



# Local development plan place standard tool engagement with the Cairngorms National Park Junior Rangers

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## Introduction

The Place Standard tool is a way of assessing places and was utilised as part of the Local Development Plan early engagement process to inform the evidence papers, which will contribute to the process of informing the next Local Development Plan.

The current Cairngorms National Park Plan can be accessed here:

- <https://cairngorms.co.uk/our-work/local-development-plan>

The Place Standard tool provides a simple framework to structure conversations about place, based around 14 questions. It allows participants to think about the physical elements of a place (such as the buildings, spaces, and transport) as well as the social aspects (like whether people feel they have a say in decision making).

The tool provides prompts for discussions, allowing participants to consider all the elements of a place in a methodical way. The tool pinpoints the assets of a place as well as areas where a place could improve.

The engagement with the Cairngorms Junior Rangers was conducted on the 20th and 21st of September with 16 participants. Split between two groups of varying ages. For the purpose of this report the groups will be treated as one reflective of the Junior Rangers group as a whole. The group discussed each theme in turn as a group, facilitated and recorded by the Cairngorms National Park Authority planning officers. The results are summarised in the following report.

## Respondent details

The Cairngorms National Park Junior Rangers programme introduces young people aged 11 to 18 (with the place standard tool; group being 11-15) to outdoor learning, conservation, and environmental action across the National Park. It provides hands-on experience through monthly sessions held in Badenoch and Strathspey, as well as Deeside.

Participants take part in activities such as species monitoring, path maintenance, outdoor expeditions, and environmental education, working alongside park rangers and partner organisations. The programme is free to join and supports personal development, environmental awareness, and community engagement. Events like this offer young people a platform to engage with planning authorities and share their views on the future direction of planning over the next ten years.



The Junior Rangers initiative also enables participants to earn recognised awards, including the John Muir Discovery Award and the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association Junior Ranger Award. These achievements help build teamwork, active citizenship, and practical skills relevant to further education and careers in environmental and land management.

Affiliated with the EUROPARC Federation, the programme promotes inclusivity, experiential learning, and environmental responsibility. Its impact on youth engagement in conservation was recognised with the RSPB Scotland Nature of Scotland Youth Action Award in 2024.

## Results

### **Play, hang out, games and hobbies**

'How good are the spaces and opportunities for play and recreation in my place?'

Participants highlighted the wide range of social and reflective activities available throughout the National Park, facilitated by easy access to nature and open spaces. Common hobbies mentioned included biking, hiking, wild swimming, paddleboarding, kayaking, mountain climbing, and use of sports facilities in and around larger settlements. This indicates that a diverse array of recreational opportunities is currently accessible to young people.

Groups also expressed that they felt comfortable using these spaces due to the overall cleanliness of the National Park. The presence of uncluttered open areas was seen to expand the availability of play spaces, enabling activities such as football and rugby.

However, several concerns were raised regarding play and recreation. Notably, participants identified a lack of informal community gathering spaces, such as community gardens, which could host events like communal planting and foster a sense of belonging in smaller settlements. There was a strong desire for more opportunities for young people to contribute to their communities and build intergenerational connections.

Discussions also addressed wildlife safeguarding efforts within the National Park. Participants felt that current measures could be improved, especially in light of unexpected species being added to red lists. One suggested cause was human interference, including disruptive activities such as blood sports (e.g., stalking and grouse shooting), which were seen to displace wildlife. A reduction in such activities was



recommended. Additionally, concerns were raised about dogs being walked off-leash within forested areas, potentially disturbing ground-nesting birds and contributing to population decline.

Another issue noted was the lack of signage and guidance throughout the National Park. Groups questioned whether this contributed to campervans stopping overnight in laybys along the A9 and other minor roads an activity they hoped to see reduced. To address this, participants proposed increasing the number of designated camping pitches for tents and motorhomes, which would also support camping as a recreational activity.

Finally, the need for facilities to empty grey water and replenish fresh water for motorhomes was highlighted, as the absence of such infrastructure was seen as a barrier to participation in camping.

Score 6 / 7

## **Nature: Parks, woods, hills, beaches**

'How good are the natural spaces in my place?'

Participants noted that access to nature within the National Park is widely appreciated and frequently described as enjoyable and enriching. The groups spoke positively about exploring the hills and the abundance of natural spaces, which were noted as being well-maintained and inviting. Spaces such as village greens and squares were highlighted as being in good condition and offering opportunities for informal recreation and socialising.

