

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE

11 AUGUST 2010

Agenda Item	13
Report No	PED 64/10

Green Networks: Supplementary Guidance
Report by Director of Planning and Development

SUMMARY

The Scottish Government requires local authorities to take the concept of green networks into consideration in the preparation of their Local Development Plans. In Highland this has meant including a policy on the issue in the Highland-wide Local Development Plan and also producing additional guidance showing where the Council will identify green networks, how they will be identified and also key projects which may be brought forward to enhance the already existing network. This report outlines the reasons for producing this guidance, key elements of the guidance and the next steps.

The work outlined in this report contributes to our commitments within 'Strengthening the Highlands' to produce new development plans which will enhance the conditions for balanced and sustainable economic growth. In doing so it aims to strike a balance between the potential development of the areas with the need to protect and enhance the environment. The work therefore contributes to the Single Outcome Agreement local outcomes for Sustainable Highland Communities and for Safeguarding Our Environment.

1. Background

- 1.1 The National Planning Framework 2 identifies green networks as being a key driver towards creating a more sustainable and equitable Scotland by connecting our urban areas with their surrounding rural environments, providing a range of social, health and environmental benefits. Scottish Planning Policy also recognises the benefits of networks of green space, to both humans and wildlife.
- 1.2 At a more local level the Highland Council has recognised the benefits of green networks for the creation of a more sustainable, healthier Highland which protects and enhances its environment. This is done primarily through the Highland-wide Local Development Plan Proposed Plan where a policy on the topic of green networks has been introduced.

2. Content of the Guidance

- 2.1 In developing the Council's Green Networks: Supplementary Guidance the Planning and Development Service has worked with Scottish Natural Heritage to ensure the appropriate issues are considered. This partnership approach culminated in a workshop attended by representatives of a number of local developers/agents, land owners, conservation bodies and key agencies. This set the context for what would make a good green network and what would make a useable piece of supplementary guidance.

- 2.2 Following this workshop the guidance has been formulated around 3 key themes:
- Environmental
 - This considers designated sites, landscape character, heritage features and habitats.
 - Social
 - This covers important areas of open space identified through the Highland Open Space Audit and paths and trails identified through the Core Path Plans.
 - Economic
 - This covers areas of significant land use change that may have significant economic benefit;

For each of these themes green network principles have been set and fit within a set of general principles for a Highland Green Network. A copy of the draft Supplementary Guidance is available for reference in the Members library and on the Council website

- 2.3 In time the Council will identify green networks around each of the sub regional centres across Highland. Given the development pressure in the A96 corridor it was appropriate to identify this green network now so it can feed into the production of the Highland wide Local Development Plan. In future Green Networks will be identified to feed into the production of the area Local Development Plans.

3.0 The A96 Green Network

- 3.1 The delivery of a green network in the A96 Corridor was first highlighted in the A96 Growth Corridor Development Framework. The purpose was to create a green setting for future growth and ensure around 90% of the area remains undeveloped.
- 3.2 In identifying a green network for the A96 Corridor it was important to take into consideration the stage of developments within the area and how they may facilitate the delivery of the Green Network. Through mapping a green network in the A96 it has been possible to identify key areas of the network and how these can be protected and enhanced.
- 3.3 Projects for the enhancement of the green network have also been identified, some of which will be at a small scale such as protection of the existing network and some will be at a larger scale such as delivery of a number of trails to connect up settlements and provide significant recreation opportunities.

4. Assessments of the Guidance

- 4.1 A Strategic Environmental Assessment has been undertaken as an integral part of the development of this guidance, and will be sent to the consultation authorities at the beginning of the consultation period. A Habitats Regulations Appraisal (including any Appropriate Assessment) may be required for the projects which have been identified and how they may impact the nearby designated sites. We will also undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment screening.

5. Community Engagement

- 5.1 There will be opportunity for extensive community engagement on the HwLDP Proposed Plan and associated Supplementary Guidance when published. The Council has continuing engagement with Scottish Natural Heritage on the issues raised by the guidance. In terms of the specific projects such as the trails in the A96 corridor, landowners will be consulted directly by the Planning and Development Service.

6. Gaelic Language

- 6.1 We will provide Gaelic translation of headings and sub-headings in the publications that we are producing.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report and supplementary guidance.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 This guidance is closely tied to the production of the Highland wide Local Development Plan and the delivery of a well connected green network is tied to proposed developments across the area. We have worked closely with Scottish Natural Heritage and a range of other organisations to produce guidance which has broad support and can, in time, deliver significant benefits to the whole of Highland.

9. RECOMMENDATION

- (i) Agree the draft Green Networks: Supplementary Guidance to be subject to a public consultation;
- (ii) Agree that following public consultation on the draft guidance and any subsequent changes that the guidance is brought back to committee for approval as statutory supplementary guidance to the Highland wide Local Development Plan.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning and Development

Date: 2 August 2010

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