



# Cairngorms Local development plan place standard tool engagement with the Aviemore Neurodiversity Support Youth Group

Prepared by Lacquarn Rose (September 2025)



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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 Local Development 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 Aviemore Neurodiversity Support Group was conducted on the eighth of September with 6 participants. The support group was split into two individual groups with one being made up of an individual contributor and the rest of the support groups members working in a second group. Due to the nature of the support groups as well as the background of some of the participants the decision was made that this session would be facilitated and recorded by the Paul Jarvis of the Highland council who has previously had experience with this group and has undergone the relevant safeguarding training. The results are summarised in the following report.

The Aviemore Neurodiversity support group is an empowering and inspiring platform for young people to share and develop ideas that allowed for them to conduct proactive participation in public engagement as well as exchange expand upon ideas between themselves, as well as provide a safe forum for youths to meet and socialise.



## Respondent details

The group was assessing the Cairngorms National Park as a whole, however included comments about specific areas where relevant. The demographic of the group involved in this session was 12 – 14 years of mixed gender. When writing this report, the decision was made to consolidate the two groups into one utilizing both answer sheets to build one conclusive document of the group's activity. This decision was in part due to the low sample size as well as the levels at which both place standard tools were completed.

## Results

### Play, Hang out, Games and Hobbies

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

Overall, the groups noted that there was a lack of purpose built third spaces for youths to be able to gather and interact with one another outside of dedicated clubs such as the neurodiversity support group and club such as these. The lack of free at point of use sporting facilities was also mentioned with participants stating that a lack of free-swimming facilities as well as football pitches and youth golfing passes proved to be a barrier for outdoor recreation for all members of the groups.

Suggestions for mitigation were as follows, for highland life to provide greater access to facilities through the National Park. Inclusive of a wider range of activities which could be of interest to young people.

Score 2 / 7

### Nature: Parks, Woods, Hills, Beaches

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

Participants for the most part were widely positive of the access to nature provided through the National Park, stating that there was a plethora of walks in and around their neighbourhoods that they could easily access. With signage and navigation proving to be positive addition concerning finding one's way around the park.

Participants did note that in their opinion development throughout the National Park specifically housing development was spoiling natural views, with development occurring in areas of natural beauty and in close proximity to their own residence this was viewed as a negative aspect of development. A by-product of this was the



reduction in air quality noticed throughout larger settlements as well as surrounding continuing development throughout smaller settlements. As a result of this foul-smelling outdoors such as petroleum fumes were noted. Participants mentioned a desire to see a reduction in private car usage throughout major settlements to mitigate the reduction in air quality

Concerning nature and internal combustion based transportation the increase in motorhomes, campervans and lorries, throughout the National Park but specifically in close proximity to 'tourist areas' proved to be a barrier to access as participants didn't feel comfortable utilising these areas due to the heightened presence of vehicles, noise pollution, and perceived environmental degradation.

Score 4 / 7

## **Streets, Squares and Buildings**

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

Aviemore's retail sector plays a significant role in attracting visitors, with participants frequently citing shopping opportunities as a motivating factor for travel. However, participants noted that this also exacerbated previously mentioned grievances. Increased traffic to larger settlements that offer increased retail amenities led to mounting concerns around accessibility and environmental impact. Parking became a significant issue, with limited availability contributing to congestion and frustration. In response, participants suggested increasing off street parking facilities to help reduce road noise and improve traffic flow the result of which could create a pedestrian friendly zone with reduced noise and pollutant levels. Many also expressed that the roads had become excessively busy and, in some cases, dangerous particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. Additionally, the strong smell of automotive pollutants was seen as detracting from the natural experience and overall enjoyment of the area.

Score 5 / 7



## Walking, Wheeling and Cycling

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

Participants noted that when navigating the National Park throughout settlements, that streets and roads were too busy to walk and cycle alongside due to the increase in vehicles operating on the roads. A particular focus was brought to the cycle routes throughout Aviemore (alongside Grampian Road) and the apparent lack of dedicated cycle infrastructure throughout the settlement. The condition of the foot path alongside the same road was also seen as a barrier to accessibility for those seeking to get around a settlement.

