

# Nethy Bridge and Vicinity Community Council

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26th February '18

## Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan Main Issues Report

Having discussed the proposals for the Local Development Plan here are our views.

### Main Issues 1 - Development Strategy.

We agree that the current overarching development strategy is maintained, however we feel that there is too much emphasis being put on development within the National Park with large housing schemes and sites for industry being actively sought. The Cairngorms were never a place of large industry, the main industries being farming, forestry and since Victorian times, the industry of Tourism. We feel that this should remain.

It would therefore be sensible to maintain most of the development in the communities mentioned i.e. Grantown, Aviemore, Kingussie, Newtonmore and Ballater.

### Main Issues 2 - Designing Great Places.

Agree that developments should be designed to the highest standards to fit with the natural environment within the park. However it is one thing asking a developer who is setting out to make a profit from their development to undertake expensive design exercises and it is another problem completely asking the same conditions of a local family who are wanting to build their family home. Building a house is expensive enough without adding in other expenses. More help should be given to these people as individual families in family homes are the future of the park and our communities as opposed to the serried ranks of holiday homes.

### Main Issues 3 - Impacts of A9.

Caution should be exercised by the park in allocating business development land as this is something which we have never had within the area and would therefore change the character of the area. If a business comes forward wanting to develop in the area it should be looked at in its own arena. Several of our villages have saw mills as their industry and this fits well in the area but there are many industries which would be completely at odds with the aims and aspirations of the vast majority of park dwellers.

While it would seem sensible to support villages bypassed by the new A9 we are back to a situation which developed during the construction of the current road. These villages were bypassed nearly forty years ago and have since by and large thrived with many small businesses and a much safer roads environment. Therefore we would suggest that a watching brief is kept and support given where necessary as opposed to blanket development. Also it should be noted that these communities are already bypassed and have built up a strong community, this would also be damaged by over development.

There should be no development available directly from the A9, which has been a tried and tested model over many years. If development is permitted directly from the A9 this will have a major detrimental affect on the bypassed communities and their businesses.

#### Main Issues 4 - Housing.

The housing allocation for the National Park we believe is too high for such an area especially given the reports own projection of population decline of 4% but an increase in the number of households within the park in the coming years. The main problem with housing within the park is not necessarily the lack of housing but the lack of 'affordable' housing. We do not mean 'affordable' as in social housing but housing which is affordable to buy or rent. Holiday homes and large houses for holiday rental are acting like 'cuckoos in a nest' as they are forcing out the local inhabitants in this case by pricing local people out of the market. Local people are being priced completely out of the housing market and then there is a call for more housing at the lower end of the market. Affordable housing can be designed to a very high standard and doesn't need to look 'cheap'.

We take note that the overall developed area of the park is very small compared to the overall park area, however so much building, especially speculative building, is going to ruin the very nature of the areas towns and villages.

More should be done by the planning authorities with the support of National and local government to limit the number of speculative houses built in the area as they will always be filled by people wanting to come to live in the area. This we feel would slow the market for this type of house, reduce prices and therefore help local people and those coming to jobs to find or build a home. While we do not accord with the suggestions from an English National Park of huge increases in Council Tax for second homes something must be done to redress the balance. Housing 'need' and housing 'want' are two entirely separate entities and there is a danger that they are being grouped together.

We would also like to see the general Presumption in Favour of a tourism related planning application removed and each proposal justified along with all other applications.

We have seen in our own village properties being built as 'tourist accommodation' benefitting from this Presumption in Favour and then within a couple of years the property being sold on the open market and thus circumventing local opposition.

#### Main Issues 5 - Affordability of Housing

This is one of the main problems faced by people within the park, the affordability of housing.

While it might seem reasonable to increase the quota of affordable homes in certain villages this could push these developments to the other villages, this would also work against the proposals to concentrate development in Ballater and Aviemore among others. It is felt that 45% is too much while 35% might be acceptable, however this will probably just push up the costs of the open market housing and as a consequence make it more exclusive as developers will still want to have their profit margin.

The costs of building a house are high enough for people building their own home therefore we feel that 'red tape' should be kept to a minimum while at the same time remaining focused and pertinent. We would also like to see the need for individual home builders (ie. non commercial) to be exempt for paying anything towards affordable housing. Making self builders pay towards affordable homes makes their own homes less affordable and as a result the design will have to be reduced and therefore work against the aims of having good sustainable housing.

We would certainly agree that there should be as much of a mix of housing types and sizes within a development as possible.

#### Main Issues 6 - Economic Development

We agree that there should be a limited number of sites identified for possible economic development but these should be within areas already with such developments, i.e. Grantown Industrial Estate, Dalfaber and Newtonmore. Such developments in villages will ruin their current

character. However any developments must fit in with the local area and not become a blot on the landscape.

#### Main Issues 7 - Natura Designations

It is felt that the plan should take greater cognisance of the natural environment and not just capercaillie. This comes back to the number of houses being built in the area and also the design of developments. Developments should be designed to take all of these considerations in to account. While it is not necessarily in the Parks remit it is felt that there should be a general refusal of allowing afforestation on perfectly good arable land. By planting farm fields this reduces the landscape diversity.

#### Main Issues 8 - Planning Obligations

We would agree that there needs to be a revision of the Planning Obligations policy. However it should be noted that individual house builders (self builders) cannot afford a huge increase in their costs or their homes become 'unaffordable' and works against the aims of the park and would therefore be counter productive. Large commercial developments should certainly be paying for the required facilities and this cost will just be passed on to the house buyer.

#### Main Issues - 9 Flood Risk

With the current concerns with climate change it is imperative that new developments are designed with flood alleviation as a central theme. It is imperative that flood defences are also considered for current park villages to protect them from the prospect of river flooding and overtopping.

#### Main Issues 10 - Land Management

We would agree that there be a presumption against new hill roads, we would also like to see any new forestry plantations conforming more to the natural landscape with no boundary straight lines, no plantations stopping abruptly on hilltops and use seedlings from a local provenance. No Norway or Sitka Spruce plantations. We would repeat that we are against afforestation of previously cultivated arable land.

## Nethy Bridge

The issues affecting Nethy Bridge are broadly correct although there has in the past been minimal demand for small business units in the village. One of the main issues affecting the community and which would have a devastating affect on the village is the concerns of flooding coming down the River Nethy. As a Community Council we are currently addressing this through our Emergency Plan and Highland Council. The Thomas Telford bridge in the centre of the village as designed and built can take a 1:200 year flood, however as it currently stands can only take a 1:50 flood. These are figures from the Flood Prevention officers of Highland Council. We are looking to get the silt and gravels removed from at least the main span to increase its capacity and therefore reduce the risk of flooding and damage to the bridge which is the main signature of the village.

We would agree that housing has to meet local needs over that of holiday and tourism markets otherwise local people working in the area cannot afford a home.

It is felt that the site H1 could be sympathetically developed and could provide space for a mix of housing styles to suit the local market with some plots being sold to self builders to build their own homes. We are also aware that the goods yard at the former railway station has been a site proposed for development in the past and would also provide space for a number of well designed homes.

In a village like Nethy Bridge it is imperative that open space is preserved. Villages like ours depend on open space within their boundaries otherwise they take on an urban feel.

Largely in favour of the current village boundary with small adjustments on the Lettoch Road.

Against all development in areas THC037, THC017, THC052 and THC 060.



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