



Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2017 – 2022

ISSUES REPORT



June 2016

COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND EMPOWERMENT ISSUES REPORT

I. POLICY CONTEXT

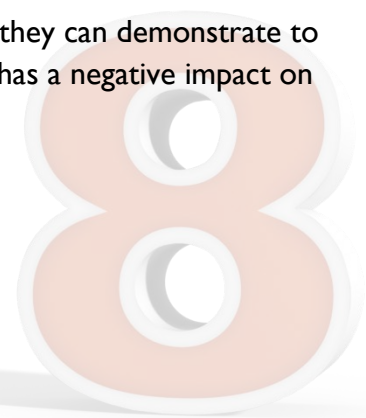
There are two current developments in national policy that are particularly significant in terms of the community capacity and empowerment agenda. These are the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016.

The **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015** is the result of a series of national consultations and reviews (including the 2010 Christie Commission). The stated aims of the Act are to:

- empower community bodies through the ownership of land and buildings and strengthening their voices in the decisions that matter to them; and
- support an increase in the pace and scale of public service reform by cementing the focus on achieving outcomes and improving the process of community planning.

The key provisions within the Act relating to community empowerment include:-

- **Strengthening Community Planning:** greater focus on tackling inequality, improved resourcing of community engagement; and a requirement to improve public sector collaboration, involving a broader range of agencies (including National Park Authorities);
- **Participation Requests:** a provision which allows community groups to participate in a process designed to improve the delivery of a strategic outcome. There is a presumption in favour of the request being granted and this provision applies to a significant number of public agencies (including National Park Authorities);
- **Asset Transfer Requests:** a provision allowing appropriately constituted community groups to request the transfer of a public asset to their use, management or ownership. This provision applies to a significant number of public agencies (including National Park Authorities); and
- **Right-to-Buy:** the community right to buy is extended to all communities and a new provision allows communities to purchase land where they can demonstrate to Scottish Ministers that it is abandoned or neglected and or has a negative impact on their environmental quality of life.



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The additional provisions for the community right-to-buy are further supported by the **Land Reform (Scotland) Act**. This Act seeks to increase the contribution of Scotland's land to sustainable economic growth; empower greater numbers of people; and change patterns of ownership in Scotland to ensure greater sustainable development. The aims of the Act are to:

- ensure the development of an effective system of land governance and on-going commitment to land reform in Scotland;
- address barriers to furthering sustainable development in relation to land and improve the transparency and accountability of land ownership; and
- demonstrate commitment to effectively manage land and rights in land for the common good, through modernising and improving specific aspects of land ownership and rights over land.

Within the Act there is one main provision that will directly impact on community empowerment. This proposed provision will allow communities to purchase land where they can demonstrate to Scottish Ministers that a transfer will provide significant benefit to the community; prevent significant harm; further sustainable development; and is the only practicable way of achieving the stated benefit.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act may have significant and long-term impacts on communities within the Cairngorms National Park, as they are given additional rights to influence decisions which affect them; take control of assets; and become more involved in the planning and delivery of public services. Developments of this nature have the potential to have a direct or indirect impact on the stated aims of the National Park (particularly Aim 4 “to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area’s communities”) and it will be important to consider this in the development of the next National Park Partnership Plan.

The Cairngorms National Park covers a large rural area of Scotland, including a number of proactive communities with a history of successful community-led local development. These communities are unique, but often have shared issues, challenges and opportunities. In addition, these communities can be isolated and some distance from the main service centres, across parts of five local authority and Community Planning Partnership areas. It will be important to reflect on these different contexts in the development of the next National Park Partnership Plan.

The new Land Reform Act has the potential to have very significant impacts on the aims of the National Park, particularly those focusing on natural heritage and natural resources. The Bill also has implications for Aim 4, especially as it provides further provision for communities to purchase land and associated assets in order to further sustainable

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development. To date no community in the Cairngorms National Park has purchased land through the community right-to-buy; however it will be necessary to consider the potential implications when developing the next National Park Partnership Plan.

2. OTHER DRIVERS OF CHANGE

In relation to the national policy context outlined previously and the Scottish Government's drive for community empowerment, the local context within the National Park area requires consideration.