A wide variety of wildlife has been observed and valued, with particular recognition of conservation efforts such as the Scottish Wildcat Protection Project. The Junior Rangers programme was mentioned as a positive example of youth engagement in conservation, helping to foster awareness and appreciation of biodiversity.

The core path network was consistently praised for its strength and accessibility, with good signage throughout the National Park making navigation between settlements straightforward. This infrastructure was seen as a key asset, supporting access to activities such as wild swimming in various lochs. Water quality was generally perceived to be high, although occasional algal blooms were noted as exceptions.



There is a strong understanding of the Countryside Code among young people, largely due to its inclusion in school education. However, some areas for improvement were identified. Not all visitors follow signage or guidance in natural areas, leading to confusion around concepts such as the “right to roam” and the responsibilities that accompany it. A call was made for clearer, more accessible information (particularly for tourists) regarding environmental responsibilities and safe behaviour in sensitive habitats.

Concerns were raised about the environmental impact of certain behaviours, including the use of fireworks, which can disturb ground-nesting birds and other wildlife. The need for greater awareness and education around these issues was emphasised, with suggestions that platforms such as Cairn Magazine could play a role in celebrating responsible access and promoting environmental stewardship.

the presence of running schoolyards is sometimes viewed as a detracting factor, as they can reduce the visual appeal of the natural areas in which they are situated. Efforts to mitigate wildfire risk are being addressed by various groups, though there is a shared perception that climate change is frequently discussed but rarely acted upon. This disconnect can lead to feelings of inadequacy among groups whose primary purpose is to effect environmental change.

Local efforts may also feel undermined by broader environmental standpoints adopted elsewhere, raising questions about the tangible impact of community-led initiatives.

Community involvement and engagement was also described as essential, with a more holistic approach to environmental decision-making one that includes meaningful consent and participation.

The lack of designated viewpoints and the desire to enjoy the landscape often lead to people pulling over into lay-bys, which can pose risks to other road users. Additionally, potholes and poor road conditions on main roads present safety concerns that need to be.

Score 6 / 7



## Streets, squares and buildings

'How good are the streets, squares and buildings in my place?'

Participants noted the local communities that they lived within had a strong sense of community spirit and as a result of such all took pride in the appearance of their local areas. Frequent and well attended events such as the highland games within areas also necessitated a clean and well-kept environment, hence, allowing for buildings and squares to be kept in a reasonable state of repair.

Participants also described the tasteful inclusion of modern buildings and extensions within the historic settlements through the National Park. Stating that the new development did not detract from the original beauty of the buildings already present. The result is an interesting non-homogenous village/town centre where participants described feeling like "they were constantly on holiday" demonstrating their satisfaction with local development further.

Road safety and infrastructure were recurring themes among participants. Many noted that potholes are widespread, creating safety concerns for both drivers and cyclists, while blind corners were also highlighted as reducing visibility and increasing accident risk. There was a shared feeling that improved safety measures within public spaces would significantly enhance both the usability and comfort of the local street/road network.

Maintenance and presentation of key community assets were also raised as areas of concern. The Laggan car park, for example, was described as being in poor condition, detracting from the visitor experience and prompting questions around maintenance priorities. Similarly, while the core path network was generally praised for its accessibility and coverage, participants emphasised the need for continued upkeep and gradual expansion to meet increasing demand and strengthen support for active travel. Signage across the National Park was identified as another area for improvement. Participants felt that existing signs often lacked clarity or context, particularly for visitors unfamiliar with local routes or regulations. They expressed a desire for more informative and visually consistent signage that not only aids navigation but also enhances understanding of local heritage, environment, and community responsibilities.

Score 4 / 5



## Walking, wheeling and cycling

'How good are the opportunities for walking, wheeling, and cycling in my place?'

Participants described 'walking, wheeling, and cycling' as very popular activities throughout the National Park. These modes of travel were seen to align closely with active travel efforts promoted by both local schools and the National Park Authority. A strong network of connections was noted across the area, with Grantown-on-Spey and Nethy Bridge highlighted as particularly well connected. This was attributed to the core path / road network linking these settlements, which had been resurfaced and is well maintained making active travel a viable and enjoyable form of transportation.

Parking provision was generally regarded as sufficient, especially in locations providing access to recreational routes. Participants appreciated the ability for families to park at roadside areas and continue directly onto trails, describing this as a practical feature that reduces barriers to participation in more remote areas of the National Park.

Cycling on roads was generally described positively, although safety concerns were raised. These included motorists exceeding speed limits, navigating blind corners too quickly, and the absence of parallel cycle paths on busy 60 mph roads. Participants expressed a desire for safer cycling infrastructure, including dedicated cycle routes alongside main roads.

