timescales are met for the consideration and determination of applications, all applicants are invited to enter into a Planning Processing Agreement (PPA). This sets clear deadlines and

ensures applications are determined in a timely manner, and the vast majority of applications are determined in accordance with PPAs.

Member training

The National Park Authority's Board consists of 19 members. These include:

- 7 members nominated onto the Board by the five local authorities in the Cairngorms National Park: Aberdeenshire Council (2); Angus Council (1); Moray Council (1); Perth & Kinross Council (1); and The Highland Council (2)
- 7 members appointed directly by Scottish Ministers
- 5 members elected locally

As there are different routes for appointment, members join the Board at different times and typically serve terms of between 18 months and 4 years. All 19 members sit on the Park Authority's Planning Committee, and all members (whether nominated by Local Authorities, directly appointed by Scottish Ministers, or elected locally) receive training on the planning system when appointed. This ensures that all members receive training on the planning system before taking part in any decision making as part of the Planning Committee. Some members serve multiple terms and are appointed to the Board multiple times. Nevertheless, they receive training on the planning system at each appointment to ensure their training remains robust and up-to-date. Since the May 2022 Scottish elections, 15 members have been appointed to the Board, and these 15 members have all received training on the planning system.

In addition, ongoing member training is provided as part of our wider programme of planning improvements. During 2023/24, member training sessions were provided on specific planning-related topics including Habitats Regulations Appraisal, short-term lets, and landscape issues.

Overtaken officer recommendations

During 2023/24, the Park Authority's Planning Committee considered 28 applications for planning permission. 89% of their decisions on those applications were made in line with officer recommendations, with only 11% of the recommendations made to Planning Committee being overturned.

As outlined above, since the National Park Authority has no ability to delegate the determination of planning applications to officers, all planning applications that are called-in are considered and determined by Planning Committee. As such, any appeals against refusals of planning permission are considered by the Scottish Government's Directorate of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA). The National Park Authority therefore does not have a Local Review Body.

ATTRIBUTE 5: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an identified Chief Planning Officer in place?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise on corporate decision making and policy within the broader organisation?
- Is the planning authority's Chief Planning Officer a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise and support external bodies through engagement in organisations' committees, advisory groups or working groups?
- Does the planning authority have a strong leadership team that supports a culture of continuous improvement?

Narrative

Chief Planning Officer

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1996 (as amended) requires that each planning authority must appoint a Chief Planning Officer. This became a statutory requirement in April 2024.

The National Park Authority's Head of Planning is also the Chief Planning Officer for the Authority and is a chartered member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

Corporate decision making and other engagement

The Head of Planning and Chief Planning Officer is a member of both the Park Authority's Senior Management Team and Operational Management Group. This enables the Chief Planning Officer to advise on and influence the Park Authority's strategic policies and operational plan to ensure that the spatial implications of decisions and investments are appropriately considered, and that the Authority's strategic policies and plans are appropriately place based.

The Head of Planning and Chief Planning Officer is engaged with a wide range of organisations and stakeholders, including Heads of Planning Scotland, Scottish Government, senior members of the five local authorities within the National Park, external consultees, the Cairngorms Economic Steering Group, and a variety of other groups on either a regular or ad-hoc basis as appropriate.

The Head of Planning and Chief Planning Officer also acts as the main interface between Board members and officers within the planning service. A positive working relationship is maintained with Board members, and in particular with the Convener and Deputy Convener of the Planning Committee, through regular meetings and informal briefings on key planning matters.

Culture of continuous improvement

The Park Authority's leadership team is committed to embedding and supporting a culture of continuous improvement. As identified in the narrative for Attribute 3 above, the Park Authority's planning service has undertaken annual assessments of performance and implemented annual service improvements through the former Planning Performance Framework, and we remain fully committed to working with the Improvement Service and other key stakeholders to identify and implement a programme of ongoing improvements to ensure that we remain a high performing planning service.

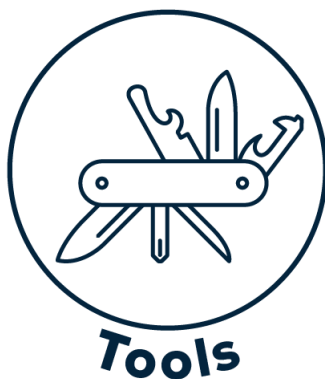
As also identified earlier, the Park Authority has a Staff Consultative Forum, which includes members of the planning service and has been established to offer staff an opportunity to shape and influence the policies and strategies of the wider organisation. It also operates a Make a Difference (MAD) suggestion scheme, through which all staff are encouraged to submit ideas, suggestions, improvements and solutions which are passed to the senior management team for consideration. These initiatives enable staff to have a level of influence and ownership over the policies and processes that affect them on a day-to-day basis, and mechanisms to suggest areas for improvement that can be acted upon by senior management as appropriate. The specific improvement actions identified within this document have been discussed and developed in full conjunction with all members of the planning service, which again ensures shared ownership of the Improvement Action Plan.

Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	3
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	2
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership	2

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Undertake an annual review of projects to identify potential candidate submissions for relevant award schemes to achieve wider recognition of the high quality work undertaken by the planning service.	Head of Planning & Chief Planning Officer, Development Management and Forward Planning Managers	Medium	Ongoing	Staff time
Continue to plan and deliver an ongoing programme of member training, in agreement with the Convener and Deputy Convener of Planning Committee.	Head of Planning & Chief Planning Officer, Convener and Deputy Convener of Planning Committee	High	Ongoing	Staff and member time



A high performing planning authority needs to have an effective local development plan and other strategies in place to provide a vision for the future of the area. It needs to be able to set and deliver on policy ambitions and priorities by clearly informing decision making and providing certainty and predictability for communities, developers and investment. The authority's development management systems need to be effective in making the right decisions about development and be efficient as possible in doing this. The planning authority makes best use of digital technology and how it manages and uses data.

ATTRIBUTE 6: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS A ROBUST POLICY AND EVIDENCE BASE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an up to date Local Development Plan in place and/ or is on track to adoption?
- Does the planning authority have an up to date Regional Spatial Strategy in place/or on track to adoption?
- Has the planning authority's Local Development Plan Evidence Report been approved by the Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals and/ or on track for approval?
- Have the application of the Local Development Plan's policies been found to be deficient at appeal or judicial review?