The Cairngorms National Park is the only area of Scotland which has its own LEADER Programme, i.e. the area covered by the programme is not wholly tied to local authority boundaries. The aim of LEADER is to increase the capacity of local rural communities and businesses; to build knowledge and skills; and encourage innovation and co-operation in order to tackle local issues. These local issues are set out as themes within a Local Development Strategy, against which applications for funding will be assessed. The identified themes for the **Cairngorms LEADER Local Development Strategy** are:

Theme 1: Build community capacity to facilitate and support local development through partnership working;

Theme 2: Grow the economy of the National Park but strengthening existing business sectors, supporting business start-ups and diversification, and increasing the number of workers employed in the National Park;

Theme 3: Attract, support and retain young people in the National Park;

Theme 4: Improve transport, connectivity and service provision;

Theme 5: Protection and enhancement of the National Park landscape, wildlife and local heritage; and

Theme 6: Excellence in sustainable tourism and recreation to enhance enjoyment of residents and visitors.

These themes highlight the key challenges and opportunities for communities of place and of interest within the National Park and should be considered as the strategy for community development and empowerment across the area. Arguably all of the identified themes are relevant to the community empowerment agenda, as communities will be encouraged to deliver projects to meet combinations of all of the themes. However, of particular importance will be Theme 1. Each of these Themes have a series of 15 identified outcomes, which should be considered closely when developing the next National Park Partnership Plan, as it will be important to ensure consistency of priorities and outcomes for community capacity and empowerment across both strategies. Key to delivering these outcomes will be

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volunteer efforts to ensure the right support structures are in place to help develop these strategies.

In December 2014, CNPA agreed a new approach to facilitate community empowerment in the National Park. Historically, CNPA had invested (along with partners) in a series of community development projects designed to build community capacity, identify community priorities and support project delivery. Due to budgetary pressures in CNPA and among partners, the Park Authority has adopted a new approach, resulting in the establishment of a grant offer with suitable third sector organisations to undertake the following activity:

1. provide capacity building support to community organisations, in terms of governance, finance, and building partnerships;
2. undertake the organisation, facilitation, and administration of specific community consultation exercises, with the objective of ensuring that communities take ownership of, and are actively involved in the process;
3. provide a key local contact with the community, providing an ongoing community engagement and information sharing role and promoting understanding of the role of CNPA and its work;
4. facilitate the process of Community Action Planning (including reviews) in National Park communities and promote links with relevant strategies such as the National Park Partnership Plan, Cairngorms LEADER, Cairngorms Nature, and Active Cairngorms;
5. support appropriate community organisations to become increasingly sustainable through income generation; and,
6. raise awareness of the Cairngorms National Park brand and brand values with community organisations and projects.

These offers are in place for three years from 2015/16 (subject to annual budget availability) and are supplemented by an annual agreement, which includes specific targets and deliverables for that period.

In addition to this, CNPA has agreed an amended approach to community engagement. For small-scale and singular engagement activities, a simple **Pro-Forma** has been agreed, which provides guidance and advice on how to ensure that the engagement meets good practice. For more strategic and long-term engagement activities, CNPA has agreed to use an on-line tool called **VOiCE (Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement)** as recommended by Scottish Government and Audit Scotland. Both systems are based on the **National Standards for Community Engagement**, which are identified as good practice principles.

As part of the **community planning** requirements as laid out in the **Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003**, each of the five local authority areas that cover the National Park have established Community Planning Partnerships, which seek to bring together the key public and third sector agencies to ensure collaboration and joint planning of services. At a

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local level, Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership has established a series of Local Community Planning Groups. The Marr Local Community Planning Group covers the area of Aberdeenshire within the National Park (and a significant area outwith the National Park) and has produced a **Local Community Plan** outlining the key service and community priorities for this area. This process is likely to be replicated in the other areas of the National Park, as one of the requirements under the strengthening community planning provisions of the Empowerment Act requires the production of Locality Plans for identified geographic areas. It will be important to ensure that the National Park context is reflected in these plans as and when they are produced and that there is consistency (where applicable) in terms of outcomes across these Locality Plans and the National Park Partnership Plan.

3. TRENDS

Lacking quantitative and statistical information, it is difficult to identify trends in community capacity and empowerment. However, it is clear that the political direction is for public agencies to facilitate greater community control of decisions which affect them and of assets which can be used to improve quality of life. On balance it is reasonable to state that communities in the Cairngorms National Park are comparatively active, with good capacity and a strong support network in place. This suggests that although some communities are in a stronger position than others, all should have sufficient capacity and opportunity to take advantage of the provisions within the Empowerment Act, should they wish to do so.