The ability to take bikes on buses was seen as a valuable option, allowing access to parts of the National Park that participants might not wish to cycle too directly. For example, travelling from Ballater to Grantown-on-Spey by bus with a bike would enable cyclists to explore scenic routes without undertaking long-distance travel entirely by bike. This flexibility was noted as important to making cycling more accessible and enjoyable.

Within settlements, dedicated cycle lanes were appreciated, though participants noted that such infrastructure is currently lacking and would benefit from expansion. The absence of benches along walking routes was also highlighted, particularly as a barrier for those unable to walk long distances. Participants felt that more seating options would support inclusivity and comfort for older adults, young children, and those with limited mobility.

Lighting was another concern. In smaller settlements, lighting was described as inadequate, reducing comfort and increasing the risk of accidents during evening hours.



Participants suggested that improved lighting provision would enhance safety and encourage more walking and wheeling, especially during darker months.

Score 5 / 7

## **Public Transport; Buses, trains, trams, boats**

'How good is public transport in my place?'

Participants expressed strong appreciation for the Young Scot card travel scheme, which enables free bus travel for those under the age of 22 across Scotland. This initiative, combined with a relatively reliable transport network throughout the National Park, was seen as a valuable tool for enabling young people to access different areas at a reduced cost. The environmental benefits of public transport over private car use were also recognised, reinforcing its value in supporting sustainable travel. Participants also suggested the inclusion of rail travel within the Young Scots card scheme to allow for those eligible to utilise rail travel for free. Though another group also mentioned current schemes which are in place to secure affordability of rail transportation for young people.

ScotRail's 'Kids for a Quid' scheme was praised for allowing young people to travel across the rail network at minimal cost. However, several rail-related challenges were identified. As it was noted that Kincaig does not have a train station, which limits direct access to Aviemore and other destinations. Seasonal disruptions to train services were also mentioned, with winter conditions such as ice, snow, and fallen debris causing interruptions to the network. Participants also highlighted the lack of sufficient bike storage on trains, which limits the flexibility of combining rail travel with cycling.

Bus services were frequently described as unreliable, with services not always arriving on time. Participants noted a lack of bus stops in key areas, particularly in rural locations, which restricts access for those living outside main settlements. The absence of printed bus timetables was also highlighted as a barrier, especially for individuals without mobile phones or in areas with poor signal coverage.

Cleanliness on public transport was raised as an issue, alongside insufficient bike storage on buses. Participants felt that improved facilities for carrying bikes would support more flexible and sustainable travel across the National Park. Concerns were also raised about behaviour on buses, particularly among school-aged passengers. One proposed mitigation strategy was to allow teachers to use school buses for commuting,



which could help manage behaviour while also reducing personal transport costs for staff.

Participants also called for better bus connectivity to rural areas, recognising that while some positive connections exist, there is still significant room for improvement. Enhancing these links would support greater access to education, employment, and recreation across the National Park.

Score 4 / 7

## **Traffic and parking**

‘How good is traffic management and parking in my place?’

Participants expressed appreciation for the 20 mph speed limit zones currently in place, particularly in areas leading out of Grantown-on-Spey where the footpath runs alongside the transition from 20-30-60mph with the 60 mph now being avoidable. These zones were seen as effective in improving road safety through speed mitigation. Dead-end streets were also viewed positively, as they prevent through-traffic utilising back roads and contribute to quieter, safer residential areas.

Free parking options were valued in both large and intermediate settlements, with street parking generally available. Park and ride facilities were also appreciated, although it was noted that these are located outside the boundaries of the National Park. Road crossings were reported to be in good condition, and pavements in larger settlements were mostly described as being well maintained.

However, several concerns were raised. In some areas, the absence of double yellow lines has led to problematic on-street parking, resulting in crowded roads and restricted access for vehicles. This was particularly concerning for wheelchair users, those with limited mobility and those with walkers or prams, as pavement parking creates physical barriers and safety risks. Lay-by parking for walking and cycling access was also described as limited, with participants expressing a desire to see more of these facilities introduced.

Speed bump clearance was noted as inconsistent across the National Park. While some vehicles were able to navigate speed bumps safely, others struggled due to their height, raising concerns about vehicle damage and road usability.



Participants suggested that the 20 mph speed limit should be extended to all settlements within the National Park. They also called for improved signage, especially signage that explains the reasoning behind restrictions and guidance making it accessible to both tourists and residents. Clear signage for key buildings such as hospitals, doctors' surgeries, and police stations was also requested, as these could be difficult to locate for those unfamiliar with the area.