Narrative

Local Development Plan

The Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan was adopted on 26 March 2021. It focuses on the five-year period until 2025, although it also includes development proposals for the ten-year period until 2030. The plan focuses on managing the development and use of land to deliver the four statutory aims of Scottish National Parks:

- to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
- to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area;
- to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public; and

- to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities

To support the delivery of the adopted Local Development Plan, the National Park Authority has also prepared a suite of statutory Supplementary Guidance and non-statutory Planning Guidance. These documents include:

- Housing Supplementary Guidance
- Supporting Economic Growth Non-Statutory Guidance
- Natural Heritage Non-Statutory Guidance
- Landscape Non-Statutory Guidance
- Renewable Energy Non-Statutory Guidance
- Open Space, Sport and Recreation Non-Statutory Guidance
- Cultural Heritage Non-Statutory Guidance
- Resources Non-Statutory Guidance
- Design and Placemaking Non-Statutory Guidance
- Developer Obligations Supplementary Guidance

Simple advice about how the planning system in the National Park operates is also described in a suite of Planning Advice Notes.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2022 – 2027 is the management plan for the National Park. This has been approved by Scottish Ministers and acts as the Regional Spatial Strategy for the National Park. The Partnership Plan:

- Sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the National Park;
- Guides the work of all public bodies and other partners to deliver the aims of the National Park;
- Provides the strategic context for the Local Development Plan;
- Acts as the Strategic Regional Land Use Framework and Regional Spatial Strategy for the National Park;
- Is also the Economic and Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the National Park.

Local Development Plan Evidence Report

Work began on the Evidence Report for the next Local Development Plan with the adoption of the Development Plan Scheme in July 2023. Initial work focused on gathering the views of the general public on issues facing the National Park using a web based interactive map and accompanying social media campaign. Work on gathering baseline data and early engagement with key agencies also began in July, which lead to the first evidence papers being published for engagement in Quarter 1 of 2024/25. Online engagement on the evidence base is ongoing with engagement taking place on a range of topics.

Alongside digital engagement, the planning team has been doing direct engagement with the communities that live and work in the National Park. This has involved supporting community action planning events across the Park, including in Blair Atholl, Nethy Bridge, Dalwhinnie and Aviemore. Alongside this work, the place standard tool has been used to engage communities of interest, children and young people and gypsy and traveller groups. This work will continue into 2024/25.

The timescales for delivery of the evidence report were updated with the adoption of an updated Development Plan Scheme in November 2024 and approval of the Evidence Report by the Park Authority's Board is on track for Quarter 2 2025/26.

Appeals and judicial reviews

There have not been any cases where Local Development Plan policies have been demonstrated to be deficient at appeal and there have been no cases taken to judicial review. Following the adoption of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), precedence is to be given to its policies in any cases where there is an inconsistency between them and policies in the adopted Local Development Plan. There have been no cases where there has been recognisable conflict between NPF4 policies and the adopted Local Development Plan policies.

ATTRIBUTE 7: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY MAKES BEST USE OF DATA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Does the planning authority have a data governance strategy in place for the management of planning data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use interactive web-mapping, GIS and spatial data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use digital approaches to engagement, including website, social media and other platforms?

Narrative

Submission of planning applications through the e-development portal

All planning applications for development within the National Park are submitted to the relevant local planning authority. The National Park Authority is notified of any planning application within the Park and will decide whether to 'call-in' the application to determine it. The Park Authority will normally call-in more complex applications and applications for larger scale development. All major applications are called-in.

The National Park Authority's website encourages and supports the electronic submission of planning applications by directing prospective applicants to all the relevant local planning authority websites and the Scottish Government's e-development portal for advice on submitting a planning application.

At present, it is not possible for applicants to submit any additional supporting information that might be required for their application via the e-development portal once an application has been called-in by the Park Authority. An improvement action is identified to explore with Scottish Government whether the e-development portal could be updated to enable this, as it would make the process of submitting additional information simpler and more efficient for applicants.

Data governance strategy

The National Park Authority is obliged to prepare and implement a Records Management Plan to meet the requirements of the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2013. The Authority continues to develop its systems and processes to improve records management (including that of planning and other data) and in 2024 the National Records of Scotland evaluated a Progress Update Review (PUR) submission and consider that "Cairngorms National Park Authority continues to take their statutory obligations seriously and are working to bring all the elements of their records management arrangements into full compliance with the Act and fulfil the Keeper's expectations."

On a practical level, planning data is managed under a shared service agreement by Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. Appropriate retention schedules are established and enacted for all planning data held within this arrangement, including information held for public access. All processes are fully electronic and all information handled by the Park Authority is digitised and filed electronically.

Use of interactive web-mapping, GIS and spatial data

A wide range of socio-economic and environmental spatial data is being used to inform the preparation of the evidence report for the Local Development Plan. Analysis is carried out by officers within the planning service using ESRI's ArcGIS Pro software. Through the Park Authority's ESRI licence, the planning authority has the ability to use interactive web-mapping. To date, interactive web-mapping hosted on the Park Authority's engagement platform has been used to gather early views to inform the preparation of the evidence report. This map allowed members of the public to place pins and leave comments on a map of the National Park as well as offer their support to comments placed by others. The Park Authority is exploring the potential for hosting future datasets as web maps, including information on 20-minute neighbourhoods, nature networks and green and blue infrastructure.

Use digital approaches to engagement

Digital approaches to engagement are central to the preparation of the Local Development Plan. Online engagement is being carried out using a dedicated Commonplace website that supports a range of techniques. Early engagement involved the use of an interactive web map to gather views to inform the preparation of the evidence report. Commonplace is now being used to carry out topic-based consultations on the contents of the evidence report, with further engagement planned for 2025 – 2026.

All the engagement on the Evidence Report is being supported across the Park Authority's social media accounts, notably Facebook, Instagram, X and LinkedIn.

Comments on planning applications are also encouraged to be submitted electronically.

ATTRIBUTE 8: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority planning have the ability to make decisions on planning applications within the required timeframes?
- Are less than x% of planning decisions overturned at appeal or judicial review?
- Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Enforcement Charter in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to resolve enforcement cases?

Narrative

Decision making within required timeframes

As noted previously, the National Park Authority does not have delegated powers and all planning applications that are 'called-in' for determination are reported to planning committee for determination. The planning committee meets on a regular basis (normally every 6 weeks), and to ensure appropriate timescales are met for the consideration and determination of applications all applicants are invited to enter into a Planning Processing Agreement (PPA). This sets clear deadlines and ensures applications are determined in a timely manner. The Park Authority issued 20 decisions on applications which were the subject of processing agreements with applicants during the 2023/24 period. This represented over 95% of all the decision notices issued during the period. The agreed timescales were met in all of these cases.