Another barrier to access identified by participants concerned public transportation, particularly the bus network. While buses are available, many felt that the service was infrequent, poorly connected to key natural and tourist areas, and not well-suited to the needs of visitors or those without access to private vehicles. This limited mobility for certain groups and contributed to a reliance on cars, further intensifying traffic and environmental pressures in popular settlements like Aviemore  
Busses are awful

The quality of pedestrian crossing points throughout Aviemore was also highlighted as an area in need of improvement. Participants reported that vehicles often accelerated when approaching crossings, creating unsafe conditions and discouraging pedestrian use. As a result, there were calls for more frequent and clearly marked crossing opportunities along the main road, alongside the implementation of traffic calming measures to enhance safety and accessibility.

Score 2 / 7

## Public Transport: Buses, Trains, Trams, Boats

'How good is public transport in my place?'

Another commonly cited barrier to access was the public transportation system, particularly the bus network. Although bus services are available during daytime hours, many participants felt they were too infrequent especially on weekends and lacked evening operations. Additionally, the network was seen as poorly connected to key destinations, making it difficult to access after-school clubs, sporting events, and other community activities. As a result, the service was considered inadequate for both locals



and visitors without access to private vehicles, leading to increased reliance on cars and further exacerbating previously mentioned issues such as congestion and pollution.

Concerns were also raised about the approachability of bus drivers. Several participants described instances of unfriendly behaviour, including the confiscation of Young Scot cards due to technical faults and being refused travel, which in some cases left individuals stranded. One participant shared, "I don't feel safe as I have been refused bus travel when my Young Scot card was misplaced and was left stranded." These experiences contributed to a broader sense of unreliability and discomfort associated with public transport, particularly among younger and more vulnerable users.

Participants also highlighted the need to improve the location of bus stops throughout the National Park, alongside better timetables and wider coverage to connect smaller settlements more effectively. Train travel was described as prohibitively expensive, with many suggesting that free or discounted fares would significantly encourage greater use and reduce dependency on private vehicles.

Score 2 / 7

## **Traffic and Parking**

'How good is traffic management and parking in my place?'

Parking throughout the larger settlements was generally seen as reasonably adequate, though primarily for short durations often limited to less than two hours. However, participants noted that securing parking for longer periods proved challenging, particularly in Aviemore. Much of the available parking was tied to retail businesses, restricting access for those not engaging in commercial activity and limiting flexibility for visitors or residents needing extended stays.

As mentioned previously the quantity of traffic observed throughout the settlement as well as the speed in which traffic traverses the settlement was seen to be an issue with members stating that they regularly observe vehicles exceeding the 20 mile per hour speed limit which the stated in turn creates a dangerous environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Calls for traffic calming measures to be implemented in order to create a behavioural shift in motorists alongside Grampian Road were called in order to mitigate this issue.

An increase in road collisions, attributed to a variety of factors such as high traffic volumes, speeding, and poor pedestrian infrastructure, has contributed to the perception



of an unsafe environment. Participants expressed that these conditions alongside previously mentioned issues like inadequate crossing points and heavy vehicle presence can lead to heightened anxiety, particularly when navigating busy roads on foot. Many reported feeling that the roads were simply too congested and dangerous to walk alongside, further discouraging active travel and limiting access to key areas within the settlement

Score 2 / 7

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

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

Participants noted that while there were opportunities for their voices to be heard by various groups and organisations, the issues they were consulted on rarely appeared to change. This, coupled with a lack of actionable feedback from these organisations, led to a perception that engagement was more of a procedural obligation than a genuine effort to incorporate community input. As a result, many participants felt that their opinions carried little weight, contributing to a sense of frustration and disengagement.

Calls for transparency about the process were made with participation the need to be informed about what happens after they share their views was emphasised, being updated on how their input has influenced decisions or led to action. With calls for something as simple as being forwarded a copy of the reports once written, to show that their voices were indeed heard and that a tangible result came from the process. This feedback loop was considered essential in demonstrating that young people are genuinely being listened to, and in encouraging continued participation.