Low-cost traffic calming measures were seen as effective and desirable, with participants expressing interest in seeing more of these implemented. Parking infrastructure outside of settlements was identified as needing improvement, and enforcement of parking regulations was deemed insufficient. With a recurring issue being vehicles parking in disabled bays without displaying a Blue Badge, which participants felt should be addressed through the increased enforcement. A potential mitigations strategy mentioned was a greater police presence and the installation of more speed cameras to enforce speed limits and deter unsafe driving behaviours.

Score 3 / 7

## **Having our say and being listened to**

'How well are young people listened to in my place?'

Participants identified the Junior Rangers programme as a valuable opportunity for young people to express their views and engage with environmental and community issues. Focus groups, youth clubs, and community meetings (such as those held in Laggan being of particular note) were also highlighted as important platforms for discussion, allowing young people to feel heard and involved in shaping their local areas.

It was noted that visitors and facilitators often actively seek the opinions of young people, asking about potential changes and improvements within the community, with Student councils being praised for providing a formal space for youth representation, and surveys were frequently used to gather feedback on local initiatives. In some cases, feedback from these groups has led to visible changes, reinforcing the value of youth input.

Suggestion boxes were mentioned as another mechanism for engagement, though their effectiveness was seen as limited. Participation in these feedback channels was described as lacklustre, and some young people felt that their contributions were



occasionally overridden by adults. This led to feelings of frustration and a perception that youth voices were not always taken seriously.

However, opportunities to engage were not always well advertised, with young people often needing to seek them out independently. Feedback mechanisms, such as suggestion boxes, were seen as needing to be more responsive and transparent. With communication between young people and adults being described as challenging, due to perceived age and experience gaps, which can make open dialogue difficult.

There was also concern about poor responsiveness from government representatives. Participants described instances where officials visited communities to ask questions, but no visible outcomes followed, leading to a sense of disengagement and scepticism. To help address this, participants suggested that feedback from youth engagement activities should be more clearly disseminated among those who participated. Even if action is slow to be enacted, seeing that their views were acknowledged can help young people feel heard and valued.

To further improve youth representation, participants proposed greater community ownership and the establishment of more community councils to ensure local voices with a focus on those of young people are better represented. Libraries were identified as potential hubs for community engagement, though better staffing was seen as necessary to support their role in facilitating discussions and events.

Score 4 / 7

### **Fixed, clean and managed**

'How well cared for is my place?'

Participants noted that the National Park benefits from an effective system of refuse bins both in settlements as well as close to trail heads, allowing for efficient collection and disposal. As a result, litter levels were reported to be low across most areas, with many locations described as clean and well maintained. However, calls for clearer rules around littering, supported by improved signage and enforcement especially for tourists, campervan users, and seasonal visitors. Community litter-picking events were seen as valuable, not only for their practical impact but also for fostering community pride and spirit.

Dog waste bins were generally available, though participants noted a lack of provision in more remote areas. Participants mentioned the idea of introducing community



compost bins, as a way to encourage sustainable practices, reduce the amount of organic waste heading to landfill and strengthen community involvement as the by product could then be implemented into a community garden.

Despite the overall positive feedback, littering was still reported in specific locations, particularly around secondary schools such as Kingussie High School. Vandalism was also raised as a concern, with older teenagers sometimes seen to set poor examples for younger children by defacing various surfaces. Abandoned and derelict housing was described as poorly maintained and unsecured, with some participants aware of individuals entering these buildings. Environmental concerns were raised about leaking pipes into the River Spey, which participants felt should be addressed urgently.

Laggan was specifically mentioned as having very few bins, with the local pump area reportedly full of rubbish. The lack of infrastructure for organic waste management such as food waste bins near businesses was seen as a missed opportunity for eco-friendly and cost-efficient disposal.

Participants also highlighted confusion around recycling due to unclear bin labelling. The various colours and types of recycling and refuse bins were described as difficult to understand, particularly without clear instructions. Better labelling and guidance were requested to help residents and visitors correctly sort their waste.

Score 3 / 7

## **Feeling safe**

'How safe do I feel in my place?'

Participants described communities across the National Park as generally safe and welcoming. Young people reported feeling comfortable going out independently from an early age, with both they and their parents perceiving the wider National Park as a safe environment. The availability of first aid training in secondary schools was seen as contributing to this sense of security.

Locals within different settlements were described as friendly and approachable, with participants noting that if help was needed, adults were generally willing to assist. However, some barriers were identified in terms of contacting responsible adults during times of need, though these barriers were not fully expanded upon. Participants felt that community reporting mechanisms could be improved, with anonymous reporting options seen as a positive step toward safer and more responsive systems.