Planning decisions overturned at appeal or judicial review

As all planning applications that the Park Authority handles are determined by the planning committee, the Authority does not have a Local Review Body. Therefore, all appeals are handled through the DPEA appeals process. Appeal case numbers against Park Authority decisions remain low, and during 2023/2024 there was only one enforcement notice appeal, which was subsequently dismissed. There were no decisions by the Park Authority taken to Judicial Review during this period, which is reflective of previous years.

Enforcement charter

The National Park Authority's first planning Enforcement Charter was approved in June 2009 and has been reviewed regularly since then. The Planning Committee has agreed to review the Enforcement Charter annually as a matter of good practice. The Park Authority's Enforcement Charter was reviewed and updated in December 2023.

Section 44 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduces a requirement on Scottish planning authorities to include a statement in their enforcement charter in relation to the monitoring of compliance with planning permissions for major developments. This will need to set out: how the authority monitor compliance with such planning permissions; how the authority record the monitoring activities undertaken and the findings of those activities; and how the authority make such records available to the public. This will need to be addressed in future updates of the Park Authority's Enforcement Charter.

Ability to resolve enforcement cases

The National Park Authority places considerable importance on the planning enforcement function. The planning service includes a dedicated Monitoring and Enforcement Officer who, as noted previously, is the current chair of the Scottish Planning Enforcement Forum. The service is also able to utilise specialist legal support in relation to complex enforcement cases through a contractual arrangement with external legal advisers. Updates on progress with active planning enforcement cases are presented to the Planning Committee at each of their meetings.

The table below shows that the National Park Authority took up a total of 47 enforcement cases during 2023/24 and resolved 40 cases. The largest number of cases were taken up during the final quarter of the year, and inevitably some of these will be carried forward into 2024/25. However, these statistics demonstrate both the importance that the Park Authority places on investigating potential breaches of planning control and the Authority's ability to resolve enforcement cases.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Cases taken up	14	5	5	23	47
Notices served	2	0	1	0	3
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	0	0	0	0	0
Prosecutions	0	0	0	0	0
Number of breaches resolved	10	7	4	19	40

Improvement Action Plan (Tools theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
6. The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base	2
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	3
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision making processes	3

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Working in conjunction with colleagues at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, complete the migration of our IDOX system to the cloud to ensure consistency and resilience of service provision.	Development Management Manager, Planning Systems Officer	High	Short term	Staff time
Liaise with Scottish Government to explore whether the e-development portal could be adapted to accept additional supporting information post call-in.	Development Management Manager, Scottish Government	Medium	Medium	Staff time, Scottish Government resource support

Implement a project to ensure effective monitoring of compliance with planning permissions for major developments in line with Section 44 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.	Development Management Manager, Enforcement Officer	High	Short term	Staff time
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A high performing planning authority should ensure a wide range of people are involved in shaping their future places. Engagement should be fair and inclusive, early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate and should include difficult to reach groups. The authority should engage with a wide range of partners at a national, regional and local level to ensure a joined-up approach and that links are made across policies and programmes. The planning authority should demonstrate good customer care, transparency and effective communication.

ATTRIBUTE 9: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS GOOD CUSTOMER CARE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the ability to offer pre-application advice where it is requested?
- Has the planning authority held regular engagement events with developers and communities?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that customers are satisfied with the service offer by the planning authority?

Narrative

Pre-application advice

The relevant local authority covering the area that any given proposal is in will provide pre-application advice based on National Planning Framework 4 and the Cairngorms Local Development Plan. The National Park Authority gives pre-application advice directly to the local authorities to whom the applicant is directed in the first instance, rather than to the applicant. This makes things simpler and more focused for the customer, and ensures they receive all required advice and not just that of the National Park Authority.

The local authority will ask the National Park Authority to comment if the development is one that the Park Authority is likely to call-in for determination. In these cases, the Park Authority will provide a written response to the local authority setting out the relevant points that any application would need to consider. If the local authority thinks a meeting with the person looking for advice is needed, Park Authority staff may attend that meeting.

The local authority will then respond to the person who made the request with advice from the Park Authority and, where relevant, from other parts of the local authority such as the roads or environmental health departments. This means the advice that customers get from the local authority covers as many relevant matters as possible. A case study showing the benefits of high quality pre-application advice for the effective processing of a major application is included in Appendix 1.

Planning Advice Notes

The Cairngorms Planning Advice Note 'Pre-application Advice in the Cairngorms National Park', provides the public with a detailed overview of this process along with contact details for the relevant local authority planning offices. The planning advice note can be found [here](#).

In addition, the Park Authority offers a series of planning advice notes which offer advice at pre-application stage on the planning system in the Cairngorms National Park and how prospective applicants can get the most from it. The Planning Advice Note series can be found [here](#).

Fees & charges

The National Park Authority does not charge for its pre-application advice service.

2023/24 statistics

The National Park Authority received a total of 16 requests for pre-application advice from the local authorities. Of the 16 responses issued, seven were issued within two weeks, five within three weeks and two more within four weeks. The remaining two responses were issued within six and 10 weeks respectively.

Engagement with developers and communities

The National Park Authority strives to include and collaborate with local communities, public bodies and other stakeholders at all relevant stages of the planning process.

Development planning

The Park Authority produces an annual Development Plan Scheme, including a Participation Statement, which acts as a strategy for engagement activities. In June 2023 a refreshed Development Plan Scheme and accompanying Participation Statement were published online to provide details on the processes and timescales for the preparation of the next Local Development Plan. This includes the proposed timings for the various stages of the Local Development Plan preparation by year and quarter. During 2023/24, the development planning team began undertaking the evidence gathering and early engagement needed to compile and

prepare the Evidence Report. More detailed information on the engagement undertaken in this respect is provided under Attribute 10 below.

Development management

With regards to engagement on planning applications, the development management team follows the processes set out in legislation, while also providing advice to applicants through the pre-application process, as detailed above.

Other engagement forums

The Park Authority has previously operated a Developers Forum and a Planning Representatives Network, which provide a mechanism for bringing together and engaging with members of the development industry and community council representatives from across the National Park. The Convener of the Planning Committee also sits on the Developers Forum. Officers from both the development management and development planning teams attend these forums, along with the Head of Planning and Chief Planning Officer, and they provide a mechanism to share and discuss emerging planning issues, provide updates on progress with production of the Local Development Plan, and to help identify and prioritise future planning improvement actions. Primarily as a result of resource constraints, neither group has met during the 2023/24 period. Improvement actions are therefore identified to reconvene these groups, in an updated and refreshed format, to ensure they are used to best effect in the future.

Customer satisfaction with service offer

The National Park Authority undertakes its own planning-specific customer satisfaction survey. A link to this survey is included on the planning information pages of the Authority's website, as well as in the covering correspondence for all planning decision notices issued by the National Park Authority. Whilst for the most part applicants / agents speak directly to the planning case officer about any comments in relation to the processing of their application or the service they have received, the results from the satisfaction survey provide a helpful indication of the extent to which customers are satisfied with the service offered by the Authority.