Score 7 / 7

### **Fixed, Clean and Managed**

'How well cared for is my place?'

Participants appreciated the wide range of retail options available throughout the area. However, there was a clear preference for shops that cater to local needs rather than an abundance of outdoor or tourism-focused retail outlets. Many felt that the balance of retail provision should better reflect the everyday requirements of residents, ensuring that essential services and goods are accessible year-round.



Road and path maintenance emerged as another key theme among participants. Potholes were frequently cited as a barrier for cyclists, making certain routes unsafe or uncomfortable to use. Additionally, the presence of weeds growing through sections of the core path network was perceived as a sign of neglect and became a source of frustration. Participants also highlighted the lack of bins for dog waste along popular walking routes, which contributed to hygiene / natural beauty concerns and detracted from the overall experience. Improved upkeep of these routes including surface repairs, vegetation management, and the provision of appropriate waste facilities was seen as essential to making them safer, cleaner, and more inviting for all users.

Score 3 / 7

## Feeling Safe

'How safe do I feel in my place?'

Feelings of safety varied across participants, often depending on the time of year and local activity levels. Many young people noted that they feel safer once tourist numbers decline, describing a calmer and more familiar atmosphere when fewer visitors are present.

However, several issues were raised that affect young people's confidence and sense of security. Walking along certain roads and footpaths such as the route from the Old Bridge Inn to Dalfaber (Cycle Route 7) was described as intimidating due to limited space, traffic proximity, and inadequate lighting. Concerns were also expressed about dogs being off their leads along the Aviemore Orbital path, with some participants reporting incidents of dogs attacking people.

Poor lighting within and around settlements was seen as a further barrier to feeling safe after dark, while busy periods with large crowds or groups of visitors were said to create unease and anxiety. Collectively, these experiences suggest that while young people generally feel secure in quieter conditions, improvements in lighting, path safety, and responsible dog management could significantly enhance their overall sense of safety.

Score 3 / 7



## **Feeling Proud and Part of my Place**

'How proud do I feel of my place?'

Participants mentioned that events celebrating the natural heritage of the National Park such as the Thunder in the Glens motorbike festival were a welcome addition to Aviemore. These events were seen as valuable opportunities to foster community spirit and bring people together. However, it was also noted that Aviemore lacks a dedicated village hall, making it one of the few settlements in the area without such a facility. Participants felt that a village hall would provide a much-needed space for hosting local events, meetings, and activities, further strengthening community cohesion and engagement.

Score 3 / 7

## **Schools, Libraries, Shops and other Services**

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

Participants noted that the public library in Aviemore provided valuable access to a safe and comfortable space for reading, accessing services, and browsing the internet. However, several challenges were also raised that impact daily life and accessibility in the area. For example, while getting to college was generally manageable, returning home was described as difficult due to poor public transport connections particularly in the evenings. There was also concern about the lack of support for individuals with additional support needs on buses, making independent travel more difficult for some.

Other issues included a perceived lack of visible police presence, which contributed to feelings of insecurity in certain areas. Additionally, participants expressed frustration over the high cost of food and retail goods, noting that shops and basic necessities were often too expensive. Some also felt that library services, while valuable, could be costly or limited in accessibility for certain users.

Score 2 / 7



## **Jobs and Places to Work**

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

Young people recognised several positives in local employment, particularly the availability of entry-level roles and volunteering opportunities that help to build experience and confidence. Workplaces such as Tesco, the Macdonald Resort, the Sue Ryder shop, and the local hospice were viewed as accessible employers offering valuable opportunities, including for those with additional support needs.

However, participants noted that most available jobs are within the hospitality and tourism sectors, which can be seasonal, busy, and sometimes overwhelming. There was a strong desire for a wider range of employment opportunities that cater to different skills, interests, and abilities, particularly for young people seeking career development or requiring additional support. Expanding local training options and diversifying the job market were seen as important steps in creating more stable and inclusive employment pathways.

Score 3 / 7

## **Homes, Friends and Neighbours**

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

The groups spoke positively about the sense of peace and quiet within their communities. Those living away from main roads particularly valued the quiet and calm of their surroundings, and many described having kind, supportive neighbours who contribute to a strong sense of local connection.