The presence of derelict buildings was described as unsettling, with some areas feeling unsafe due to poor maintenance and lack of security. Broken glass in public spaces was highlighted as a hazard, particularly for outdoor recreation. Loud and intoxicated individuals were also mentioned as contributing to discomfort in public areas, especially during evenings. Participants called for tighter regulations on alcohol and energy drink consumption among those under 18, particularly in public spaces.

Lighting was identified as a key issue in certain locations, with inadequate provision reducing visibility and increasing the risk of accidents. Participants suggested that improved lighting would enhance safety and comfort, particularly in smaller settlements and areas used for walking and cycling.

Police response times were perceived to be slow, largely due to the size and scale of the National Park. Participants felt that young people would benefit from better education on how to contact emergency services, with some groups stating they were unsure of what to do in an emergency. It was suggested by multiple groups that the National Park Authority could help by producing and distributing a flyer with clear instructions on how to contact police, ambulance, or fire services.

Large groups of people were described as intimidating, especially in poorly lit areas or during the late hours. Buses were also mentioned as feeling chaotic and occasionally unsafe, prompting calls for increased security measures.

Safety concerns extended to rivers and roads, particularly for cyclists. Participants raised issues around vehicle speeds in large settlements, especially during peak times when children are commuting to and from school. Goods vehicles were specifically mentioned as posing risks due to their size and speed.

Participants also called for improved wildfire protection and better education around fire safety, particularly for tourists and seasonal visitors. There was a strong desire for clearer communication of environmental responsibilities, including the Countryside Code and Leave No Trace principles.



## Feeling proud and a part of my place

'How proud do I feel of my place?'

Participants described themselves as feeling proud to be part of their local communities, with a strong sense of being valued and welcomed. Communities across the National Park were characterised as strong and supportive, with posters, group chats, and local networks helping to promote events and foster inclusivity. This sense of belonging was seen as a key contributor to wellbeing and local engagement.

Local museums were praised for their role in supporting cultural learning and pride, offering accessible ways to connect with the area's history and heritage. The Highland culture and sense of community ownership were recognised as major strengths, with participants noting that people of all age groups felt listened to and included.

The scenic landscapes and natural beauty of the National Park were also seen as enhancing local pride. Participants described the views and outdoor spaces as central to their connection with the area and a source of inspiration and identity.

Community involvement in wildlife management and wildfire mitigation was highlighted as another strength, with residents actively contributing to environmental stewardship. Traditional events such as the Highland Games, Dinnie Stones lifting, pipe bands, and local shows were seen as important for maintaining cultural traditions and fostering pride across different generations.

Participants expressed a desire for more historical information about villages, suggesting that greater visibility of local heritage could further strengthen community identity. At the same time, they called for improved wildlife protection and security measures to ensure that the natural environment remains safe and accessible for all.

Score 7 / 7

## Schools, libraries, shops and other services

'What is my place like for accessing services we need?'

Participants expressed appreciation for Scotland's offering of free university education, describing it as a key strength in supporting learning and providing opportunities for furthering their careers. High schools across the National Park were generally described in a positive light, and many towns were noted to have a good range of shops and



usable buildings. Grantown-on-Spey and Laggan were highlighted as providing a variety of local services, with Kingussie also mentioned as a close follower.

Healthy food options were available in local shops such as the Co-operative, and school buses were described as accessible and widely used. Libraries were present in both villages and towns, and GPS and digital tools were available to support accessibility. Youth hostels and affordable accommodation options were also noted as being available throughout the National Park.

Mental health support was seen as a strength, with mental health first aiders available in secondary schools and through the police service. Although participants highlighted that anti-bullying programmes were also recognised as valuable, participants felt these could be expanded upon. Suggestions included better access to trained counsellors and mental health support staff in both primary and secondary schools, as well as the introduction of anonymised reporting systems to help young people feel safe when raising concerns.

A good number of schools, libraries, shops, and fire stations operate within the area, contributing to a sense of community resilience and access to essential services. However, participants identified several areas for improvement. There was a desire for more frequent reading opportunities, particularly for young people, and for the inclusion of more 'third spaces' designed specifically for youth where activities are provided which are not "always outside".

Long travel times to reach urgent care were seen as a downside, with the nearest hospitals equipped with an accident and emergency department being Raigmore Hospital located in Inverness.