During 2023/24, the planning customer satisfaction survey received nine responses. Although this is a relatively low number in absolute terms, it compares favourably to the overall number of planning applications determined during 2023/24. No single responder chose to answer all the questions within the survey. However, 100% of responses to questions about the pre-application advice service (three individuals) stated that the advice received was helpful. 100% of responses to questions about the planning information on the Authority's website (six individuals) stated that they used the planning web pages to find information to help with their

application, with 67% (four individuals) stating that the web pages were helpful and 33% (two individuals) stating they were not helpful. Although based on a low sample size, this indicates there may be scope to improve the Authority's online planning information and advice.

Individual feedback received from service users also provides an indication of the extent to which customers are satisfied with the service offered by the Authority, and selected examples are provided below:

"We applied for a change of use for a small caravan park... With your help we were granted permission for this project... We recently won the best CL Caravan Site for Scotland and Northern Ireland 2024, from the Caravan and Motorhome Club... We can't thank you enough for your team's support during our application... It really meant a lot to us."

"In light of the outcomes and developments for the Nethy Bridge 10-year plan, I'd like to highlight how positive a contribution (your officer) made to that discussion... The ease at which he made it possible to visualise the community needs and opportunities from a Park Authority perspective was so valuable. To have direct contact with a Park Authority planning representative, who invited and welcomed healthy and proactive discussion for potential ideas and developments was invaluable... The collation of all those community hopes and discussions in the report with a visual map was so worthwhile. Thanks for providing the opportunity."

ATTRIBUTE 10: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITIES

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a community engagement strategy and infrastructure in place to ensure engagement is early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate?
- Has the planning authority undertaken community engagement, for example consistent and effective use of the Place Standard Tool, to inform decision-making processes? Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?

- Has the planning authority engaged with a good representation of the community including young people, gypsies and travellers, people with protected characteristics, including disability, race, age, sex and sexual orientation, and including people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds?
- Has the planning authority supported the production of Local Place Plans when requested?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that stakeholders are satisfied with their collaboration with the planning authority?

Narrative

Community engagement strategy and ongoing engagement activities

The National Park Authority recognises that delivering successful places relies on successful engagement and consultation, and we want the next Local Development Plan to be shaped by the aims and ambitions of communities across the National Park. The Park Authority produces an annual Development Plan Scheme, including a Participation Statement, which acts as a strategy for engagement activities. In June 2023 a refreshed Development Plan Scheme and accompanying Participation Statement were published online to provide details on the processes and timescales for the preparation of the next Local Development Plan, and the engagement activities that will be undertaken to inform its preparation.

The development planning team received training on the Place Standard Tool in preparation for targeted engagement, including with hard-to-reach groups, as part of the evidence gathering process for the next Local Development Plan. Several engagement activities have subsequently been undertaken utilising the Place Standard Tool, including:

- Youth Engagement with the Cairngorms Youth Action Group (March 2024)
- School Engagement at Grantown Grammar School (March 2024)

In October 2023, Conyach Advocacy & Engagement were commissioned to conduct a specific engagement project with the gypsy / traveller community living and working in the National Park to inform the Evidence Report. Again, the Place Standard tool was utilised as the basis for this, and the results will be analysed alongside other engagement using the same tool. Further information on this engagement project is provided in the case study in Appendix 2.

In August 2023 the planning team supported wider engagement activities at the Lonach Gathering annual event as part of the early engagement with communities for the Evidence Report.

Looking forward to 2024/25, the planning team are applying gamification techniques to engagement by creating a card game designed to generate discussion between local residents on their priorities for the future development of the National Park. The aim is to reach people from under-represented groups in the National Park identified through previous consultation responses and increase the development planning team's understanding. If successful, the game approach will be utilised by other teams within the National Park. Engagement with community councils on the preparation of their respective Community Action Plans will also continue, along with further engagement with local secondary schools and targeted engagement with the local access forum for Badenoch and Strathspey.

With regards to engagement on planning applications, the development management team follow the processes set out in legislation, while also providing advice to applicants through the pre-application advice process, as detailed in the narrative for Attribute 9. The Park Authority's website encourages and supports the electronic submission of planning applications by directing prospective applicants to all the relevant local planning authority websites and the Scottish Government's e-development portal for advice on submitting a planning application, as detailed in the narrative for Attribute 7.

Local Place Plans

In June 2023, the Park Authority invited community councils and other community bodies to create their own community-led Local Place Plans that will be taken into account in preparing the next Local Development Plan. The original deadline for Local Place Plans to be submitted for consideration for the Evidence Report was set for May 2024 (due to changes in the Evidence Report timeline and delivery, this was later revised in the subsequent year). No Local Place Plans were submitted in the National Park area during 2023/24, although it is possible that such plans will be prepared in the future.

Officers have also been attending local community action planning events across the National Park, both assisting the communities in the development of their Action Plans and gathering information to support the Evidence Report. Alongside Local Place Plans, the Park Authority will also take account of Community Action Plans in preparing the next Local Development Plan. The following communities have been supported by the planning team to prepare Community Action Plans during the 2023/24 period:

- Blair Atholl (May 2023)
- Dalwhinnie (June 2023)
- Nethy Bridge (December 2023)

More information on the support and engagement around Community Action Plans is provided in the case study at Appendix 3.

Customer satisfaction with collaboration

Feedback received from service users provides a useful indication of the extent to which customers are satisfied with the collaboration and engagement offered by the Authority. An example of such feedback is provided below:

“(A member of your team) was present during our open evenings at Nethy Bridge Community Centre, as part of our engagement sessions linked to the Nethy Bridge Big Conversation, which in turn fed into the Nethy Bridge Action Plan. It was really helpful to have (your officer) present, along with various maps and information which showed the spatial and priority mapping for Nethy Bridge. The visuals really enhanced understanding of the plans for different areas of our village and really helped enlighten some conversations at the events.”

Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
9. This planning authority has good customer care	3
10. The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	2

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Reconvene the Developers Forum, in an updated format, to provide a more effective mechanism for regular engagement with development industry representatives to identify and address common issues and to target further service improvements	Head of Planning & Chief Planning Officer	Medium	Short term and then ongoing	Staff time
Reconvene the Planning Representatives Networks, in an updated format, to provide a more effective mechanism for regular	Head of Planning & Chief Planning Officer, Development Management and	Medium	Short term and then ongoing	Staff time

engagement with community council representatives to identify and address common issues and target further service improvements, and explore other methods for increasing planning knowledge and engagement at the local community level.	Forward Planning Managers			
Reconvene regular planning protocol meetings with relevant local authority colleagues, in an updated format, to identify and address common issues and to target further service improvements	Head of Planning & Chief Planning Officer	Medium	Short term and then ongoing	Staff time
Overhaul the planning web pages as part of a wider redevelopment of the Park Authority's website to ensure greater use of accessible language, clearer advice and guidance, and enhanced visibility of planning content	Development Management and Forward Planning Managers	High	Medium term	Staff time



A high performing planning authority should demonstrate place leadership by taking a collaborative place-based approach in line with the Place Principle. It should use the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in decision-making processes, to achieve the three spatial principles outlined in NPF4: Sustainable places, where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity; Liveable places, where we can all live better, healthier lives; and Productive places, where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy. The planning authority should seek to ensure that there are no impediments to delivering agreed development.

ATTRIBUTE 11: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY SUPPORTS THE DELIVERY OF SUSTAINABLE, LIVEABLE AND PRODUCTIVE PLACES

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Is the planning authority aware of the [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#), the evidence that sits behind them and is it using them in decision-making processes?
- Has the planning authority identified tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places and is implementing them?

Narrative

Place and wellbeing outcomes

The National Park Authority is aware of the Place and Wellbeing outcomes and the evidence that sits behind them. The development planning team are working with relevant stakeholders and partners on what data is available for the Evidence Report, and the outcomes will be embedded into the new Local Development Plan as it emerges.

Tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, livable and productive places

Place-based planning has informed the processes undertaken for the early engagement on the new Local Development Plan, as outlined earlier.

To date, an interactive web-mapping tool hosted on the Park Authority's engagement platform has been used to gather early views to inform the preparation of the evidence report. This map

allowed members of the public to place pins and leave comments on a map of the National Park as well as offer their support to comments placed by others.

Extensive use has also been made of the Place Standard Tool, as a means of engagement during the evidence gathering process for the new Local Development Plan, including with hard-to-reach groups. The Place Standard Tool has been used during the following:

- Youth Engagement with the Cairngorms Youth Action Group
- School Engagement at Grantown Grammar School
- A specific engagement project with the gypsy / traveller community living and working in the National Park

Looking forward to 2024/25, the planning team intend to utilise a gamification tool designed to generate discussion between local residents on their priorities for the future development of the National Park. The aim is to reach people from under-represented groups in the National Park. If successful, the game approach will be utilised by other teams within the National Park.

The Park Authority has also been working with community groups to support the preparation of community action plans. The aim of this work has been to better integrate the community action plans with the preparation of the next Local Development Plan so that they can form a foundational part of the place making process. The core part of this involvement has been to attend the community action planning engagement events, where planners have run a map-based exercise where members of the public can add comments to a map, for example where they want actions or priorities delivered, or where they identify issues to be addressed, and this forms part of the overall engagement on the action plan. At the same time, officers provide information about planning processes, which is helpful from a delivery perspective.

ATTRIBUTE 12: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY SUPPORTS THE DELIVERY OF CONSENTED DEVELOPMENT

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority provided clear and proportionate expectations of Section 75 agreements and set these out in the LDP and pre-application discussions and they are concluded within 6 months of resolution to grant?
- Does the planning authority take a proportionate approach to imposing conditions?
- Does the planning authority have an ambitious local housing land requirement that exceeds the Minimum All Tenure Housing land requirements in NPF4 and is it on track to support delivery?

- Are the number of processing agreements the planning authority has agreed with applicants increasing?
- Does the planning authority have an effective delivery programme in place that supports the delivery of development on the ground?

Narrative

Section 75 agreements

The expectations for when developer obligations will be secured by legal agreement are set out in policy 11 of the adopted Local Development Plan, and further details are provided in statutory Supplementary Guidance. The expectations for developer obligations are also highlighted in pre-application discussions, where applicable.

Local Development Plan policy 11 (Developer Obligations) states that where development creates a need to increase or improve public services, facilities or infrastructure, or to mitigate adverse effects, the developer will be required to make a fair and reasonable contribution, in cash or in kind, towards the additional costs or requirements. The policy explains that the types of contributions anticipated in each settlement are set out in the Community Information section of the Plan to reflect local circumstances and costs, and that Action Programmes will be used to publish regular updates of the contributions anticipated.

The Supplementary Guidance explains that the National Park Authority sets the level of contributions for affordable housing, while the local authority in which a development is located sets the contributions required for education, healthcare, community and leisure facilities, and transport and related infrastructure. The guidance provides a summary of when different types of contribution may be required for different scales and types of development and explains that contributions will be calculated based on each local authority's most up to date developer contribution guidance.

Notwithstanding the above, legal agreements often take longer than six months to conclude. This is in part due to the complexities associated with the National Park Authority's unique status. This means that legal agreements often need to involve the Park Authority, the applicant, and the relevant local authority (since the financial contributions required under legal agreements will often be towards infrastructure for which the local authority, rather than the Park Authority, is responsible – eg schools, roads etc). The requirement for three parties to enter into legal agreements in this way adds complexity and can cause significant delays in issuing decision notices after planning committee has resolved to grant planning permission. An improvement action is therefore identified to carry out a full-scale review of section 75 agreement processes and procedures with a view to streamlining and simplifying existing arrangements and reducing decision making timescales.

Planning conditions

In terms of the approach to imposing conditions, we have regard to the requirements and tests set out in Circular 4/1998 on the use of planning conditions. Draft planning conditions require to be reviewed by a minimum of two professional planners, including the Development Management Manager, before being presented at committee. As such, opportunity for challenge and review of the conditions is built into the process. We have had no planning appeals challenging decisions or the imposition of conditions during 2023/24.

Notwithstanding, we have identified a need to develop and implement more standardised planning conditions to ensure greater consistency where possible across all decisions, to streamline decision making, and to enable easier / more effective monitoring and enforcement. An improvement action is identified to this effect.

Local housing land requirement

The Scottish Government has set a minimum all-tenure housing land requirement (MATHLR) of 850 housing units for the Cairngorms National Park. The National Park Authority is currently collecting its housing evidence in order to propose an appropriate local housing land requirement that takes account of the MATHLR for its next Local Development Plan. By way of reference, the adopted Local Development Plan 2021 sets a ten-year housing land requirement of 819 dwellings, indicating that a minimum target of 850 dwellings over the ten years of the next Local Development Plan will be ambitious.

