

CNPA Supplementary Planning Guidance

WILDNESS

July 2011

Planning in the Cairngorms National Park

Planning in the Cairngorms National Park is unique. It involves the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) working alongside the five local authorities which operate in the Park – Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland, Moray and Perth & Kinross.

Due to the expansion of the National Park in October 2010, to take in part of Perth and Kinross, different planning policies apply there.

The following paragraphs set out what planning policies apply in the National Park, and how planning applications will be dealt with.

Planning Policies

The Cairngorms National Park Local Plan, and this Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), cover the Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland and Moray parts of the National Park only. This SPG sets out detailed advice to help you meet the requirements of the policies in the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan. It is recommended that it is read in conjunction with the policies in the Local Plan and other relevant SPG.

The Cairngorms National Park Local Plan and this SPG does not cover the Perth & Kinross area of the Park. The Perth & Kinross Highland Area Local Plan, or the Perth & Kinross Eastern Area Local Plan, and any associated SPG, apply. Please see www.pkc.gov.uk for further information.

The Cairngorms National Park Plan provides the strategic context for the local plan and its policies. It sets out the guiding principles, objectives and priorities for the CNPA and its partners to deliver. The Park Plan is a material planning consideration.

Planning Applications

All Planning applications submitted within the Cairngorms National Park must comply with the relevant Local Plan and SPG (see paragraphs above on planning policies for details).

Planning applications should be submitted to the relevant local authority in the normal manner. The local authority ensures all the necessary information is supplied and registers receipt of the application. The CNPA is informed by the local authority and has 21 days to decide whether to call-in the application. Only applications which are of general significance to the aims of the Park are called-in. The CNPA determines called-in applications. In instances where planning applications are not called-in, the local authority will determine the application.

1.0 Background

This supplementary planning guidance on wildness sets out to provide detailed information to assist applicants to ensure they comply with Policies 2: National Natural Heritage Designations and 6: Landscape in the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan.

These policies set out how aspects of landscape and its particular wildness qualities will be considered when assessing planning applications. The Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment will also be used to assess landscape impacts (see www.cairngorms.co.uk).

2.0 Introduction

The experience of wildness is a core special quality of the Cairngorms National Park. This quality should be protected and enhanced throughout. It's strength varies across the Park.

It is expected that all developments within the National Park will pay due regard to the protection and enhancement of wildness both directly and indirectly

The information on wildness characteristics has been aggregated into three bands of relative wildness from least to most wild. For each band, specific sensitivities and opportunities for mitigation, compensation and enhancement have been identified, and all development proposals will be assessed against these.

For the purposes of this guidance the following definitions are used:

Wildness – The experience felt when in a wild landscape.

This is the experience of being in a landscape and is derived from the combination of four specific attributes. They are attributes: naturalness, ruggedness, remoteness and the lack of modern human artefacts.

Wild land – An area where an individual finds the experience of wildness is particularly strong.

A sense of wildness is key to many people's experience of the Cairngorms National Park. Over a third of visitors to the National Park chose to describe the area as 'a tranquil unspoilt wilderness area, where conservation is the key aim' (1). Each year over 2000 young people from a wide variety of backgrounds complete a John Muir Award in and around the National Park. The main aims of the award are for people to discover, explore and conserve a wild place and then to share those experiences with others. The wild places and the sense of wildness that people seek out in the Cairngorms are important to their experience of the special qualities of this area. They are usually thought of as the great upland areas of the Park however they also often found close to communities in; small areas of natural woodland, meadows, wetlands and lochans.

1. National Park Visitor Survey 2010, sample size 2,500.

3.0 Purpose of this guidance

This guidance sets out how wildness will be taken into account when considering development proposals. It is intended to help in the preparation of applications to ensure that they protect

and enhance wildness within the National Park. This guidance also defines where in the Park the qualities of wildness are most readily experienced. Particular issues are highlighted, for example historic remnants. A methodology summary is set out in Appendix I.