Participants expressed a preference for fewer souvenir and tourist-focused shops, and more practical, everyday stores particularly in Aviemore, where the current offering was perceived as catering more to visitors than residents. Libraries were seen as needing stronger connections to local communities, and participants encouraged schools to work more closely with local services to foster engagement.

Concerns were raised about shops selling alcohol and energy drinks to minors, with the lack of police presence in some areas seen as exacerbating petty crime. Primary school education was perceived to be in need of reform (this issue however was not expanded upon), with calls for clearer guidance for teachers on accessing emergency care for students.



Finally, participants noted that Gaelic lessons could be made clearer and more accessible, given its status as an official language. Strengthening Gaelic education was seen as an important step in supporting cultural heritage and inclusion.

Score 4 / 7

## **Jobs and places to work**

‘What is my place like for jobs and places to work?’

Participants noted that opportunities do exist for youth involvement in community services and fundraising, with events such as the European Youth Parliament providing valuable platforms for engagement. Volunteering opportunities in secondary schools and youth coaching were also encouraged and widely taken up. Many young people reported helping out with their parents’ work or volunteering locally within their settlements.

A blacksmithing space in Nethy Bridge was highlighted as a unique opportunity for hands-on experience, within a niche sector of work.

Schools were praised for offering work experience placements even in less conventional or fringe subjects. Some good local workplaces were noted within the National Park, particularly in hospitality and tourism, where jobs were described as relatively easy to obtain.

However, participants expressed a desire for more long-term job opportunities within the National Park. Routes into employment were seen as unclear or limited, with age restrictions (e.g. 16+) preventing younger teens from accessing work. Most available jobs were in the hospitality sector, which limits career diversity. Additionally, work availability fluctuates with the seasons, peak times can be extremely busy, while off-peak periods offer fewer opportunities with participants noting that older youths have also faced being ‘let go’ during quieter periods.

Participants felt that all age groups would benefit from better education and guidance on job choices and career paths. One table suggested that this need may stem from the limited availability of job-related charities and support services within the National Park. The closure of small businesses was also seen as reducing opportunities for part-time or flexible work, particularly for young people seeking employment alongside their schooling.



Greater awareness of the types of jobs available locally was requested, with suggestions that schools or the National Park Authority could help provide this information. The limited availability of work for those under the age of 15 due to legal restrictions was also seen as a barrier to early employment and skill development.

Score 5 / 7

## **Homes, friends and neighbours**

'What are my home, friends and neighbours like?'

Participants described their neighbours as friendly and welcoming, contributing to a strong sense of community across the National Park. Youth clubs were praised for offering excellent opportunities to meet others of a similar age and build friendships outside of school settings. Free clubs and those free at the point of use (such as breakfast clubs) were seen as particularly valuable, alongside opportunities for community leadership and volunteering.

A sense of community was reinforced through frequent local events, which were appreciated for their inclusivity and ability to bring together a wide range of age groups. Mixed-age friendships were seen as a strength, with public spaces and clubs providing safe environments for socialising and connection. Friendly and polite behaviour was commonly observed throughout the local communities.

Access to housing was generally perceived as adequate, and young people reported that they felt their voices were heard in most community matters. However, participants expressed a desire for more youth-focused opportunities, including the expansion of the Junior Rangers programme and the introduction of additional clubs within schools. These initiatives were seen as valuable for helping young people connect with others outside their immediate peer groups and for strengthening inter-community relationships.

Street naming and signage were identified as areas for improvement, with participants suggesting that clearer signs would support better navigation and accessibility, particularly for visitors and new residents. The prevalence of holiday homes across the National Park was seen as a continuing concern, as it was thought to limit the availability of housing stock for local residents and young people wishing to remain in the area.



Participants also highlighted the need for better transportation options to enable children and young people to visit friends in neighbouring settlements (as distances between communities are often greater than they are willing or able to cycle). Improved transport links were viewed as important for social inclusion and independence, particularly for those without access to private vehicles.

Respect for personal boundaries was described as both encouraged and largely observed within communities, though participants felt this could still be improved through greater awareness and education. Creating safe, inclusive opportunities for social interaction (both within and beyond schools) was seen as vital to maintaining and enhancing the supportive and welcoming character of local communities.

Score 5 / 7

## **Meeting and talking with people**

‘What is my place like for meeting and talking with people?’

Participants described programmes such as the Junior Rangers as crucial in developing confidence, teamwork, and environmental awareness. These initiatives were seen as valuable opportunities for young people to learn, contribute, and connect with others in meaningful ways. The programme also supported personal wellbeing and a desire to drive positive change for the future.

