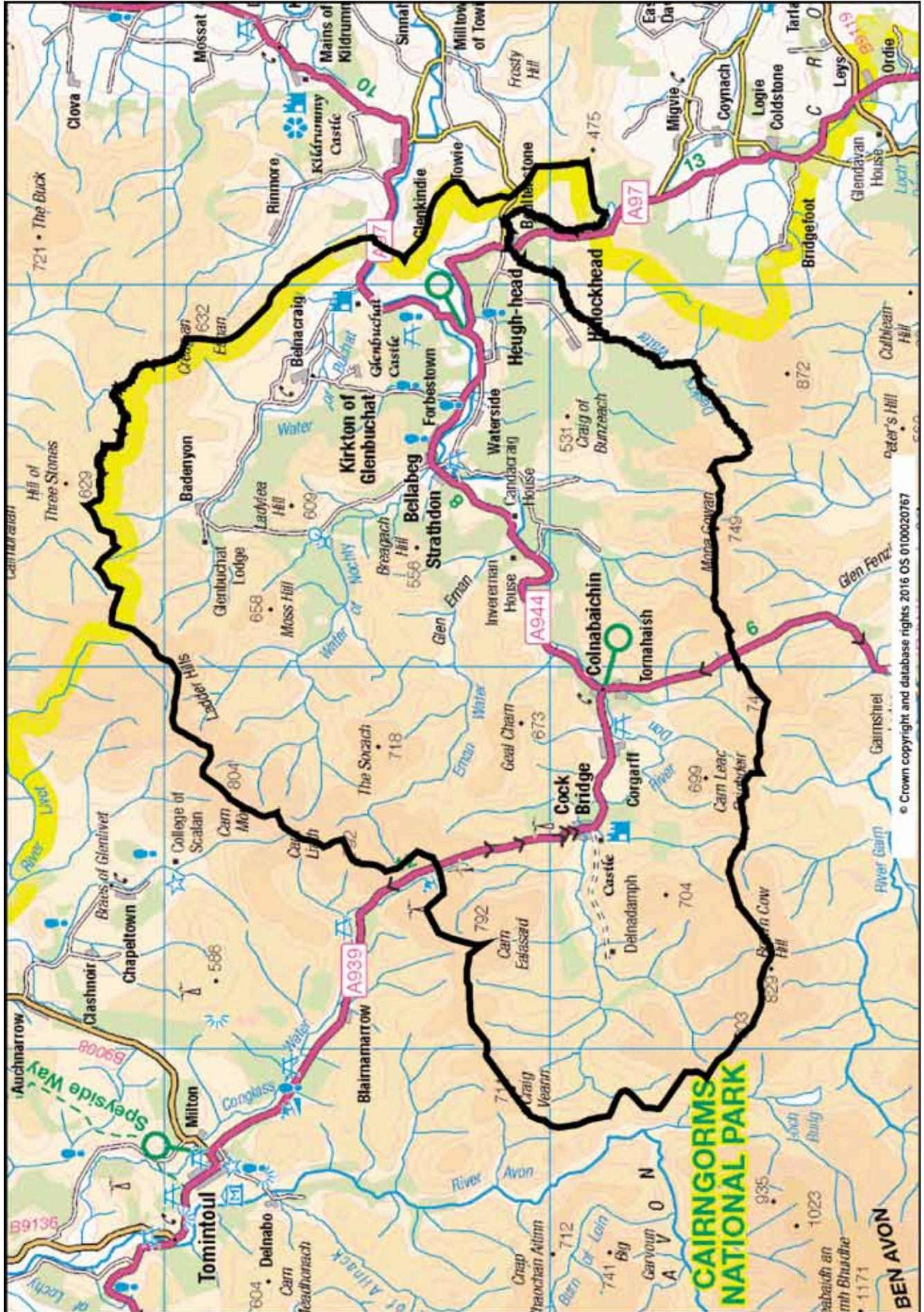


# Strathdon Area Community Action Plan

May 2016



## Welcome!

This document brings together a wide range of issues, actions and projects which the community of Strathdon has identified as important to its members.