This guidance mainly applies to developments that require a planning application. However for land management activities that do not require planning permission, such as deer fencing or woodland planting, it will be helpful to consider the information here as well.

The wildness map is not a new designation but it shows the varying strength of this special quality across the whole of the national Park.

4.0 The quality of wildness

The components that contribute to the experience of wildness are called the attributes. There are four key ones: perceived naturalness, ruggedness, remoteness and the lack of modern human artefacts. They are described more fully in Appendix I.

These four attributes have each been mapped within the Park by computer modelling techniques. The maps were combined to form a single map of wildness (see Figure I). This is not, however, a map of wild land.

The range of values in Figure I has been grouped in to three broad bands for the purpose of assessing the impacts of development. They approximately correspond to the colours on the map. The browns are generally Band C, Green is generally band A and Band B lies between them. Which band a site is

in is best determined on site by a comparison with the descriptions in table I and location on map I.

Band A has the strongest measure of wildness, Band B the next and Band C the lowest. However, wildness exists in all three areas and therefore an experience of wildness may be found in any of them. Table I describes the nature of the landscape and the particular sensitivities of each Band to development. In addition it highlights particular activities which may be used for mitigation, compensation or enhancement.

A development proposal might lie in one or more of these bands. This will be determined by a comparison of the descriptions in Table I and the landscape observed on site. For example, and new agricultural building may relatively discrete and be in one band. A power line or a pipeline for a hydro electricity scheme may stretch across two.

5.0 The sensitivity of wildness to development

The purpose of the bands is to highlight the particular wildness sensitivities within each one. They are indicative of these sensitivities and not an absolute measurement or an exhaustive list. In general, terms Band A is more sensitive to development than either Band B or Band C because the wildness qualities are stronger and so any change to this landscape may have a proportionately greater effect.

A development may have impacts upon wildness across one, two or all three bands. This will vary according to the type and scale of the development, as

well as its exact location. This is most likely to happen through visual effect. For example, a structure erected within Band B may be visible from Band A and therefore introduce a modern man-made feature. This is likely to reduce the feeling of wildness.

However there are other potential effects. These may include noise from construction traffic or night time lighting. In addition, developments in one band may have servicing requirements within an adjacent one, for example an access track or electricity or water supply. These should all be considered at the pre application planning stage.

6.0 Cumulative and sequential impacts

An individual development may not in itself have any significant effect upon the wildness of an area. However when combined with a number of other developments or existing features the effect is a reduction in the quality of wildness.

All developments will be assessed in relation to other developments in an area both existing and in the process of planning. Developments may be seen together in a single view (cumulative) or individually as a series along a route way (sequentially). The cumulative or sequential effect will be considered.

7.0 Mitigation, Compensation and Enhancement opportunities

Development in more sensitive areas is, by its nature, likely to have a negative effect upon the wildness of an area. It is

important that development should provide onsite mitigation to ensure that the landscape character and wildness is maintained. Compensation will be required to offsite areas where full mitigation cannot be achieved on site.

Enhancement will result in an area being wilder than before. It can be achieved both on and off site and is always desirable.

Examples of mitigation, compensation or enhancement may include the use of natural landforms or tree planting to screen a development from a more sensitive area. It could include the removal of features that are particularly prominent in an area, for example redundant fencing or vehicle tracks. It may also be achieved through the restoration of more natural habitats, either on or off site.

Mitigation in particular can be achieved through good design. Please refer to Section 10: Further guidance, for more sources of information. Mitigation, compensation or enhancement may result in additional natural heritage benefits. (See also Natural Heritage Supplementary Planning Guidance)

It is recommended that for larger or complex developments the services of a specialist are used to help guide the design in relation to impacts on wildness. This may be a chartered landscape architect or other wild land specialist or organisation.

8.0 Historic artefacts

There are many historic features within all landscapes. Even within Band A there are significant features that are left over

from previous generations. Some of these are of recognised historic or cultural value and may be covered by statutory designations or recorded by local authorities. Others have no such recognition but nevertheless have historic or cultural value and are well regarded by local communities.

