



# Local Development Plan Place Standard

## Tool Engagement with Cairngorms

### Youth Action Team

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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.

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.

This report details the public engagement exercise carried out with the Cairngorms Youth Action Team. The group was formed through the Cairngorms Youth Action project, launched by the Cairngorms National Park Authority in 2019, aims to help address issues identified by young people and outlined in the EUROPARC Youth Manifesto.

The key elements of Cairngorms Youth Action Team are:

- To be the voice of young people in the National Park by recruiting young people to form the Cairngorms Youth Action Team.
- To develop a procedure to fund young people's ideas about living, learning and working in the National Park by giving them a grant.
- To put on educational, exciting and innovative events for young people in the National Park.



Cairngorms Youth Action is an empowering and inspiring platform for young people to share and develop ideas that lead to proactive participation in decision making. It aims to engage with the natural and cultural heritage of our local rural communities. Cairngorms Youth Action enables young people to tackle issues and create positive change. By including the voice of young people and their constantly evolving ideas, the group aims to create a sustainable future for the National Park.

The engagement was carried out with a group of six members of the Cairngorms Youth Action Team at Badaguish Outdoor Centre in Aviemore for a morning session on the 2 March 2024 from 9.30am until 1pm. The engagement was facilitated by Nasim Mehrabi and Dan Harris from the Cairngorms National Park Authority planning team. Also present were two organisers supporting the wider activities of the Cairngorms Youth Action Team over their weekend long event.

The age range of the group spans from 16 - 30 years and therefore it was deemed appropriate to utilise the adult focused Place Standard tool. Further information on the Place Standard tool can be found at the links in the 'Links to Evidence' section at the beginning of this report.

It was decided by consensus that the group would work together working through each section in order, with a discussion, summary of thoughts / feedback noted by the notetaker and agreement between the team on the final score for each section.

## **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 17 - 27 years all female.

## **Results**

### **Moving around**

'How easy is it to move around and get to where I want to go?'

The group praised the Speyside way between Aviemore and Boat of Garten. They stated they think it is accessible and good for wheelchair and pram users. They did report that they think some sections are easier to navigate than others – leading to some inconsistency along the route. Between Grantown on Spey and Nethy Bridge it



was reported there were perhaps too many gates and potholes making this section of the route less desirable.

Between Kincaig and Aviemore it was reported there are potential issues surrounding the gradients not suitable for all travel methods, for example wheelchair and pram users. One member who commuted between Kincaig and Loch Inch who cycled, stated there are sections of the journey that are easier to do on the road and key sections of the route that flood and are impassable at times.

Another confirmed that it is easier to walk along the road in places which in the off-peak season is fine but can be problematic in the summer season due to the increased traffic.

It was agreed that the route between Kincaig and Newtonmore was good and had no notable issues.

Within the surrounding area around and within the settlement of Kincaig there were reported issues around speed limits not being adhered too, and private vehicles and buses not giving enough space for cyclists. One suggestion put forward was the creation of a dedicated cycle lane through the settlement.

In Aviemore, the same problems as in Kincaig were discussed and it was also decided this settlement would also benefit from a dedicated cycle lane through the town centre.

Over in Deeside, there were reported problems with connectivity between the settlements of Braemar and Ballater in relation to the path / active travel network. The route is hindered by heavy gates, potentially causing an accessibility concern, with sections of the paths in poor condition.

The paths surrounding Glen Tanar and Muir of Dinnet were also reported to be in poor condition.

The group discussed potential active travel proposals that may be implemented in Aviemore and agreed the settlement could benefit from better connections to the surrounding settlements / villages.

One participant mentioned the Cycle Friendly Kingussie scheme which has toolkits in place in the village which they reported worked well and supported cycling in and around the settlement.



The discussion on public transport and cycling raised the possibility of introducing buses which could carry electric bikes in the area to support the wider use of them further afield. This suggestion was supported by the precedent of their use in Canada.

Another suggestion from a member on possible improvements to active travel routes / usage was the need to specifically consider wheelchair users and problems around steep gradients. The member suggesting incorporating rest spots on the routes.

The group also reported issues around accessing information on active travel routes in the National Park. They noted that there was a mobile app, but it was not well publicised, and the information was hard to find on the National Park Authority's website (this will be passed back to the web and content design team within the Park Authority).

Moving around score: 5 / 7

## **Public transport**

'What is public transport like in my place?'