Processing agreements

The Park Authority issued 20 decisions on planning applications which were the subject of processing agreements during the 2023/24 period. The agreed timescales were met in all of these cases. There was only one decision on a planning application which was not subject to a processing agreement. We continue to offer processing agreements to all planning applicants as standard. With 95.2% (20 out of 21) of our decisions during 2023/24 being subject to processing agreements, and all of these determined within the agreed timescale, this demonstrates that the Park Authority places significant emphasis on using processing agreements as a useful application management tool.

Delivery programme

Action Programmes relating to the Local Development Plan 2021 were published in 2021 and 2022 to effectively track progress with delivering the policies and proposals of the Local Development Plan, and to support the delivery of development on the ground.

Although outside the reporting period for this performance assessment, the Park Authority's first Delivery Programme was published on 31 March 2025. This found that 260 dwellings were built on allocated and windfall sites of four or more dwellings in the first three years of the Plan (2020 – 2023). This equates to an average of 87 new dwellings per year, indicating that delivery is on track to achieve the adopted Local Development Plan's housing supply target.

The Delivery Programme provides an up-to-date position for each settlement on the development progress of each of the allocated sites in the Local Development Plan, including the provision of affordable housing and financial contributions secured through planning permissions or required where permission has not yet been granted. It also provides updated developer contribution information, identifying where contributions will be sought in relation to education and healthcare infrastructure.

Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
11. The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	3
12. This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	3

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Carry out a review of s75 processes and procedures – to include greater alignment with local authority developer obligations teams and relevant services, introduction of clearer ‘heads of terms’ documentation in conjunction with local authority legal teams to streamline s75 drafting process, and implement processes for enhanced	Head of Planning & Chief Planning Officer and Development Management Manager	High	Short – medium term	Staff time

monitoring of s75 agreements post approval.				
Develop and implement standard planning conditions to ensure consistency where possible across all decisions, streamline decision making, and to enable easier / more effective monitoring and enforcement	Senior Planning Officer	High	Short term	Staff time

Appendix 1 –

Case Study: Efficient processing of major planning application - Laggan Distillery

Attribute 8: This Planning Authority has effective and efficient decision making processes

Attribute 10: This Planning Authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities

Attribute 11: This Planning Authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places

Context

Major planning application (reference number 2023/0267/DET) for proposed distillery and associated infrastructure to be determined by Planning Committee within 4-month target set by Scottish Government.

Called in by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) on 26 June 2023, considered at meeting of CNPA Planning Committee on 10 November, just over 4 months from submission – there was no Committee meeting scheduled in October 2023. Decision notice issued on 16 November 2023. All dates in line with agreed processing agreement timetable.

By way of background, this was a major planning application for a new distillery at Laggan within the western part of the National Park close to Spey Dam and the main long distance route into the Corrieyairack pass, a popular walking route into the mountains and leading to Fort Augustus - an important location recreationally. It is also important culturally as a General Wade Road crosses the site. The distillery is to be sited beside the River Spey which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as well as a designated core path, so any impacts upon this internationally designated site had to be carefully considered along with any impacts upon the special landscape qualities of the National Park. The proposed new distillery was intended to replace and expand upon an existing distillery operation elsewhere within the National Park on a new site. The proposal intended to retain the link to the River Spey, bring all aspects of

processing together, provide long term security for the business, retain and expand the workforce and respond to the increased demand for Scotch whisky. The development would also enable the maturation of whisky on site rather than exporting it to the central belt.

What happened?

- The applicant sought pre-application advice through the Local Authority's (Highland Council) major application process and CNPA planning staff, supported by CNPA landscape, ecology and access staff, provided input to this process to outline key information required to help determine any application in 2022 (Reference Pre/2022/0004). CNPA staff attended a pre application meeting and provided comments to the Highland Council's final response.
- CNPA planning staff also provided input to the EIA scoping process in 2022 - this process was run by the Highland Council (reference Pre 2022/0023). The submitted application was accompanied by an EIA report.
- As it was a major application, the applicant engaged in pre-application consultation with the community with public meetings held at the end of 2022. These highlighted issues such as the need for traditional design for warehousing, concerns regarding traffic coming to the site beside existing forestry cottages and the need to upgrade this track along with points on water abstraction and the reasoning for the selection of the site. CNPA commented on this and commented on the Proposal of Application Notice information as submitted to the Highland Council (reference Pre/2022/0021).
- The application was submitted at the end of June 2023 and was determined at the Planning Committee meeting on 10 November 2023, just over four months from submission, in accordance with an agreed processing agreement and in line with Scottish Government targets. During consideration of the application, the CNPA case officer dealing with the application left for another post and the new case officer took over.
- As much of the information identified at the pre-application stage was submitted with the application, this consequently made the consideration of the numerous issues more streamlined although throughout consideration of the application there were numerous points of details from consultees and the case officer which required to be resolved. A number of Teams meetings were held with the agent to discuss issues at various points and there was ongoing discussions/meetings

between the case officer and a range of consultees. A wide range of land use planning issues were involved including cultural heritage, outdoor access, water resources, economic impacts and securing of jobs, landscape, ecology and residential amenity. Requests for further information were responded to timeously, again enabling targets to be met.

- Key issues of concern regarding design and access were addressed, significant structural landscaping secured, along with improvements to the access track past the Forestry cottages and benefits such as formalising the pick up of school children here and securing the ongoing maintenance of the General Wade Road, all to be delivered by appropriate planning conditions.
- Work is yet to commence on site and suspensive planning conditions require to be discharged, but the application is an example of how pre-application engagement can make processing of a major application more efficient and quicker by identifying issues early on in the process and allowing the applicant clarity on what needs to be addressed.

Areas of collaboration

Lead Officer Katherine Donnachie, Planning Officer (Development Management)

Stakeholders involved

Key Agencies

SEPA

Scottish Water

Historic Environment Scotland

Nature Scot

External Consultees

Spey Fishery Board

Highland Council Flood Risk Management Team, Transport Team, Environmental Health staff, Archaeology Officer, Forestry Officer.

Laggan Community Council.

CNPA staff

CNPA Ecology Advisor and Outdoor Access Officer.

External landscape advisor contracted by CNPA.

Developer and agent

Contributors

Following advertisement and neighbour notification, 4 representations were received, 3 objecting and one noting general comments.

Planning Committee which comprises all the CNPA Board members. The Committee determined the application.

What was the overall result?

As a result of the input from officers and consultees more trees were retained, planting was agreed which maximized biodiversity, improvements to access arrangements including onto the trunk road and the conservation of the General Wade Road and upgrading of roads in immediate vicinity of the junction onto the local authority road network were secured along with general interpretive material to highlight local culture/history.

