



WORKSHOP REPORT

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK PLAN – BUILT ENVIRONMENT & CULTURAL HERITAGE ASPECTS CONSULTATION WORKSHOP

INTRODUCTION

This workshop took place on Tuesday 2nd May 2006 in Edinburgh and was attended by thirteen participants from various organisations within the built environment sector. Robin Turner, Head of Archaeology at the National Trust for Scotland and Vice-Chair of BEFS, introduced the workshop.

The purpose of the workshop was to raise awareness of the content of the draft Cairngorms National Park Plan and to examine relevant issues within the Plan for the built environment – including cultural heritage aspects. National Parks operate with a national perspective and although the drivers for the establishment of national parks were ‘natural’ environment oriented, the cultural heritage is a main strand of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000.

Participating organisations were encouraged to make their own responses to the Park Plan – the deadline for response to the consultation documents is 30th June 2006.

PRESENTATION

Hamish Trench, Park Plan Officer at the Cairngorms National Park Authority, gave an outline of the Park Plan documents. Key points were made as follows:

The consultation is running from 11th April to 30th June 2006. On 30th May there will be another workshop on cultural heritage aspects at the Lecht Ski Centre for more locally based interests, and on 6th June there is a meeting arranged with Scottish Environment LINK. The key intention behind the public consultation is to learn whether the Plan is broadly going in the right direction; whether the vision and objectives are correct, views on the priorities and also gaps. The aim is to submit the final Park Plan to Ministers by the end of 2006.

The Park Plan comprises two documents; the long-term vision ‘Looking to 2030’; and ‘Priorities for Action in 2007-2012’ which begins to prioritise activities. There is also a summary report ‘Viewpoint to the Future’; the ‘State of the Park Report 2006’; and the ‘Strategic Environment Assessment - Environmental Report’.

Three broad themes for the Park are set out in ‘Looking to 2030’:

- Conserving Enhancing and Managing the Park
- Communities Living and Working in the Park
- Understanding and Enjoying the Park

The activities set out in ‘Priorities for Action 2007-2012’ comprise an initial programme which will be subject to further development based on the consultation process. It is hoped, through

consultation, to achieve a more focussed document with clear actions identifying what will be different in five years time, how and with whose input.

Questions

The status of the plan: the National Parks (Scotland) Act states that all public bodies must have regard to the National Park Plan. The emphasis is to develop a partnership approach for the area where agencies work together for the Park. With regard to development control, the Park Authority screens, and can call in, planning applications. The Park Plan provides strategic direction and context for the Local Plan which is being developed at the same time.

Audit of the Historic Environment: this is identified in the 'Priorities for Action' document and will take place over the next 4-5months. It was observed that information on the Historic Environment will be subject to greater gaps than information held on the natural environment.

OPEN DISCUSSION

The workshop moved into an open discussion: Rita Callander, Cultural Heritage Policy Officer at the Cairngorms National Park Authority, presented some questions to the meeting:

- Is the vision correct?
- Are the priorities right?
- If they are, what should we collectively want to achieve?
- What is missing/urgent in the 'Priorities for Action' document?

LOOKING TO 2030

Discussions highlighted the following comments:

Managing the Park in a Changing Environment

Increased Conservation emphasis: It was suggested that the guiding principle 'Sustainable Development' (page 20) be amended to 'Conservation' in order to place conservation at the heart of the Plan, over and above development needs.

Housing: Defining housing need in the Park – the relationship with local authority housing targets. It was noted that the need for affordable housing comes largely from younger people and those on low income and that figures are based on current housing waiting lists. The market is influenced by the demand for second homes. The scope for regulation and market intervention is a key challenge for the Park. This issue lies at the nub of sustainable development.

Concern was expressed that there does seem to be potential for drastic change in the Park, particularly in relation to housing and that control is appropriate. Responding to unrestrained need will cause a degeneration in quality – the Park Plan should focus on less on 'responding to need' and more on 'managing demand'.

It was observed that pressure for development in the past was accommodated by planned settlements. Concern was expressed over the design of much new building within the Park area, which is very intrusive. The Cairngorms National Park presents a good opportunity to commit to achieving quality places.

Sustainable design: re-use of existing buildings is as relevant an aim as the sustainable design of new buildings.

Economic Pressures: the Park will generate its own economic pressures which the Plan should be mindful of. The capacity of the Park to supply sufficient water within the Park was highlighted. Good design will help cut water use in each household by 40%.