In late 2016, CNPA will be leading a project designed to improve the statistical base for community capacity and development. This will involve piloting the use of the Building Stronger Communities Framework in four areas of the National Park. If successful, it is anticipated that this process will be rolled out across the National Park, thereby producing baseline information to inform future strategic planning.

4. RELEVANT DATA

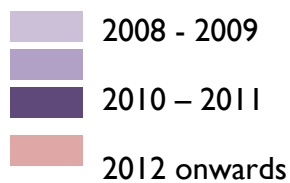
Community capacity and empowerment is a very subjective area as there is often reliance on anecdotal or qualitative information. As a result it is difficult to say that a community has “strong” capacity or is “more empowered” than another. However, there are some factors worth considering.

A key part of community capacity and empowerment is having a consolidated plan, setting out a community’s priorities and how it intends to get there. These plans are typically called **Community Action Plans** and CNPA has invested in the development of these plans (based on community council / association areas) across the National Park since 2008. Although it is very difficult to compare different communities against each other, it is reasonable to suggest that if a community has a more up-to-date action plan, or has recently

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reviewed its action plan, then it is likely to be a more active and empowered community, with good capacity. As of June 2016 all bar three community council / association areas in the National Park have a Community Action Plan (see Figure 1), although some are more current than others. The NPPP needs to encourage and support the regular review of Community Action Plans.

When most recent Community Action Plan was produced:



Spatial Priority Areas: Tomintoul & Glenlivet (I)