Such features do not necessarily reduce the experience of wildness, indeed they may enhance it by representing a long-lost use of the land prior to its current state. In these cases removal would not be desirable as it would not be an enhancement.

9.0 Hill tracks

Hill tracks in the Cairngorms have had, over time, a significant and negative effect upon the experience of wildness through their visual impact and the opening up of remote places. However, it is necessary to balance the reasonable requirements of working land management to those of recreational and conservation interests. In some areas the wildness qualities are so sensitive that alternatives to constructing new tracks should always be considered.

In general, if a new track is required, or repair of an existing one, then following good guidance (for example *Constructed Tracks in the Scottish Uplands*, SNH, 2005) should result in an acceptable solution. This publication also gives a fuller description of the need for consent and licensing. It is available as a free download from the SNH website listed below.

It is always advisable to speak to the local planning authority which can assist in the interpretation of the planning regulations and advise when a track or repair needs planning permission or other consent. This will give reassurance that proposed works will comply with regulations and potentially save time and expense later on.

Hill Tracks and planning permission

Not all track developments require planning consent as some are exempt through the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO). Within a National Scenic Area (NSA) any new track will require planning permission because the exemptions of the GPDO do not apply.

Elsewhere in the National Park planning permission is not required if the new track is for either agricultural or forestry purposes. A planning authority may seek such justification if there is any doubt. Tracks for field sport activity and other land management reasons either wholly or shared with agricultural or forestry purposes also require planning permission.

There are also requirements that planning authorities should be notified of certain works in Natura and SSSI sites regardless of permitted development rights, this can often apply to tracks.

Routine maintenance of tracks does not usually require planning permission. For example: localised repairs of drainage channels, filling in of potholes or minor

resurfacing. However where there is rebuilding using excavation, new drainage works or realignment of the track route these may require planning permission.

In cases where a track is severely damaged or completely removed by flooding contact your planning authority immediately.

www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/

www.jmt.org.uk

www.nts.org.uk

10.0 Further guidance

If you are planning a development and are not sure how it might affect the wildness of an area, please contact your local planning authority or the CNPA. It is also recommended that the following sources of planning advice are read in conjunction with this guidance.

The Scottish Government Planning Guidance, including the policy reference to wild land, is available from the Scottish Government website:

www.scotland.gov.uk

The Cairngorms Landscape Character Assessment, Local Plan and National Park Plan are available on the CNPA website. In addition, other Supplementary Planning Guidance can be found on a number of topics, including Sustainable Design and Natural Heritage:

www.cairngorms.co.uk

The wild land policy statements for the John Muir Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage and the National Trust for Scotland are available from their websites:

(1) Please note the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan and this SPG does not apply to the Perth & Kinross part of the Park

Table I Wildness band descriptions

Band	Area description	Development Sensitivities	Opportunities for mitigation, compensation or enhancement,
Band A (High Value)	<p>High quality wildness areas where the landscape is perceived as natural and ecological processes are prevalent. Some areas are still managed, however it is extensive and low impact. Man-made features are likely to be absent, historic or redundant. Domestic animals are generally absent.</p> <p>At night there will be no or very distant light sources or dim light pollution glow.</p>	<p>Any form of development is likely to reduce the quality and character of the landscape and the wild experience it offers. This will include items such as: Hill tracks, fencing, telecom masts, wind turbines, artificially impounded water, plantation forestry, pylons, pole lines and signage.</p> <p>Buildings and other such structures would also be inappropriate. Activity arising from development such as vehicle traffic, noise and lighting could also be significant. These may be from inside or outwith the CNP.</p> <p>Hill tracks can often represent the most visually prominent man-made feature. New tracks within this area should be avoided and the impacts of existing ones should be removed completely or reduced through remedial works.</p>	<p>If man- made features exist, consideration should be given to their removal as mitigation for development elsewhere. Redundant features should be removed, other than historical artefacts.</p> <p>Land management should be very light touch and emphasise natural processes. Restoration of natural vegetation and habitats should be a high priority.</p>
Band B (Medium Value)	<p>These areas have a largely natural feel with infrequent man-made features. Significant built structures are unlikely to be present. Management for sporting interest is common and woodland plantations are likely as well as rough grazing.</p>	<p>Features likely to most significantly impact upon wildness include: built structures, buildings, barns, and storage facilities, as well as pylons, pole lines, telecom masts, wind turbines, large dams, hill tracks and plantation forestry.</p>	<p>Existing non essential features should be removed if possible or repaired and redesigned to reduce their visual impact. Redundant features should be removed if they</p>