However, some participants expressed concerns about feeling uneasy or anxious in areas with a high number of holidaymakers. Reports of visitors drinking or behaving unpredictably in residential streets made some young people feel unsafe in their own neighbourhoods. These experiences suggest that while local communities are generally friendly and close-knit, seasonal pressures and tourism-related behaviour can affect young people's sense of comfort and security when outside of their hometowns.

Score 3 / 7



## Meeting and Talking with People

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

The groups spoke positively about clubs such as the Aviemore Neurodivergent support group, with other clubs that are facilitated by Paul Jarvis being highlighted for the value that they bring. Going forward the groups would like to see more groups / clubs of this nature being ran within the National Park offering a safe environment to meet and engage with different people.

Score 4 / 7

### Group discussion

The groups agreed on the following proposals put forward by individual groups during the discussion at the end of the session as means to mitigate the challenges outline through the course of the session:

- Increase the number of buses operating to and from college, especially during late afternoons and evenings.
- Adjust bus timetables to better align with youth activities and club schedules.
- Allow young people to board buses at night even if they've forgotten their Young Scot card, possibly through a grace system or alternative ID verification.
- Implement clear safeguarding protocols on public transport and in youth spaces.
- Ensure staff and volunteers are trained in child protection
- Provide free access to playing fields for informal games and sports like football.
- Remove barriers such as booking fees or locked gates to encourage spontaneous outdoor activity.
- Open up the village hall for regular youth-friendly events and drop-in sessions.
- Develop additional community spaces to diversify social opportunities and reduce overcrowding.
- Use these spaces to foster community cohesion and help young people make friends.
- Introduce traffic calming measures in Aviemore to reduce noise and congestion.
- Limit heavy vehicle access during peak tourist seasons to reduce pollution.
- Promote alternative transport modes (e.g. cycling, walking, electric shuttles) to ease pressure on roads.



## Conclusion

Young people across all areas explored through the Place Standard Tool expressed strong appreciation for living within the Cairngorms National Park, highlighting the natural beauty, welcoming communities, and outdoor opportunities. Access to nature, walking routes, and recreation were identified as key strengths that enhance wellbeing and community pride.

However, recurring challenges affect daily life and participation. Limited, unreliable, and poorly connected public transport leaves many young people dependent on parents for travel, restricting access to work, education, and leisure, and contributing to congestion and environmental pressures.

Safety and comfort in public spaces were also concerns. Participants reported feeling less safe during peak tourist seasons and cited poor lighting, speeding traffic, and insufficient pedestrian and cycling infrastructure as barriers to independent movement. Improvements to paths, lighting, and traffic management were seen as priorities for enhancing quality of life.

The need for more youth-friendly third spaces was a consistent theme. While organised activities and clubs are valued, young people identified a shortage of informal, free, and inclusive spaces that encourage social connection and active lifestyles.

Employment and housing pressures were also highlighted. Seasonal, tourism-based jobs limit career development and stability, leading to calls for more diverse, year-round opportunities and clearer routes for skills development.

Finally, participants voiced frustration that their input is not always reflected in decision-making. Although consultation opportunities exist, feedback processes were viewed as lacking transparency. Strengthening communication and establishing ongoing, meaningful engagement between young people and the Cairngorms National Park Authority were seen as essential to building trust.

Overall, young people feel deep pride in their communities but face persistent barriers particularly around transport, safety, and affordability that constrain their participation. Addressing these issues will improve everyday experiences and support the long-term resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability of communities across the National Park.