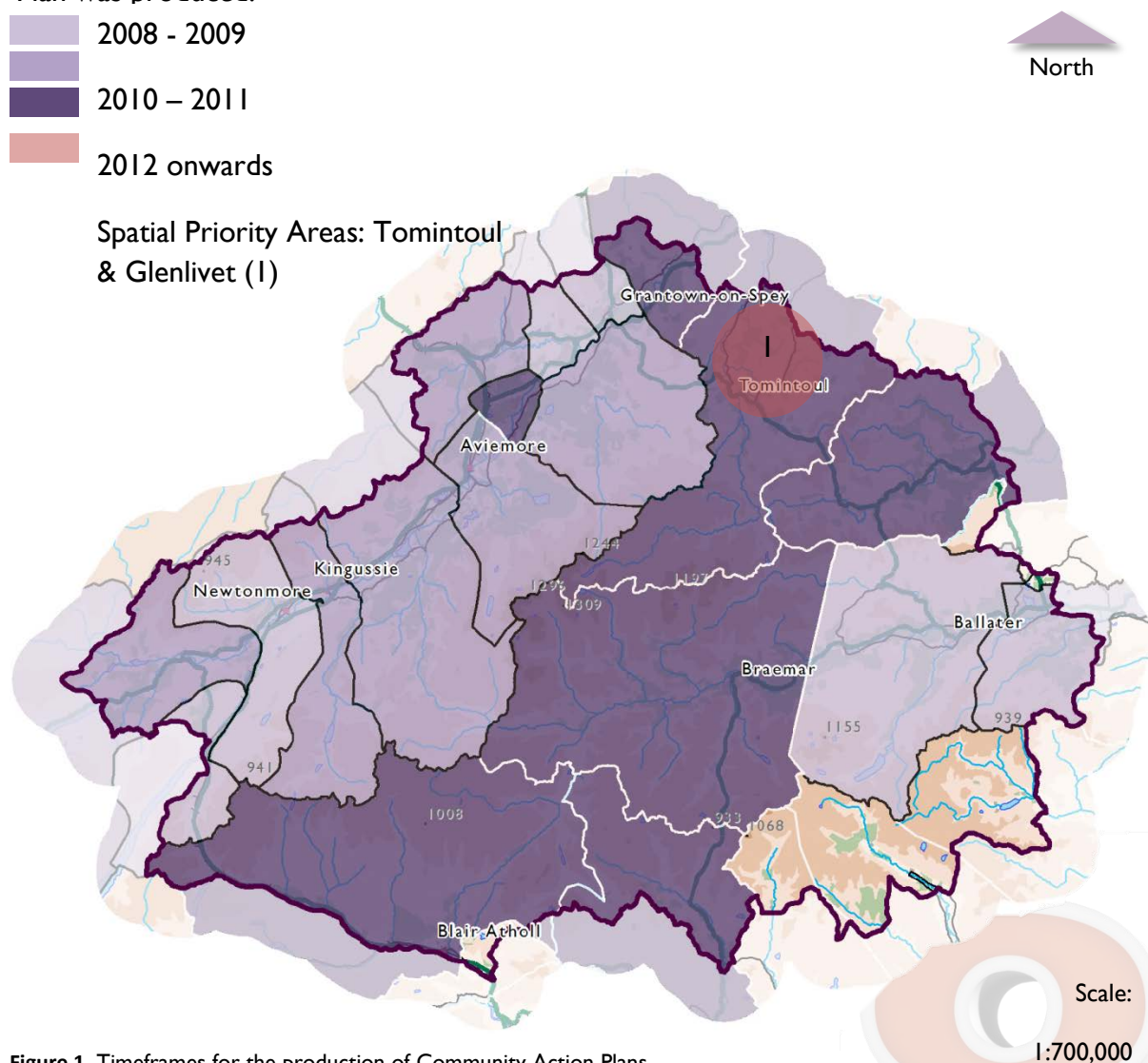


Figure 1 Timeframes for the production of Community Action Plans

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The Tomintoul and Glenlivet area was identified as a spatial priority in the previous NPPP, as a result of a number of socio-economic issues. This led to the development of a

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Regeneration Strategy for the area, which has a number of priority actions. Two of the key priorities were the establishment of a Development Trust, which is now operating very successfully; and the implementation of a Landscape Partnership Project, which submitted its final application to the Heritage Lottery Fund in May 2016 for a four year project. If successful, this project will lever in approximately £3.6m of funding.

The Tomintoul and Glenlivet community now has greater capacity to take forward more ambitious projects, as a result of this work. Over the course of the next National Park Partnership Plan, it would be beneficial to take forward this approach with another community by helping to develop appropriate support structures to build community capacity. The Dalwhinnie, Laggan, Kingussie and Newtonmore area has been identified as a possible new Spatial Priority Area.

Community Councils are based on a Scheme of Establishment, produced and monitored by the relevant local authority. Typically, a Community Council is limited in what it can do in terms of community-led projects and as a result, an active and empowered community with good capacity will typically establish some form of **Community Company** (or equivalent), which is locally controlled and constituted in such a way that it can deliver projects or manage assets. Therefore, the existence of an active Community Company also gives a reasonable indication of the level of capacity and empowerment in a community.

As mentioned, a Community Company is often established to take forward more complex projects and initiatives, such as **asset management or ownership**. These assets are often taken on by a company in order to protect or enhance a service, to provide a new service, or to generate an income to support other community projects. Asset management or ownership requires a significant amount of volunteer input, knowledge and skill and as a result, it is reasonable to suggest that an asset owning or managing community will typically have better capacity and be more empowered than a community lacking such an organisation. NPPP should support opportunities that enable communities to take control of income generating assets to encourage and facilitate community empowerment.

Taking all of the above into account, it also reasonable to suggest that a community which lacks an up-to-date and relevant action plan; does not have an active community company; and does not own or manage any local assets could be described as fragile and requiring additional support.

5. RESEARCH AND REPORTS

The **Association of Cairngorms Communities (AoCC)** was established to act as an umbrella organisation for communities across the National Park. The aims of the AoCC are to:

- provide a forum for sharing information, experience and networking;

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- identify shared issues and encouraging appropriate action;
- providing communication between the Cairngorms National Park Authority and other relevant organisations to support and exchange of views and information; and
- assisting the Cairngorms National Park Authority to engage with communities and to meet all its statutory aims

In 2014 AoCC undertook a review of its activities and aims, with the majority of respondents being generally positive about AoCC, its aims and the benefits that it brings in terms of networking and discussing matters of common interest. There was a feeling that AoCC could do more to widen membership, be more proactive in its communications and seek to demonstrate how the meetings add value to other community discussions/meetings. In addition, there was a desire to alternate between morning and evening meetings and move the location around the National Park, in order to make the discussions more accessible to more people. A full copy of the results and summary report is available if necessary.