Due to the applicant submitting information that had been identified at the pre-application stage with the planning application, consultees, the public and case officer were able to properly consider and comment upon the application. Whilst there were some information gaps for consultees, requests for information were dealt with timeously so ensuring the determination of the application remained on target.

Proposed planning conditions were informed by discussion with consultees and initial drafts of conditions shared with the applicant/agent for comment. This ensured that any potential issues with implementation were addressed prior to final drafting and that conditions were workable for all parties.

Lessons learned

Pre-application consultation worked well in highlighting information required to enable efficient processing of the forthcoming planning application. Ongoing discussion and

direct contact with the agent worked well in identifying issues to be addressed and encouraged timely responses from the agent. Input from the community/contributors was constructive and clear in their requirements and identification of issues including matters such as disturbance to neighbours and access improvements at junction onto trunk road. Keeping contributors informed also helped this process. Responses from consultants, including transport and environmental health teams were clear and helpful taking a problem solving approach which was appreciated.

The applicant and agent addressing the Planning Committee at its meeting was useful and enabled members of Committee to ask direct factual questions to the proposers of the scheme.

Lessons learnt from this case revolve largely around information required to fully address NPF4 policies. At present we do not have a detailed approach to biodiversity gain, or community wealth building so had to draw on experience gained from other authorities. This case highlights the need for clearer direction to ensure we are fully delivering in a clear, transparent manner on these policies/objectives.

Also, the need to carefully check plans at all stages to identify any omissions and rectify these at earliest stage – although time consuming this avoided issues later.

A final lesson is that it would have been preferable to obtain some of the information addressed by planning conditions upfront to avoid the need for so many suspensive conditions. In this case the general principles were satisfactorily presented but some finer detail was required. This is always an issue with planning applications in terms of balancing the developers' understandable desire to minimise extra costs on detail without knowing if the application will be supported. Charging for applications to discharge conditions, as is done by some other authorities, may help to focus developers on the benefits of early submission in terms of avoiding that cost and also avoiding costly time delays in the conditions discharge process post-decision and taking this into account when balancing financial costs for projects.

What contribution did it make towards delivering outcomes?

NPF4

☐ Sustainable places

- ☒ Climate change and nature crisis
- ☐ Climate mitigate and adaptation
- ☒ Biodiversity
- ☒ Natural Places
- ☒ Soils
- ☒ Forestry, woodland and trees
- ☒ Historic assets and places
- ☐ Green belts
- ☐ Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings
- ☐ Coast development
- ☐ Energy
- ☐ Zero waste
- ☐ Sustainable transport

- ☐ Liveable places
 - ☒ Design, quality and place
 - ☐ Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods
 - ☐ Quality homes
 - ☐ Rural homes
 - ☒ Infrastructure first
 - ☐ Heat and cooling
 - ☒ Blue and green infrastructure
 - ☐ Play, recreation and sport
 - ☒ Flood risk and water management
 - ☐ Health and safety
 - ☐ Digital Infrastructure

- ☐ Productive places
 - ☒ Community Wealth Building
 - ☒ Business and industry

- ☐ City, town, local and commercial centres
- ☐ Retail
- ☒ Rural development
- ☐ Tourism
- ☐ Culture and creativity
- ☐ Aquaculture
- ☐ Minerals

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

- ☐ Movement
 - ☐ Spaces
 - ☒ Resources
 - ☐ Civic
 - ☐ Stewardship
-

Appendix 2 –

Case Study: Gypsy and Traveller Engagement

Attribute 6: This Planning Authority has a robust policy and evidence base

Attribute 10: This Planning Authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities

Context

As set out in the Town and Country Act (Scotland) 1997, in the preparation of their local development plans, planning authorities must seek the views of Gypsy and Travellers. This has traditionally been a difficult task for planning authorities due to factors such as historical discrimination, trust issues with authorities and institutions and challenges associated with reaching people who lead nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles. Therefore, the Park Authority commissioned Conyach Advocacy and Engagement, who specialize in working with and advocating for Gypsy and Traveller communities, to lead the engagement on our behalf.

What happened?

Conyach Advocacy and Engagement has over a decade of experience working directly with Gypsy and Traveller communities on issues that matter to them. In October 2023, The Park Authority commissioned them to conduct an engagement project with Gypsy and Travellers living and working in the National Park area. The engagement was to focus on the upcoming Local Development Plan for the National Park and ensure Gypsy and Traveller voices were heard in this process. The specific aims of the work were to:

- Develop meaningful processes to gather the views of Gypsy and Traveller communities who live and work in the Cairngorm National Park on issues relevant to the Local Development Plan.

- Where possible gather quantitative data related to Gypsy and Traveller communities, particularly where there are data gaps around transitory populations and less visible Gypsy and Traveller families in the area.
- Co-produce with Gypsy and Travellers a meaningful collation of their data for the evidence report, that will build sustainable engagement within the LDP lifecycle and empower communities to play a more active role.
- Explore deep-mapping with Gypsy and Traveller communities to find the right balance between conserving and enhancing the cultural heritage of the National Park, delivering accommodation, and supporting a sustainable thriving economy.

Conyach Advocacy and Engagement focused their engagement through a semi-structured deep listening exercise with Gypsy and Traveller communities who live and work in the Cairngorm National Park. They utilised four key methods during this exercise:

- Circle-way approach
- Community-based storytelling
- Digital surveying
- Telephone trees

This deep listening exercise enabled them to explore the needs and aspirations of communities in a meaningful and non-intrusive manner (via the Circle Way approach and Community storytelling techniques). It also enabled them to lean into the wisdom and experience already within the Gypsy and Traveller community, co-designing their approach, building trust and shared ownership of what was generated within the project.

Alongside the community-based workshops, Conyach also facilitated a number of face-to-face meetings and telephone interviews with individuals living in housing. Additionally, to further bridge the gap of accessibility to their engagement process, they conducted an online survey.

Following this, Conyach established shared offline working rhythms with communities, to support collaborative reflection on the data and how it should be presented.

In total, 76 Gypsy and Travellers were engaged. This is significantly in excess of the 2022 Census estimated Gypsy and Traveller population of 6.

Using the Place Standard Tool to collect and present information, the engagement identified a number of implications for the local development plan. These included:

- Developing stronger relationships between planning bodies and Gypsy and Traveller communities to build new culturally inclusive accommodation - particularly in the east of the National Park.
- More infrastructure links between Gypsy and Traveller permanent sites and local villages / towns, particularly those that focus on walking routes and cycling routes for younger people or those without access to a car.
- Exploring investment into community wealth-building development that supports opportunities for Gypsy and Travellers to access the landbased and conservation sectors.
- Prioritise investment into digital inclusion and digital infrastructure that connects communities, opening up more employment opportunities online.
- Provision of more public toilets, and portaloos for families travelling to better protect beauty spots and ancestral stopping places.
- Support inclusion of more Gypsy and Travellers in development of conservation and climate change infrastructure / planning.