It was agreed the public transport (in particular buses) in the area was not good enough to support employment / commuting practices.

It was agreed that the links in and out of the National Park connecting the National Park to other cities – north and south was good, but this was not reflected within the National Park between settlements. Connections to on the east-west axis were reportedly poor from within the National Park to Fort William and from Aviemore or from Deeside to Aberdeen.

There were particular concerns in Deeside where it was reported that to access Perth from Braemar using public transport (bus and train) you have to first go to Aberdeen. Furthermore, connections within Deeside between Braemar and Ballater were also reported very bad.

A public transport connection between Aviemore and Braemar would be welcomed.

Train services serving the Highland Mainline from Aviemore to Inverness were also criticised. There is no late evening service after 8.22pm meaning the city cannot be used



for late evening entertainment if relying on train services. This is later than any buses running between the two locations.

The group reported were issues surrounding the trains coming from Perth to Inverness not always stopping at the smaller settlements of Newtonmore and Carrbridge

In Nethy Bridge, it was raised that the public buses were reportedly bad, and unreliable. Generally, it was agreed that the buses in the National Park were not reliable or reflecting the published timetables.

One suggestion for improvement was the rollout of on demand minibuses for short journeys between settlements.

Public transport score: 2 / 7

## **Traffic and parking**

'How do traffic and parking affect how I move around my place?'

In the Deeside villages, the group felt the provision of parking was deemed ok. Generally, across the villages it was reported that traffic is too fast, and parking often occurs in an illegal, unregulated or dangerous manner. There were problems noted at tourist 'honey spots' in the National Park, which are also exacerbated by the lack of and unreliable / underused public transport.

Suggestions for improvements included the support for car schemes / car sharing schemes in the smaller villages, carpooling at community centres and Park and Ride offerings to alleviate seasonal stress. One of the members reported that they avoided driving through the centre on the High Street in Aviemore due to the nature of elevated levels of other vehicle, cycle and pedestrian traffic flowing through and crossing the centre.

Traffic and parking score: 3 / 7

## **Streets and spaces**

'What are the buildings, streets and public places like in my place?'

The group had a lot of positive things to say on this subject. They welcomed the ease of access to nature, woodland and open spaces from the villages in the National Park.



They commended the layout of the planned towns in the National Park, being easy to navigate and move around in. Ballater, Grantown on Spey and Newtonmore all have nice green / public spaces that are accessible.

With regard to possible improvements – the group felt the High Street could be kept tidier, and more effort made to reduce vacant premises.

Some of the trails around the settlements in the adjoining woodland could be improved to support accessibility for those with disabilities, with dedicated loops and links between settlements meeting a higher accessibility standard.

Streets and spaces score: 6 / 7

## **Natural space**

‘How easy is it for me to regularly enjoy natural space?’

Much of the discussion around natural space was covered by the previous section when the group all reported access to nature being excellent with regard to the availability and quality of the natural space available.

Natural Spaces score: 7 / 7

## **Play and recreation**

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

The group felt a distinction was needed due to the location of the area and its difference from an urban setting. They expressed that play was different in that it involved more outdoor activities, self-directed play for example dens / woods / nature based etc.

They commented on the good availability of Shinty pitches across the area. They also commented on the good availability of small children parks, and strong creative offerings, for example the art classes available in Kingussie.

When asked for improvements the group stated that there was lack of climbing walls in the area with the nearest one being Inverness. It was also noted that there was / is a decline in winter sports. Furthermore, a lack of evening entertainment and only one public swimming pool in the National Park.



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Play and recreation score: 4 / 7

## **Facilities and services**

'How well do facilities and services in my place meet my needs?'

Positive comments about the area included the ALDI superstore in Aviemore, good provision of multi-use libraries in some settlements (in particular Kingussie and Ballater).

Suggestions for improvement included the use of mobile libraries to service the smaller communities, improvements to some libraries (for example Grantown on Spey) with better coordination between the libraries and public buildings / services.

Facilities and services score: 4 / 7

## **Work and local economy**

'How active is the local economy in my place and are there good opportunities for work, volunteering and training?'

The group stated that from personal experience they found a lot of easily accessible jobs available in hospitality which suited the seasonal demand created when studying a further education.

They noted that there was a lack of volunteering opportunities within the National Park.

They stated that to improve the situation more affordable housing was needed, especially for catering / hospitality workers which was a barrier to opportunities in this sector and more generally in the National Park. There was a need for seasonal housing to support seasonal employment.