The table overleaf sets out:

- When the most recent Community Action Plan was produced;
- Whether or not there is an Active Community Company (or equivalent);
- Whether or not an appropriate community group owns or manages an asset on behalf of the community (only a selection have been included – some communities own or manage a number of assets);
- Whether or not the community is an active member of AoCC (i.e. they have attended at least one meeting in the last 12 months); and
- Whether or not there is an active local community planning structure in the area

6. WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

- Offer support to communities through locally based support organisations, with a presumption in favour of collaborative working;
- Support communities to review and update their Community Action Plan at least every five years;
- Work collaboratively through community planning structures to provide consistent and clear support and communications to communities;
- Work collaboratively on and jointly resource shared priorities, involving communities of place and interest;
- Offer support and advice to the Association of Cairngorms Communities and use it as a forum for broader engagement; and

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- Identify a new Spatial Priority Area to provide an enhanced level of assistance/collaboration over a focussed time period to the Dalwhinnie, Kingussie, Laggan and Newtonmore area.

7. MECHANISMS FOR DELIVERY

- The LEADER Local Development Strategy
- Community Development Officer network
- The provision of external support and funding from regional or national bodies
- Association of Cairngorms Communities providing a leadership role as a key organisation for National Park-wide community-led activity
- The creation of appropriate local community planning arrangements in each of the five Community Planning Partnership areas



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Community Council/ Association Area	Community Action Plan	Known examples of active Community Companies	Known examples of community owned or managed assets	Active Member of AoCC
Highland				
Cromdale and Advie	2013	Cromdale & Advie CDT	Sports Pavilion	No
Grantown-on-Spey & Vicinity	2008	Grantown Initiative		No
Dalnain Bridge & Vicinity	2008	-	Village Hall	No
Carr-Bridge & Vicinity	2010	Carr-Bridge Ahead	Bike Park	Yes
Nethy Bridge & Vicinity	2011	Nethy Bridge Community Company	Community Centre	No
Boat of Garten & Vicinity	2014	Boat of Garten Community Company	Community Centre	Yes
Aviemore & Vicinity	2010	Aviemore Community Enterprise		Yes
Kinraig & Vicinity	2011	-	Community Hall	Yes
Kingussie & Vicinity	2011	Kingussie Community Development Company	Micro Hydro Scheme	Yes
Newtonmore & Vicinity	2009	Newtonmore Community Woodland DT	Wildcat Centre	Yes

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Community Council/ Association Area	Community Action Plan	Known examples of active Community Companies	Known examples of community owned or managed assets	Active Member of AoCC
Laggan	2011	Laggan Forest Trust	Forest Centre	Yes
Dalwhinnie	2009	-	Village Hall	No
Highland Perthshire				
Blair Atholl & Struan	2014	Blair Atholl & Struan Initiative		Yes
Killiecrankie & Fincastle	-	-		No
Mount Blair & Glenshee	2013	Mount Blair CDT		Yes
Angus Glens				
Kirriemuir West	-	-	Glenisla Hall	Yes
Kirriemuir East	-	-	Clova Kirk	No
Inveresk	-	-	The Retreat	No
Aberdeenshire				

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Community Council/ Association Area	Community Action Plan	Known examples of active Community Companies	Known examples of community owned or managed assets	Active Member of AoCC
Braemar	2013	Braemar Community Ltd	Braemar Castle & Community Hydro	Yes
Ballater & Crathie	2009	Ballater (Royal Deeside) Ltd	Caravan Park / V&A	Yes
Mid Deeside / Cromar	2009 (Tarland)	Mid Deeside Ltd	Dinnet Hall	No
Donside	2016	-	Glenbuchat, Lonach & Corgarff Halls	No
Tomintoul & Glenlivet				
Kirkmichael & Tomintoul	2012	Tomintoul & Glenlivet DT	Smugglers / VIC	Yes
Glenlivet & Inveravon	2012	Tomintoul & Glenlivet DT	Glenlivet Hall	No

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8. KEY QUESTIONS

- Are there sufficient support structures available to help build capacity and encourage empowerment, particularly in the most fragile communities?
- How should communities be supported to maximise the opportunities provided by the Community Empowerment Act and Land Reform Act?

9. REFERENCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

- **Association of Cairngorms Communities** (information available at: <http://cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/supporting-communities/association-of-cairngorms-communities/>)
- **Cairngorms LEADER Local Development Strategy 2014-20** (www.cairngorms-leader.org)
- **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015**
- **draft Land Reform (Scotland) Bill 2015**
- **Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003**
- **National Standards for Community Engagement**, Scottish Government (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/94257/0084550.pdf>)

