

Strathard Framework – Draft Planning Guidance

Agenda Item 5



National Park Authority Planning and Access Committee
Monday 26th April 2021

Paper for decision

Submitted By:	Director of Place
Subject:	Strathard Framework – Draft Planning Guidance
Lead Officer:	Kirsty Sweeney, Development Planner 01389 722622

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report seeks the Planning and Access Committee’s approval of the draft Strathard Framework, for a 6 week consultation period. This Framework, which includes guidance to inform planning and land use decisions, was prepared in a new co-designed approach by the National Park Authority and a close working steering group including the Strathard Community Council, Strathard Community Trust, Stirling Council and Architecture and Design Scotland. The engagement work was facilitated by Planning Aid Scotland.

2. Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to:

- a) **Note** the formation and engagement processes used in the production of the Framework;
- b) **Approve** the draft Strathard Framework, as set out in Appendix 2, for consultation starting May 2021 to June 2021; and
- c) **Agree** to delegate responsibility to the Director of Place to make any amendments to the design and formatting prior to consultation.

3. Background

- 3.1 This will be the third Rural Development Framework for the National Park (others cover [West Loch Lomondside](#) (Luss and its hinterland) and [Buchanan South](#) (south-east Loch Lomondside) but it will be the first place based development and land use framework for the National Park.

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It builds on previous activities that have supported community-led action planning and stakeholder engagement on land use (Strathard Initiative Project) and place making within Strathard.

Engagement so far

- 3.2 In order to prepare this Framework, we first formed a steering group in May 2019 (as described above) to help prepare a consultant brief and then Planning Aid Scotland was appointed to collate and prepare a summary of all the spatial land use plans affecting Strathard and then to facilitate two workshops and prepare a report.
- 3.3 It is worth noting two notable earlier pieces of work – the Strathard Initiative (including the Community Action Plan) and the community’s own Life Plans. The details of this is included in section 3 of Appendix 2 – ‘How did we get here?’ The key point being there has been significant engagement and consultation work undertaken by the community and partner organisations over the last 5 years which at the same time has led to significant early steps in the regeneration of Aberfoyle to the benefit of Strathard. The drive for the need of this Framework has very much come from the community and businesses of the area, supported by the Authority’s enabling work.
- 3.4 In March 2020 and October 2020 two successful workshops were held with stakeholders representing community representatives, businesses, landowners and public agencies including Stirling Council. The first workshop, held in Kinlochard Village Hall, was attended by 45 invited stakeholders and was used to test and broaden the findings from the baseline study and build consensus. The second workshop held as a virtual workshop and was attended by 27 invited stakeholders and was focused on unresolved issues identified in the first workshop. A place based approach was taken, with scenarios and questions being used in small break-out groups to test the appetite for change, with a full group discussion to draw out the strategic vision. Further information on how the engagement was managed is included in **Appendix 1**.

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- 3.5 Planning Aid Scotland prepared an extensive report with all the various discussions summarised and this was used, alongside further discussions with partnership organisations, the community and the steering group, to prepare the Framework.

Status and Statutory requirements

- 3.6 The framework provides a steer as to potential land use choices and conservation projects in the area and clarity on how all partners see the area's potential. Whilst land owners and managers will make the final decisions about their land, the Framework includes a strong mandate for taking forward projects and acts as encouragement and facilitator for bigger changes in land use. It could be used to inform grant or funding applications by partners. For example, for informing an application for the Scottish Rural Development Programme, developing landscape and biodiversity projects and more generally ensuring that the land use change benefits the community, biodiversity loss and/or carbon reduction.
- 3.7 The Framework will also become planning guidance given the content on development issues and opportunities. The main benefit of this non-statutory guidance is that it can be updated quickly as required. Procedurally, following consultation if Members approve then the Framework it can be adopted immediately and does not have to be submitted to Scottish Ministers for approval. Similar to supplementary guidance it will be used to provide detail on and guidance in relation to policies within the Local Development Plan. Although it is not form part of the statutory LDP like supplementary guidance, it is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.
- 3.8 Following the 6 week consultation in May and June 2021, all representations will be considered and the Framework will be amended, discussed with the Steering Group and returned to Committee for approval. The consultation will ensure we reach the widest audience possible reaching all the interests in the Strathard area.

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- 3.9 There are a number of technical assessments required to be considered in preparing the Framework, namely Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). A screening assessment was undertaken in relation to SEA which assesses the significant potential positive and negative environmental impacts of implementing the Framework and it was determined that no SEA was required. This was because the majority of proposals have already been subject to SEA as identified in other plans or strategies (for instance the Trees and Woodlands Strategy) or the proposals are small-scale in nature with any localised being better assessed when a project is taken forward.
- 3.10 A similar screening in relation to HRA was undertaken which assessing the impact of the plan on European Sites, including Trossachs and Lomond Woods SAC. Similarly it was determined that the plans and policies can be screened out similarly because some proposals are not generated by this plan or there is no link to the designated sites or a proposal has conservation benefits to a site.
- 3.11 Thirdly, the equality impact assessment that assess discrimination to prescribed groups has been prepared. These assessments will be issued with the consultation.