Following a thorough and inclusive consultation programme, all of the proposed actions are grouped under the following nine themes:

### **Theme 1: Recreation and social life**

### **Theme 2: Assets and facilities**

### **Theme 3: Local attractions and tourism**

### **Theme 4: Employment, business, training and education**

### **Theme 5: Access, infrastructure and transport**

### **Theme 6: Telecommunication**

### **Theme 7: Local communication**

### **Theme 8: Environment**

### **Theme 9: Housing and resident support**

The themes are described more fully on pages 6 - 11. The table on pages 12 - 14 lists each issue, together with its proposed actions and associated key partners.

## **An Introduction To Strathdon**

Strathdon is an upland rural area on the eastern edge of the Cairngorms mountain range within the Cairngorms National Park. It includes the parishes of Glenbuchat and Corgarff. The whole area is approximately 16 miles long by 6 miles wide.

The Strathdon area is bound by the Deeside Hills to the south and the Ladder Hills to the north, and includes the mountain road to the Lecht Ski Centre. It broadly follows the River Don from its source at 2000 feet above sea level, eastwards to Corgarff Castle and onwards to Glenbuchat Castle, which stands at the foot of the dominant landmark of Ben Neve. Strathdon's high altitude makes its weather unpredictable and its winters particularly harsh and long. The waters of glens Ernan, Nochty, Buchat, Deochry, Conrie, Carvie and Deskry all feed into the Don. The area has a distinctive and specific geography and shows much evidence of glaciation, particularly in its rounded hills. It is home to an abundance of wildlife including red and roe deer, grouse, ptarmigan, red squirrels, mountain hares, crossbills, buzzards, golden eagles and visiting ospreys.

Although it is officially recognised by some bodies as a very remote and rural area with a lack of facilities, the wider community of Strathdon has shown itself to be remarkably resilient, independent and self-reliant, continually evolving and changing to meet the needs of its people.

### **Strathdon Past**

The area has a rich history with evidence of human habitation dating as far back as 2000 BC. Artefacts include Iron Age hut circles, earth houses and the Pictish Doune of Invernochty.

The scattered ruins and remnants of the many clachans (fermtouns), small farms and crofts that supported rural life are still visible. Most of the habitable dwellings in Glenbuchat and Corgarff are well spaced out and located some distance apart from one another, but the settlements of Bellabeg, Roughpark and Heughhead are clustered cosily together and provide some sense of how small communities evolved in the past.

By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the breeding and rearing of cattle and sheep had become the mainstay of the local economy and the main crops in arable farming were oats and barley. The former fed both the animal and human populations and the latter was largely used in the brewing of ale and the distillation of whisky. The introduction of excise duty resulted in an illegal trade in whisky, much of which was smuggled through the Ladder Hills to Glenlivet by Duff's Defiance, allegedly so named as a house built in defiance of the local laird.

By the 1800s local limestone deposits were being utilised to condition the soil and enhance crop yields with the aim of improving the 'miserable condition' of the inhabitants during depressions in farming. Remnants of these lime kilns are still visible, particularly in Glenbuchat and Corgarff.

The clan system was much in evidence before the 1745 Jacobite rising. Particularly predominant were the Gordon and Forbes clans. After the '45, Corgarff Castle, with its distinctive star-shaped wall, was rebuilt as a military barracks on the newly established General Wade military road from Braemar Castle to Fort George. Part of the original military road and several bridges still exist in the locality.