Understanding of the core values of the Park: In order to manage change it is imperative that we understand what is special; what is valued about the Park. A deep and broad understanding of the heritage assets of the Park must be expanded upon in the Plan. This provides the context for decision-making on managing change in the Park area in an informed way. The Park Plan should convey an aspiration to acquiring the best possible knowledge and understanding of the values associated with the Park.

The Audit of the Park's Historic Environment will have a significant role in co-ordinating information on the cultural heritage within the Park.

Conserving and Enhancing and Managing the Park

5.5 – Conserving and Enhancing the Cultural Heritage

Strategic Objectives:

- a) *Develop a sound knowledge and understanding of the archaeological, historic and built environment resources.*

Participants were in agreement with this objective and commented that change should be managed in accordance with this objective.

- b) *Conserve and enhance the resources of the archaeological, historic and built environment.*

Participants felt that this does not go as far as the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Plan. It was observed that there are potential conflicts in sourcing materials locally within the Park (eg landscape impact in quarrying of sand and gravel and potential impact on archaeological monuments hitherto unrecorded). Kit housing is likely to be an option, with use of construction timber grown in the Highlands. The key issue will be the design, and local sourcing of expertise. There could be significant benefits in terms of local employment.

Any deconstruction of existing buildings within the area should enable re-use of local materials – this would reduce transport and waste implications and landfill costs. It was highlighted that ruins do have enjoyment value and that dykes have a key impact in cultural landscapes.

- c) *Promote awareness and interpretation of the value of the archaeological, historic and built environment.*

This needs to cover the evolution of the park; its economy and landscape.

- d) *New development and management of public space in settlements should complement and enhance the character, pattern and local identity of the built and historic environment.*

Participants felt that this element needs further teasing out. Sustainable Development should be related at different levels – planning, management, design – through the Park Plan, Local Plan, Sustainable Development Guidance, Settlement Statements.

Best Practice: The Park presents an opportunity to pioneer good practice.

Accommodating values: The timing is particularly good as the UK Government has recently signed up to the European Landscape Convention, which places much emphasis on public participation. Different people value and perceive the Park in different ways: eg for its wild landscape, for its regenerated pinewoods. The Park Plan should accommodate these differing perspectives and avoid following the approach established in English National Parks which are managed in a particular way. There should be local and national community involvement over what we would like to see happen to the landscape within the Park in the next five years.

Cultural heritage aspects within the Plan: Cultural heritage elements should be referred to under other topic areas to help cross reference relevance between topics – for example the cultural heritage aspects relating to deer management, forestry etc. There is a danger in the Plan of compartmentalising different topics – topics should be covered separately but the interrelationships highlighted as well to give a stronger ‘flavour’ for the Park. It was observed that the Environmental Report provides a matrix which helps to relate issues to each other. The challenge will be giving the document cohesion. It may be that relationships could be built in through diagrams and use of case studies.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION 2007-2012

The following comments and issues were raised in respect of the priorities for action:

Enhancing the Park’s Landscapes

Meaning of enhancement: Enhancing the landscape must take place only on an informed basis, and take into consideration the continuum of the Historic Environment over time. Enhancement need not mean ‘addition’ – it can involve removing detractors. The restoration of hill tracks could significantly improve the landscape. Drove roads were identified as an example of linear features within the landscape that have cultural heritage value.

Road side interventions: In addition the Park Plan offers a chance to establish good practice in small scale interventions, such as developing scenic routes of high quality in terms of roadside features and also management of road side screening (which can inappropriately screen out good views).

Historic Landscape Assessment: The Park Authority should take account of existing Historic Landscape Assessment work, for example the Historic Landscape Assessment at the Mar Lodge Estate indicates significant cultural elements of value within the landscape. The Park Plan could advocate the need for targeted landscape management plans, similar to the Property Management Plan for the Mar Lodge Estate which provides a framework for a management rather than ad hoc approach to landscape.

Deer Management: Varying views were held on the relative priority of deer management.

Practice elsewhere: The Park Authority could look to practice in Scandinavia in relation to landscape management.

Linkages with other management initiatives: Clarity was sought on how landscape management would be related to Local Authority initiatives at the sub Park level.

Key partners: The key partners under this theme should include Local Authorities, Historic Scotland (HS), the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) and other Land Managers.