Young people reported that support was generally available when needed, with adults in the community approachable and willing to help. Access to local parks and the ability to walk safely around villages were seen as strong positives, contributing to a sense of independence and security.

Community events held across different regions of the National Park were appreciated for fostering a sense of local identity and belonging. However, participants expressed a need for more informal spaces where young people could meet, socialise, and relax such as youth cafés or dedicated drop-in centres. A greater variety of clubs and activities was also requested, including options like birdwatching groups and outdoor environmental clubs to complement existing programmes like the Junior Rangers.

Some participants raised concerns about age discrimination and instances of unkind behaviour among peers, highlighting the need for better inclusion and positive relationship-building practices. Stronger safeguarding measures for such hang outs



were also recommended to ensure all young people feel safe and supported within their communities.

Closer collaboration between schools and youth organisations was encouraged, with suggestions that schools could host shared activities or provide more opportunities to connect with local youth groups in a responsible and inclusive setting.

Finally, participants recommended expanding anonymised reporting systems and improving access to mental health first aiders and counsellors in both primary and secondary schools. These measures were seen as essential for supporting young people's emotional wellbeing and ensuring that all voices are heard and respected.

Score 6 / 7

### **Group discussion (my priorities for change)**

- For the group to be approached for consultation more frequently.
- More public questions concerning the national park.
- An increase in the quantity of bus services.
- More regulations surrounding speeding.
- Renovations for derelict and abandoned buildings.
- Stopping septic waster being illegally discarded in the Spey in the areas around Laggan.



## Conclusion

### Key theme discussion

Groups consistently highlighted the value of living in communities characterised by strong social bonds, welcoming residents, and ready access to natural spaces.

Opportunities to meet others through clubs, volunteering, events, and outdoor activities were widely appreciated, supporting both wellbeing and community pride. Informal, youth-led spaces were seen as particularly important for fostering intergenerational interaction and providing safe, year-round meeting points.

Facilities and amenities were generally well regarded, with schools, libraries, and shops providing essential services. However, accessibility, maintenance, and youth relevance varied between areas. Participants called for designed for purpose, inclusive facilities and improved transport links to support year-round access to recreational and community services.

Access to nature and recreational spaces was a standout strength. Parks, trails, lochs, and hills offered high-quality opportunities for exercise, play, and socialising, contributing to both physical and mental wellbeing. At the same time, young people identified environmental pressures and limited informal community areas, highlighting the need for community gardens, seating, lighting, and clear guidance for responsible outdoor recreation.

While some avenues for youth influence exist (including Junior Rangers, student councils, and community meetings) participants expressed frustration over limited visibility of outcomes and tokenistic consultation processes. Stronger mechanisms, such as Youth Advisory Panels with publicised feedback loops, were suggested to enhance agency and ensure young voices meaningfully inform local decision-making.

A strong sense of identity and belonging was evident, grounded in local heritage, culture, and landscape. Traditional events, storytelling, and visible recognition of youth contributions were valued, with calls for broader representation in media and community celebrations.

Safety was generally perceived as high, yet concerns remain around lighting, road traffic, antisocial behaviour, and derelict spaces. Participants recommended targeted improvements in infrastructure, safety education, and accessible reporting mechanisms to maintain confidence and independence.



Transport accessibility emerged as a significant barrier in some areas. While schemes like the Young Scot card and active travel routes were praised, unreliability, limited coverage, and insufficient infrastructure hindered independent mobility. Participants highlighted the need for enhanced public transport, cycle paths, crossings, and resting points to ensure safe and equitable movement.

Finally, digital inclusion was recognised as a useful enabler for learning, navigation, and communication. Connectivity gaps in remote areas were noted, alongside opportunities for digital skills development through schools, libraries, and free public Wi-Fi, ensuring young people can fully engage with local life and services.

Young people expressed a deep sense of pride in their communities and placed high value on the natural, cultural, and social assets of the National Park. However, persistent challenges (particularly around transport, safety, informal social spaces, and opportunities for meaningful influence) continue to limit full participation. Addressing these issues through targeted, youth-informed interventions will help enhance everyday experiences and contribute to the long-term resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability of communities across the National Park.