By 1820 the population was recorded as approximately 2000. The rise of sporting estates wrought significant changes in local farming practice along



with the introduction of enclosures and mechanisation. Later records indicate that many people squatted in the upper glens, whereas others emigrated and moved elsewhere. The large family estates of Candacraig, Edinglassie, Allargue, Tornashean, Inverernan and Newe, with their substantial houses and surrounding gardens, were to become major employers and also landlords to tenant farmers. The improved tenants' housing of the early 20th century, built in traditional granite, continues to account for most of today's housing stock. However, until well into the first half of the 20th century it was normal for each area to sustain shops, sawmills, a smiddy, a miller and a tailor, as well as a school and church. The population of the area supported churches in each community, with two in Glenbuchat, one in Strathdon, and two in Corgarff, including the Catholic Chapel, Our Lady of the Snows.

In 1823 Sir Charles Forbes reintroduced the previously proscribed wearing of Highland dress and encouraged the preservation of the Gaelic language. A Highland and Friendly Society was created to promote 'manly conduct' and 'benevolent feeling'. At its heart was - and remains - the annual Lonach Gathering.

## Changes And Present-Day Strathdon

Between World War I and the 1970s, as people migrated to towns and cities, the population declined and with it many of the area's facilities. Properties became vacant, were allowed to fall into disrepair or were bought as second homes by professionals from elsewhere. As the Forestry Commission began to clothe the hills with conifers, many of the marginal upland farms disappeared and the hills became the patchwork of high heather moorland and managed forestry we see today. Forestry and estate tracks

now add to the old drove roads and smugglers' trails. The estates continue to have a huge influence on land use and still offer grouse and pheasant shooting, deer stalking, and trout and salmon fishing. Nowadays only a small number of tenant farmers manage larger areas in the glens. Many of these original farms have been occupied by the same families for several generations. In recent years it has become common for farm tenancies to be replaced with farm managers who oversee several incorporated farms. The area's climate and remoteness, and changing land use, have all combined to result in substantial population fluctuations.

Grid electricity did not reach the outlying areas of Corgarff and Glenbuchat until the mid to late 1970s. Since then, and particularly as private transport has become more attainable, the area has gradually become more attractive as a place to live. Greater numbers of young people are staying in or returning to the area, which is also witnessing an influx of new full-time residents, many of whom are either self-employed or work outwith the area, often in the oil industry and related activities. Otherwise, the population is mainly employed in the service industries, gamekeeping, farming, tourism and creative industries, although retired people form a significant proportion of current residents.

Changing patterns in land ownership have resulted in many more privately owned properties in recent decades and a more mobile demography. The area includes a small number of privately rented properties, as well as large quantities of estate housing for rent. There is still a certain amount of weekend holiday homes, but these are decreasing significantly in number as properties are now more likely to be bought as full-time residences. Holiday lets, mainly in the more remote glens, are now a feature of visitor amenities.

Over the past 30 years Strathdon itself has suffered reductions in public transport, as well as the loss of a garage, a shop at Roughpark, a hotel at Boultenstone, a branch of the Clydesdale Bank and several small visitor attractions such as open gardens. Corgarff School closed due to lack of pupils in 1998. Strathdon School (which also houses a playgroup) remains an integral part of the present community and has a steady roll of approximately 25 pupils. When children reach secondary school age, they enrol at Alford Academy in the village of Alford, a distance of 20-25 miles from most of Strathdon. This academy draws students from an area of approximately 600 square miles. The reductions in local services, as well as employment outwith the community, have led to a heavier reliance on car transport to Aboyne, Tarland, Alford, Ballater, Aberdeen and Huntly. The community's carbon footprint is correspondingly high.

Across the wider area facilities nowadays include nursery provision at Towie School, sheltered housing for 10 residents in Bellabeg, two Post offices and a variety of other local businesses including; shops, mechanical and gardening services, restaurants, art galleries, hotels and IT services. The Lonach Hall at Strathdon and the smaller halls at Corgarff and Glenbuchat all provide social events and activity space. The general practice surgery in Strathdon covers the whole Upper Donside area. The ambulance service is based in Alford, roughly 25 miles away. Volunteer services include a fire service, first responders, the Silver Circle Day Centre, a lunch club, a weekly community bus and a hospital volunteer driver scheme.