		Any development here should consequently seek to enhance the essentially natural qualities through discreet design and enhancements to the natural vegetation. They must be of appropriate scale and due regard given to visual impacts and access directly and indirectly to Band A.	have a significant visual impact. Restoration of natural vegetation and habitats should be encouraged. Woodland and plantation forestry should be sympathetically designed and follow best practice.
Band C (Low Value)	The band includes agricultural land with improved and rough grazing as well as woodlands and conifer plantations. Management is highly evident. This band also includes transport corridors, quarries and other well developed areas. Land management is more active and may be highly evident. Some areas of high perceived naturalness are within this band because of their proximity to roads, well used tracks and/or other built features. They may be relatively small and localised.	Well designed development that is of an appropriate scale and finish that compliments the landscape character of the area is unlikely to reduce wildness. Regard should be given to small scale and localised wildness areas where appropriate.	The priority in this band is to reduce the impacts upon band A and B from existing features. This could be done for example through woodland planting, a reduction in bright lighting or redesigning parts of buildings.

¹ Non-essential features – these may be infrastructure and equipment such as pylons, wooden poles or sheds not longer in use. It does not include historic or culturally sensitive structures.

Note on Settlements

For the purpose of planning settlements are not included in any band as they are not generally regarded as having significant wildness (other than possibly small and localised areas). However they all have views to areas of significant wildness and also development within them can affect the wildness of areas outwith. Consequently such impacts may be considered during the assessment of planning proposals.

Appendix I

Wildness mapping summary

The CNPA and SNH jointly commissioned a study on the relative wildness across the Park in 2006 from the University of Leeds. This was updated in 2010 to fit within the new Park boundary and utilise up to date information. The study looked at the four key attributes of the experience of wildness:

- perceived naturalness
- ruggedness
- remoteness
- absence of modern human artefacts

Each of these was mapped digitally from a variety of data sources. The four maps were then combined into one map showing the relative strength of the wildness across the whole of the Park. In each case the attributes were mapped from measures that serve as proxies for the attribute or were a direct measure.

Perceived naturalness was mapped by rating habitat types according to how natural it would appear to a non expert rather than by their ecological value or condition.

Ruggedness was measured by scoring the altitude, aspect and steepness of the landform. Combined they give a general impression of how difficult it is to travel across the area.

Remoteness was mapped by estimating the time taken to get to a point from the nearest public road or track. The rate of travel was a combination of walking speed and cycle speeds according to the gradient. Account was taken of physical barriers such as water bodies but reflecting the lower summer water level of rivers at fords.

Absence of modern human artefacts was a direct measure of how many modern artefacts were visible from any point. The effect of distance from the feature was allowed for so that less weight was given to

those furthest away from the view point. Plantation forests, as well as built features, were included. The area sampled included features up to 15km away from the Park boundary (or 30km in the case of wind turbines).

All four attribute maps were 'normalised', i.e. the scale used for each was made compatible and then they were combined to produce a wildness map.

This map (Figure 1) shows a range of scores of increasing relative wildness. This scale is specific to the Cairngorms National Park and is not a Scotland-wide range of scores. Consequently an area that appears to be low for the Park may in fact be relatively high if compared to a country wide map.