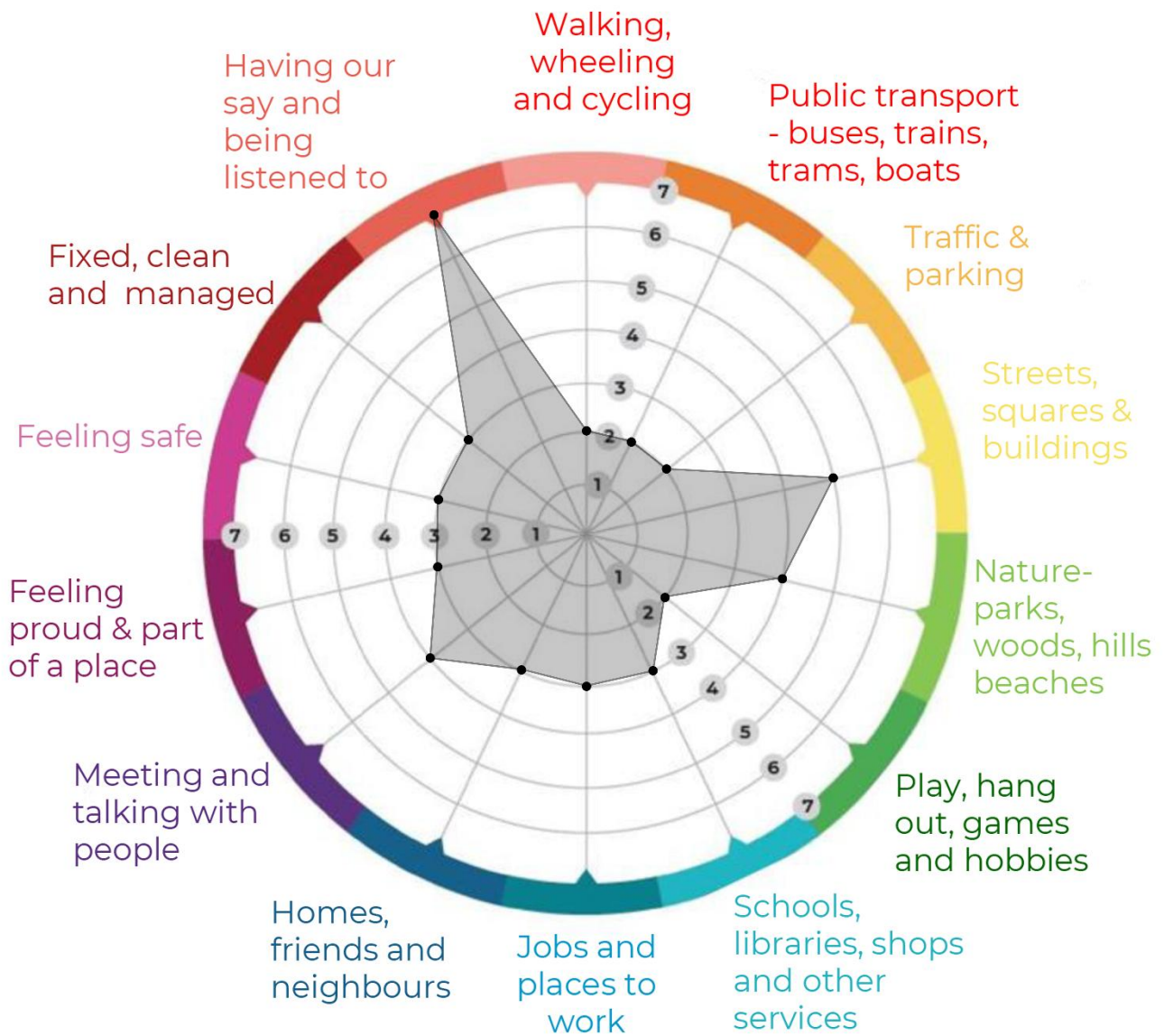


Figure 1 Summary of Young People's Responses to the 14 Place Standard Tool Questions. A visual breakdown highlighting key themes and priorities identified through youth engagement.



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	2
Nature: Parks, woods, hills, beaches	4
Streets, squares and buildings	5
Walking, wheeling and cycling	2
Public Transport – Buses, trains, trams, boats	2
Traffic and parking	2
Having our say and being listened to	7
Fixed, clean and managed	3
Feeling safe	3
Feeling proud and a part of my place	3
Schools, libraries, shops and other services	4
Jobs and places to work	3
Homes, friends and neighbours	3
Meeting and talking with people	3