The established tourist route runs from Ballater to Speyside (the A939), which passes through Corgarff bypassing most of the Strathdon area. The major visitor event of the year in this quiet area is the annual Lonach Highland Games and

Gathering, which includes the March of the Lonach Highlanders. This event, held on the fourth Saturday of August, attracts over 6000 people into the area.

## The Community Action Planning Process

The community's interest in developing an action plan was motivated by discussions between Donside Community Council (DCC) and Marr Area Partnership (MAP), which explained the benefits of community action planning and offered to work with the local community to develop an action plan. Discussions between DCC, which also agreed to chair a proposed steering group, and members of the community, held in order to gauge interest, then led to the development of a local steering group.

The steering group first met in November 2014. It was supported by MAP and the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and comprised members of DCC, two hall committees and other volunteers from the community, including parents, local artists and people who work in land industries. It was open to anyone who was prepared to contribute to the process. Some young people joined the group at a later stage.

The steering group's role was to encourage and enable the involvement of local people in order to ensure that their needs and aspirations would be reflected in the action plan. To do this, the steering group:

- Designed a questionnaire and delivered it to all households in the area in spring 2015. This was also made available in local facilities, such as shops, and online
- Publicised the process in order to encourage people to respond and then analysed the survey results (105 responses were received)





- Attended Strathdon Primary School to seek the views of the children on what they wanted for the future of their community
- Organised a community open day in May 2015 to feedback on the information gathered, seek ideas for community projects and enable more input (over 90 people attended)
- Reached out to local toddlers groups, the service industry, younger people, older people's groups and other identified individuals to feedback information and enable input
- Collated all of the information and prepared an outline of the themes, issues and potential areas for action
- Facilitated a community conversation around the draft action plan in November 2015 for local group representatives, support agencies and others interested in supporting the action planning process in order to further develop the outline actions and promote involvement in their implementation (46 people attended)
- Redrafted the action plan, collected images via a community photography competition, and wrote the introduction to this document through discussion with various residents.

## Areas For Action

The actions proposed by the community have been grouped into nine themes and are summarised in the table at the end of this plan. The most significant of these, or those for which potential solutions are readily achievable, are described in more detail below.

These reflect the situation that was current as the action plan was developed, but will be supplemented by further actions as these are identified over time. Community action planning is a dynamic and progressive process that will reflect the priorities of the various subgroups within the community as they evolve. It is also dependent on the involvement and

energy of the community to enable action to be achieved.

## Theme 1: Recreation and social life

A sense of community was mentioned repeatedly as a real attraction to living in this area. Many ideas for setting up new, reviving old or building on established groups, activities, events or clubs were put forward. Currently, there is felt to be a lack of organised social opportunities for children and young people. Brownie and Scout groups, which were formerly available, were particularly valued by primary school pupils and the reviving of a youth club was mentioned across 10-16-year-olds. Across other age groups various suggestions were made, including Scrabble or debating clubs in Corgarff, general fitness projects across the area, the promotion and expansion of arts and culture projects and events, the creation of an annual week-long event with music and arts connecting with the Lonach Gathering, a community garden and bee-keeping. All of the suggestions collected received some enthusiasm from members of the community.

Village halls are recognised as key venues for social activities. Events at these are often organised directly by the hall committee. It was suggested, by committee members and others, that the three halls and community groups might benefit from linking with each other to coordinate events, and to support cross-community activities and planning. Local hotels, cafés and pubs were also mentioned as important for social opportunities and events. As Strathdon is a geographically scattered community, it was suggested that transport links between the halls and other venues could be developed to enable people across the area to access more activities, which would help to bolster the numbers attending each venue.