It was also noted that there was a lack of higher education opportunities in the National Park.

They also felt there was a need for co-working spaces and improvements to digital connectivity in and around settlements.

Work and the local economy score: 5 / 7



## Housing and community

‘How well do the homes in my place meet the needs of my community?’

The group stated that from personal experiences they are aware of good potential lodging opportunities for providers which would benefit people looking for low-income options.

Despite this, the group expressed an overly negative opinion on this question. Stating that current housing was poorly designed, and local amenities and schooling currently under subscribed. They felt there is a need for affordable short-term worker accommodation (three to nine month) and seasonal housing. It was reported that much of the new housing being built is of poor quality, aimed at a competitive market with house prices too high to be accessible.

Housing and community score: 2 / 7

## Social interaction

‘How good is the range of opportunities which allow me to meet and spend time with other people?’

The group stated they thought there was good provision for older people (30 years and over).

The discussion on this section mainly centred around potential improvements. These included:

- The need for evening opportunities as young people at present have nowhere safe / sheltered to go and ‘hang out’.
- More alcohol-free opportunities.
- Safe / well-lit open spaces that could be multi-use.
- Climbing wall needed but also could provide an opportunity for community building.

Social interaction score: 4 / 7

## Identity and belonging

‘To what extent does my place have a positive identity that supports a strong sense of belonging?’



The following positive comments were made:

- Kincaig has a good sense of community.
- The Shinty community and sport in the National Park has a strong sense of identity.
- There is a positive identity in Grantown on Spey.
- There is a strong landscape and outdoor culture.

The group mentioned that they felt there was not a positive identity in Nethy Bridge. In Deeside they felt there was a strong English / Scottish divide.

There was a disconnect between the local community and the incoming seasonal community which leave at the end of the season.

Identity and belonging score: 6 / 7

## **Feeling safe**

'How safe does my place feel?'

The discussion was short for this section as the group all reported they thought the area felt safe, with comments it was much safer than other places and safe enough to leave doors etc open when out. They felt there is a strong sense of community within the National Park and within settlements connected digitally via platforms including Facebook. One comment about improvements was that the visitor management could be improved.

Feeling safe score: 7 / 7

## **Care and maintenance**

'How well is my place looked after and cared for?'

Comments on this section were aimed toward improvements which included better visitor management and introducing mechanisms to better control and improve visitor behaviour. The group thought more bins are needed in the Glenmore area. They felt problems around hot spots including disposable BBQs and tents also needed better control.

Care and maintenance score: 5 / 7



## **Influence and sense of control**

‘When things happen in my place how well am I listened to and included in the decision-making?’

The group felt they are well listened too generally as it is a primary function of their group to feed into discussion about the National Park area. They stated they would like feedback on their input into potentially helping to inform and shape the next Local Development Plan.

Influence and sense of control score: 6 / 7

## **Conclusion**

The group engaged well with the exercise and generated discussion on a number of topics which highlight local resident and young people concerns in the National Park. There were also a lot of positive comments about the area, in particular the great access to Nature, open spaces and sense of security and feeling safe. The main areas discussed for future improvement centred around improvements to public transport and active travel provision and infrastructure as well as the lack of affordable housing.

A number of key issues raised in the discussion will be considered in the spatial plan proposals for the next Local Development Plan, including;

- The need for potential improvements to the Speyside Way between Grantown on Spey and Nethy Bridge.
- Inclusion of dedicated cycle lanes in and around settlements.
- Review of active travel routes between Braemar and Ballater, and the paths surrounding Glen Tanar and Muir of Dinnet.
- Consideration for potential future improvements to public transport and if required expansion of existing or new travel hubs.
- Review of site allocation for leisure or community use to support further community or leisure activities that support need of young people.
- Continued focus on need for affordable housing in the National Park, in particular support for seasonal workers housing.
- Explore the possibility of higher education providers expressing future desires to expand/ locate a campus in the National Park.
- Lack of positive identity in Nethy Bridge and Deeside settlements.
- Support for better visitor management and facilities to reduce negative seasonal effects of tourism.
- Investigate the possibility of car share schemes.



- Investigate Park and Ride options within the National Park, specifically in and around Aviemore to help reduce the visitor impact.
- Address issues surrounding digital connectivity in areas of the National Park.
- Need for co-working spaces.
- Improvements sought to Aviemore town centre with regard to vehicle traffic, and pedestrian movement on the High Street.