Improving the Quality and Sustainability of Design

Scope of Design Guidance: It was stressed that design guidance should go beyond housing to include road engineering, street lighting, and area based approaches. Requirements/expectations placed on other authorities (Local Authorities, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency etc) must be clearly defined, to ensure that this element of the Park Plan will be binding.

The Park Plan needs to define more clearly what is required of a Sustainable Development Guide – taking into account how it will be used and how it will gel with Sustainable Design Guidance prepared by Local Authorities. Again Local Authorities are key partners. In order to make the guidance binding there would be a need to prioritise. In order to make the Guidance useful it would need to stretch requirements over and above the base line requirements under

building regulations but be realistic so as to be achievable. The Park Plan offers a strong opportunity to unify and develop best practice.

Design Skills within the Cairngorms Park Authority: The Park Authority was encouraged to engage broadly over the development of design guidance given the limited capacity in-house.

Village Design Statements: These would provide a useful mechanism to adopt in the Park. The Village Design Statement prepared for Tarland would provide useful lessons particularly as there was a high level of public participation and buy-in to the approach. There has however not been any follow-up.

Strengthen links between Design, Civic Pride, Community Planning: There is much scope here to engage local residents in developing a sense of pride by identifying the particular features and details that enhance the character of buildings within the area. There is much local interest and knowledge that can be brought into the process of public engagement. The Plan could do more to cross reference this element on design guidance to communities. There is a resourcing implication here as this will require the Park Authority to find out what communities value, and help identify and present features of significance.

Understanding the Special Natural and Cultural Qualities

Qualitative evaluation: Reference was made to the UNESCO Convention on the intangible cultural heritage. The emotional response that the landscape evokes is hugely varied, and the Park Plan should ensure that work is carried out to help develop the range of understanding of what the landscape in the Park means to people.

It was noted that the HLF is currently initiating research into qualitative values, and that 'landscape' is a current priority for the Arts & Humanities Research Council. It is likely that Aberdeen University and the McCauley Institute will hold research information in this area. Mind mapping was identified as a useful tool for gathering information on values and also for presenting interrelated data.

Qualitative evaluation of special qualities associated with the Park should come through strongly as a theme within the Park Plan. Intangible qualities are easy to omit because they are harder to identify and are fragile. They must be sufficiently accommodated within the Park Plan.

Historic Environment Record: A Historic Environment Record for the Park was considered to be a fundamental requirement.

Listed Building Survey for the Park: the Park Authority was urged to engage with Historic Scotland and the RCAHMS. Both organisations hold, and are collecting on an ongoing basis, key information on Historic Environment assets within the Park area. The RCAHMS is currently undertaking an Audit of the evolution of the landscape within the area.

Area based significance: Clusters of buildings within the landscape were mentioned as being a significant part of the landscape and that the Park Plan might endorse or facilitate the designation of conservation areas within the rural setting to afford some protection to these assets. Culloden battlefield was referred to as an area of significant cultural interest, within a rural context and designated as a 'Rural Conservation Area'.

Land Management Contracts (LMCs): it was noted that LMCs have too little financial support and that they currently only cover agricultural land. Much land is not covered and the Park Plan should encourage best practice in this area – particularly in relation to forestry and moorland which is not covered under agri-environment LMCs.

Document structure: It was noted that the list of activities under this section mixes together products, processes, explicit actions and more strategic objectives. It was noted by way of

response that the Park Authority anticipates the Plan in general to become more focussed. Explicit outcomes will be monitored against targets.

Key partners: It was noted that the professional institutes should be included as key partners in implementing the Park Plan.

SUMMARY

Key themes and issues arising were as follows:

- Guiding principles – emphasis on conservation within broader sustainable development
- Housing – Need and Capacity – represents a major challenge for the Park Plan
- Special Qualities – Emphasis on Understanding and making links with Community
- Significance of European Landscape Convention and emphasis on public participation
- Relationships between Park Plan/Local Plan/Design Guidance
- Park as a Place to Pioneer, establish best practice and make well informed decisions
- Emphasis on Place Making within the Park
- The document provides a good basis on which to develop greater focus and ensure that cultural heritage and sustainable design aspects are fully integrated into the Park Plan.

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Cairngorms National Park Authority

Council for Scottish Archaeology

Institute of Field Archaeologists – Scottish Group

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland

Royal Town Planning Institute in Scotland

Rural Scotland

National Trust for Scotland

Scottish Civic Trust