The information is being used to inform the Evidence Report. The Park Authority will build on this engagement through the preparation of the Proposed Plan.

Areas of collaboration

Katie Crerar was the lead officer on this project.

The key partners were Conyach Advocacy and Engagement and the Gypsy and Traveller communities within the National Park.

What was the overall result?

The key output of the exercise was a report on the engagement that summarises its results. This document is a core part of the local development plan's evidence base and will support the Park Authority's Evidence Report.

<https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Cairngorms-National-Park-Gypsy-Traveller-Community-Engagement-2024.pdf>

Lessons learned

The project highlights the importance of targeting engagement through methods tailored to the audience. It is unlikely that the Park Authority would have been as successful in engaging Gypsy and Traveller communities had it attempted to do so directly. Conyach's unique focus on Gypsy and Traveller engagement made them the ideal partners to lead this work, which is demonstrated by the quality of the information collected during the project.

What contribution did it make towards delivering outcomes?

NPF4

☒ Sustainable places

- ☒ Climate change and nature crisis
- ☒ Climate mitigate and adaptation
- ☒ Biodiversity
- ☒ Natural Places
- ☒ Soils
- ☐ Forestry, woodland and trees
- ☒ Historic assets and places
- ☐ Green belts
- ☐ Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings
- ☐ Coast development
- ☐ Energy
- ☒ Zero waste
- ☒ Sustainable transport

☒ Liveable places

- ☒ Design, quality and place
- ☒ Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods
- ☒ Quality homes

- ☒ Rural homes
- ☒ Infrastructure first
- ☐ Heat and cooling
- ☐ Blue and green infrastructure
- ☐ Play, recreation and sport
- ☐ Flood risk and water management
- ☐ Health and safety
- ☐ Digital Infrastructure

☒ Productive places

- ☒ Community Wealth Building
- ☐ Business and industry
- ☐ City, town, local and commercial centres
- ☐ Retail
- ☐ Rural development
- ☐ Tourism
- ☒ Culture and creativity
- ☐ Aquaculture
- ☐ Minerals

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

- ☒ Movement
- ☒ Spaces
- ☐ Resources
- ☒ Civic
- ☐ Stewardship

Appendix 3 –

Case Study: Community Action Plans

Attribute 10: This Planning Authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities

Attribute 11: This Planning Authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places

Context

The National Park Authority works with a number of partners to provide communities with the support they need to achieve more for themselves and Community Action Planning is a key part of this process. Community Action Planning is a process through which communities have the opportunity to identify their own priorities and tackle the issues which are important to them. Since 2008, 18 communities in the National Park have produced a Community Action Plan. These are reviewed on a 5-yearly basis with the support of the community development organizations operating in the National Park, namely Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey and Mar Area Partnership.

With the process of reviewing and updating these community action plans coinciding with the preparation of the next Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan, the Park Authority has increased its support for community action planning to make them more spatial in nature and bring them more closely into the development planning process.

What happened?

The process of preparing community action plans follows a four-stage process of:

1. Gathering information
2. Data sorting and collation
3. Involving people and refining ideas
4. Community action plan document production.

The first two actions are led by the community groups with support from a community development organization. An important aspect of this is a survey which is distributed to all members of the community. Following these stages people are involved and ideas refined through public engagement events. This is the stage at which the Park Authority gets directly involved.

Planners from the local development plan team attend the event with a range of material designed to engage the public on the Park Authority's work on the local development plan and collect further information to inform the community action plan. A key part of this is the use of large print maps on which members of the public are asked to note where they would like priorities and actions implemented, including identifying issues and constraints.

Following the event, the Park Authority take the information collected at the event, as well as the content of the draft community action plan document, to create a map for the action plan. The map acts as the spatial expression of the identified priorities and actions. The results have been positively received by communities.

Areas of collaboration

Dan Harris, Planning Manager (Forward Planning and Service Improvement), is the lead officer on the planning service's work on community action plans.

The Park Authority have worked closely with both Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey and Marr Area Partnership on the preparation of the new community action plans. To date, action plans have been updated for ten communities, namely:

- Aviemore
- Blair Atholl
- Boat of Garten
- Dalwhinnie
- Dulnain Bridge
- Grantown-on-Spey
- Kincraig
- Kingussie

- Nethy Bridge

- Strathdon

What was the overall result?

The key result is the creation of ten updated community action plans that have had significant input from the planning service and are more spatially focused as a result. The events have formed a core part of the direct engagement on the next local development plan, and their content is to be highlighted within the Evidence Report. Looking forward to the proposed plan stage of the local development plan's preparation, the updated community action plans will form a foundational part of the place making process.

Lessons learned

The key message from the events are that:

- Direct engagement through the community action process provides valuable information that can be used in the preparation of the local development plans.
- The updated plans are more spatially orientated which allows them to be more easily integrated into the place making aspects of the local development plan.
- The process of preparing the local development plan builds productive working relationships with community organisations.

The process is, however, time-consuming and requires a lot of staff resource. Initially, this was difficult to manage within a timely manner without having an impact on other duties. However, this issue has now been addressed with the addition of a new post within the local development plan team that provides technical and GIS support.

What contribution did it make towards delivering outcomes?

NPF4

☒ Sustainable places

☒ Climate change and nature crisis

- ☒ Climate mitigate and adaptation
- ☒ Biodiversity
- ☒ Natural Places
- ☒ Soils
- ☒ Forestry, woodland and trees
- ☒ Historic assets and places
- ☐ Green belts
- ☒ Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings
- ☐ Coast development
- ☒ Energy
- ☒ Zero waste
- ☒ Sustainable transport

☐ Liveable places

- ☒ Design, quality and place
- ☒ Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods
- ☒ Quality homes
- ☒ Rural homes
- ☒ Infrastructure first
- ☐ Heat and cooling
- ☒ Blue and green infrastructure
- ☒ Play, recreation and sport
- ☒ Flood risk and water management
- ☒ Health and safety
- ☒ Digital Infrastructure

☐ Productive places

- ☒ Community Wealth Building
- ☒ Business and industry
- ☒ City, town, local and commercial centres

- ☒ Retail
- ☒ Rural development
- ☒ Tourism
- ☒ Culture and creativity
- ☐ Aquaculture
- ☐ Minerals

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

- ☒ Movement
 - ☒ Spaces
 - ☒ Resources
 - ☒ Civic
 - ☒ Stewardship
-