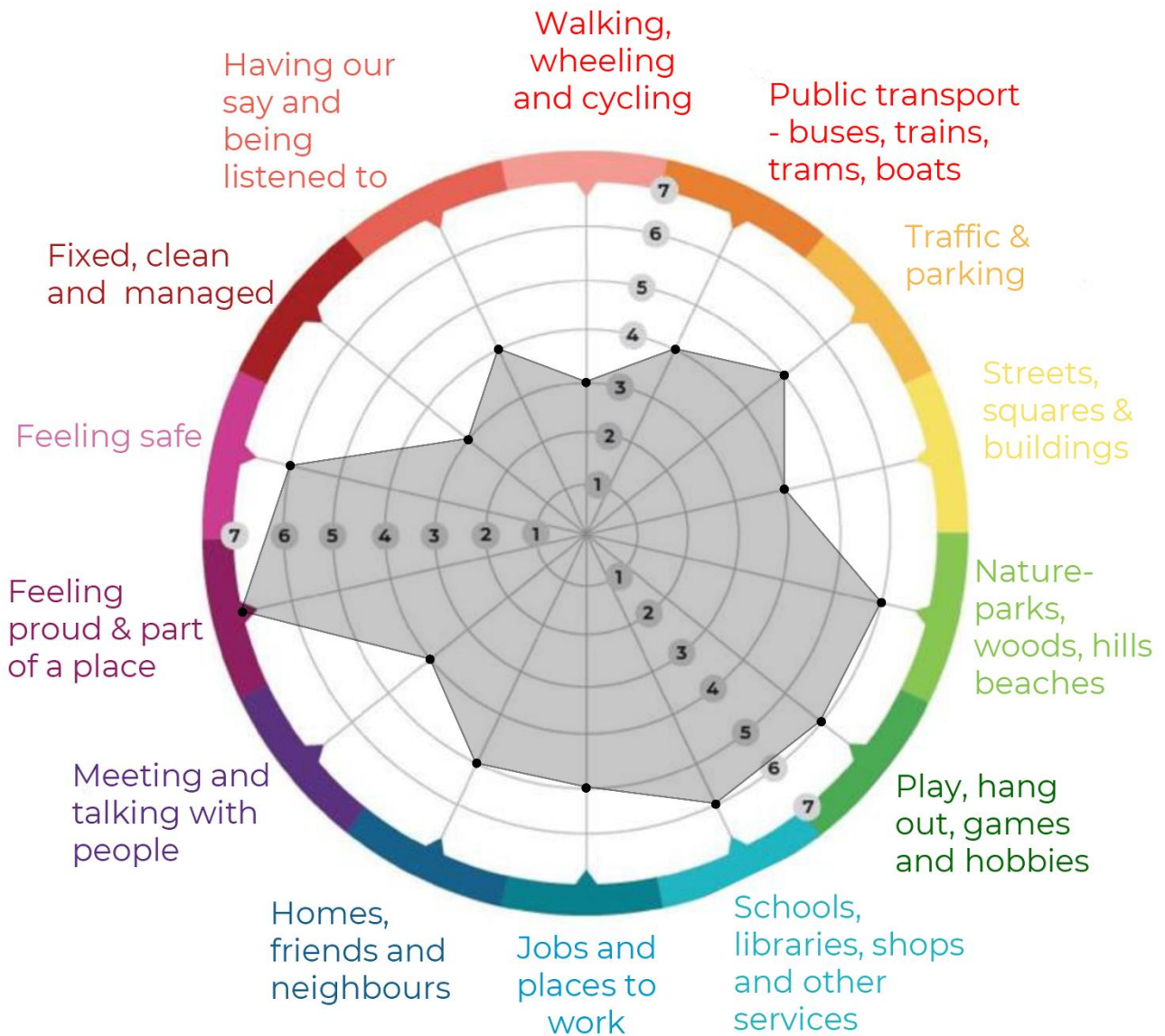


Figure 1 Summary of Young People's Responses to the 14 Place Standard Tool Questions. A visual breakdown highlighting key themes and priorities identified through youth engagement.



Table 1 Summary of Young People's Responses to the 14 Place Standard Tool Questions. A tabularised breakdown highlighting key themes and priorities identified through youth engagement

| Question                                       | Participants rating out of 7 |
|--|------------------------------|
| Play, hang out, games and hobbies              | 6                            |
| Nature: Parks, woods, hills, beaches           | 6                            |
| Streets, squares and buildings                 | 4                            |
| Walking, wheeling and cycling                  | 5                            |
| Public Transport – Buses, trains, trams, boats | 4                            |
| Traffic and parking                            | 3                            |
| Having our say and being listened to           | 4                            |
| Fixed, clean and managed                       | 3                            |
| Feeling safe                                   | 6                            |
| Feeling proud and a part of my place           | 7                            |
| Schools, libraries, shops and other services   | 4                            |
| Jobs and places to work                        | 5                            |
| Homes, friends and neighbours                  | 5                            |
| Meeting and talking with people                | 6                            |