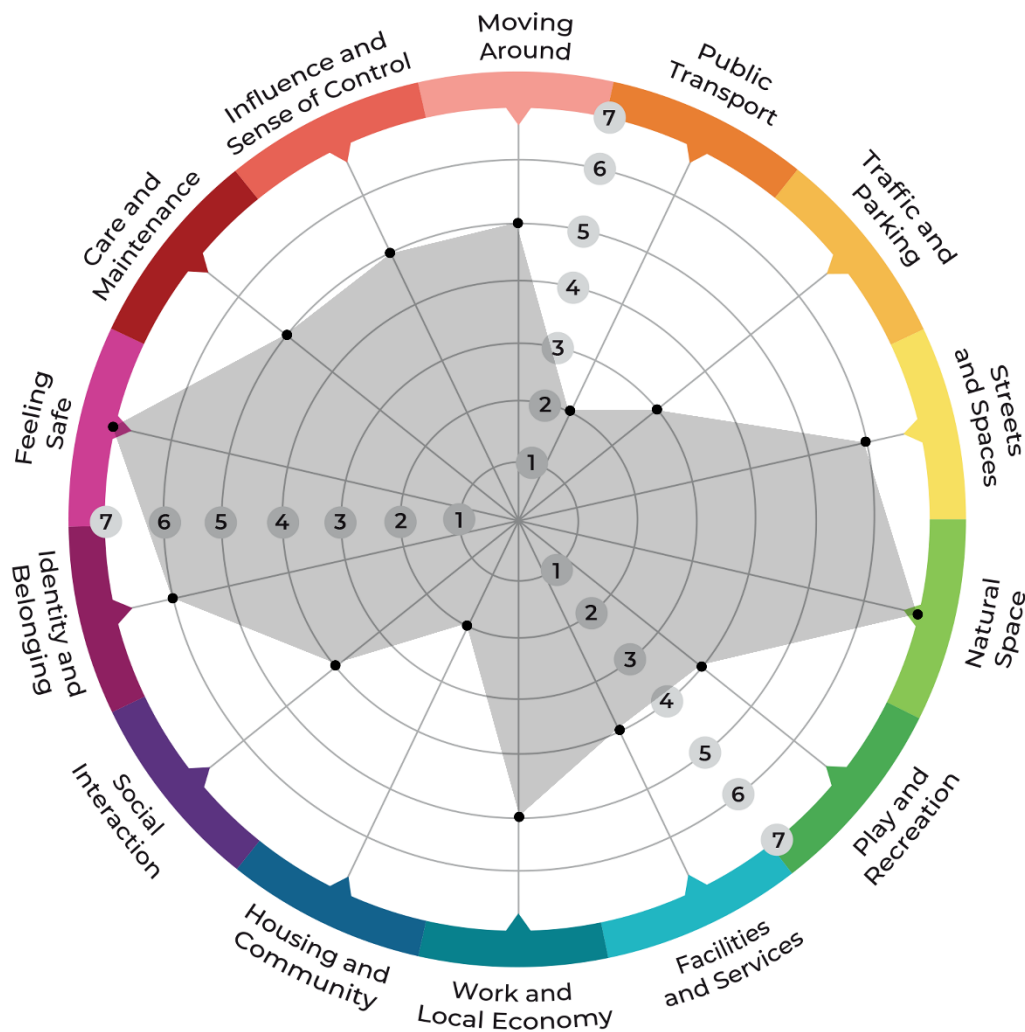


Figure 1 Compass diagram with Cairngorm Youth Action Team place ratings.

The place rating scores garnered from the group for each of the topics have been collated and presented in Figure 1. The diagram shows the lack of confidence in public transport and housing and to a lesser degree traffic and parking. In terms of work and the local economy this topic scored well, although this perhaps reflected the demographic of the group, who mainly students, found a good supply of seasonal work



available in the area to suit their needs. Only the topics covering natural space and feeling safe scored in the top bracket (7 / 7).

Figure 1 will be compared to similar diagrams from the other engagement activities we are currently running to give an overall picture of how the different groups feel about the National Park and to identify common areas for future potential improvement which the next Local Development Plan can help address.

## References

- Place Standard tool  
<https://www.ourplace.scot/About-Place-Standard>
- Cairngorms Youth Action Team  
<https://cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/education/youth-action/>
- EUROPARC Youth Manifesto  
<https://cairngorms.co.uk/caring-future/education/youth-action/europarc-youth-manifesto-project/>