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4. Strathard Framework



- 4.1 The Framework – attached as **Appendix 2** to this report - covers Strathard Community Council area. It is a climate responsive spatial land use and development framework that provides clear guidance to those who live, visit and want to develop in the area as to what types of carbon considerate development and land use activity might be accommodated. It provides a section of the overall strategy for the area with four sub-area detailed strategies for The Forest, Aberfoyle, Kinlochard and Stronachlachar and Inversnaid.
- 4.2 The document contains a shared vision and consensus for the future of the area. It is bold about sustainable and active travel, the role of Aberfoyle, affordable housing, renewable energy, natural flood management, woodland enhancement and creation and peatland restoration. However it is being respectful of the areas' unique qualities – its tranquillity and beauty. It complements the National Park Partnership Plan and the Local Development Plan and articulates how the Park wide Vision and Development Strategy could be implemented for this focused area.

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- 4.3 The Framework sets out the context of the area (Section 2, pg 10) including a number of issues facing the area such as flooding, poor ecological value of the woodlands and water bodies, the lack of affordable housing but also the impact of high levels of day visitors experienced during 2020 (due to the pandemic) which was voiced very clearly at the workshops.
- 4.4 In Section 5 of the report (pg 13) there is a summary of the opportunities that the area has – improving ecological status, use of natural flood management, signposted path network, innovative transport and parking solutions, and ways to diversify the local economy.
- 4.5 The benefit of the Framework holistically looking at land use and development is that there can be links between the two. The Framework sets out the decision making process for development (pg 8) and potentially could provide the opportunity for limited development that would otherwise not accord with the Framework or the Local Development Plan (LDP) Strategy if it would help finance gains for natural capital and biodiversity. An example is development such as modest open market housing or commercial development not supported at a certain location by the LDP but could be supported where it complies with all other LDP and Framework requirements and demonstrates it would finance positive land management, visitor management or biodiversity enhancement opportunities identified in the Framework. This is consistent with the approach taken for the West Loch Lomondside Framework.
- 4.6 One of the most challenging elements is the delivery of the Framework. The delivery plan within the Framework (Appendix 2) sets out the projects underway and sets out the first steps for new projects. These projects in many cases do not yet have funding but the Framework is here to help with funding bids and develop a delivery programme.
- 4.7 It is thought that there are three large work steams initially (when projects are grouped together) that should be prioritised following approval of the Framework by the Steering Group:
- Placemaking Priority/Mobility Hub in Aberfoyle

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- Tourism Strategy/Branding alongside Shuttle Bus/Active Travel Infrastructure
 - Eco-system enhancement and Flooding
- 4.8 For the **placemaking priority/mobility hub** in Aberfoyle, the first step will be to form a steering group and seek funding. Stirling Council are expected to take the lead on this with National Park Authority support. The Strathard Community Development Trust also have role in the second work stream as they have already made a great progress in **Tourism Strategy** with new signage around the village after securing LEADER funding. They are proposing to appoint a development officer and it is hoped they would have capacity to continue to take forward the Tourism Strategy/Branding. One of the projects identified in the Strategy was for a new shuttle bus from Aberfoyle to Inversnaid. The Countryside Trust have also been helping and developed an Active Travel Plan (tackling non-infrastructure projects) and building on this success it is hoped that further improvements can be made to new/improved active travel infrastructure.
- 4.9 The last workstream is **eco-system enhancement and flooding**. There is scope for the established group, known as the Strathard Initiative (Stirling Council Flooding, FLS, SEPA and NatureScot) to take forward a variety of projects (peatland, natural flood management, invasive removal, tree planting). Further thinking is needed around community involvement as the community have voiced interest in becoming more involved.
- 4.10 East Loch Lomond Management Forum are a separate group including a large number of land owners in the area and they have produced a [joint Management Plan](#) for herbivore management which they are taking forward collectively. They will continue this work and it is hoped the group will expand to involve all the landowners in Strathard and undertake community consultation.
- 4.11 It is evident in terms of what has been described that the role of the Framework is much more than helping to make decisions on new development. This is only part of the delivery. The Framework has brought together all the various plans and strategies and presented these in a 'place' based rather than themed

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approach. It allows the people who live, work and visit the area to clearly see the strategy. It is about visitor management, conservation, land management and development all together and how improvements can be taken forward by partners individually or collectively. It can influence all decision makers and landowners and have the power to gain funding given the level of consensus reached.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 This Framework is a really significant project, the first of its kind in the National Park, it trials a co-designed and co-led approach where land use and planning/development matters have been considered together in a holistic manner. Even though it will become planning guidance and used in a similar manner to the other existing frameworks (as a material planning consideration), it will also be able to influence land use change and build on the successful community and business led project delivery in the area.
- 5.2 Members are asked to note the engagement process and agree the Framework for the 6 week consultation.

6. List of Appendices

- Appendix 1: Engagement Statement by PAS
- Appendix 2: Strathard Land Use and Rural Development Framework