## Theme 2: Assets and facilities

As members of a very remote rural and therefore necessarily self-reliant community, residents recognise the need to both protect and expand on the assets and facilities available. From the community action planning consultation it became clear that both privately owned and community assets, such as the village halls, hotels, pubs, café, school, ski centre, local shop, garage services and post office, are valued. It is appreciated that local and visitor support for these facilities is critical to their survival. Particular concern was expressed over the sustainability of local hotels and pubs. Indeed, these were frequently mentioned in association with the need for good quality places in which to eat and socialise in the area. The three village halls in the area are important to the community as venues that provide spaces for a variety of activities. A great amount of work by volunteers goes into running, maintaining, utilising and improving the halls. Threat of closure to any remaining facilities would very much impact on the community as a whole.

The Clubby Rooms, currently privately owned by the Lonach Society and not presently available or in fit condition for community use, were mentioned frequently as a potential venue for a variety of community uses. Potential uses include a youth club, the provision of community internet access, a training venue, a community café and a museum. The Clubby Rooms building is particularly valued by the community for its location at the heart of Bellabeg, close to local amenities.

Hopes were expressed across age groups that a community playing field could be developed in a site that is accessible to local amenities and the school. This could replace the privately owned piece of land that is currently

unofficially loaned to the community. A local estate has expressed a desire to support the community to this end and has suggested that the community could potentially use a piece of its ground in Bellabeg, which would fit the location criteria; at the time of writing this is being explored.

Primary school children and their parents value the playpark facilities, but expressed frustration that these are suitable only for very young children and that there are no facilities for upper primary school and older pupils. A desire to expand the playpark facilities to meet the needs of older children was widely indicated.

There was also interest in exploring the potential of a community-run project to raise revenue, which would strengthen the community. This might include identifying assets that could be purchased, developed and managed by the community. The various suggestions included small-scale renewable energy schemes, recreational tourism facilities and heritage projects, and more specifically referred to a biking centre and trails, a swimming pool, a petting farm, camping facilities, heritage sites and eco-tourism sites.

## Theme 3: Local attractions and tourism

In the context of the local economy, spending by tourists and other visitors is recognised as a means of supporting and sustaining essential local services and social facilities. These include the Bellabeg Spar Shop and Post Office, Goodbrand and Ross Café and Gift Shop, the two local hotels and the Lecht Ski Centre, as well as individual providers of tourist accommodation. People in the service industry, and other residents, consider that Donside has been given little support in promoting tourism compared with Deeside and other areas in the Cairngorms National Park.





The provision of cohesive information about the area's attractions would be of significant value. Methods of dissemination might include leaflets, a web presence and a visitor information point; during the period in which action planning took place, the current owners of Bellabeg Shop developed an information point and a basic visitor information leaflet with support from the CNPA. Owners of other businesses indicated that they would be interested in forming a business group for the purpose of attracting visitors.

There was a lot of interest in not only promoting existing attractions, but in further expanding what is currently available. Community participants demonstrated interest in exploring heritage projects, and in looking at ways to ensure that local hotels, other accommodation and eating places are attractive and accessible to visitors and residents. In particular, there were suggestions to improve and develop pathways, including by reinstating bridges and developing more ambitious projects such as a 'Donside Way' (see also *Theme 5: Access, infrastructure and transport*).

#### **Theme 4: Employment, business, training and education**

Residents expressed positive feelings about the local primary school. Access to extracurricular activities for teenagers attending the secondary school in Alford was reported as difficult due to distance and lack of transport. Journey times and costs (by both public and private transport) were seen to represent significant barriers to accessing opportunities for further education. In addition, poor or no broadband access to the internet added a further substantial barrier to accessing further education opportunities, and completing online training for work or school homework. A desire for local education

opportunities was mentioned, specifically in information technology.

Business, education and employment opportunities are seen as key to attracting and retaining younger people in the area, which the wider population identified as important. Additional research with young people, aged 16-30 years, was carried out by MAP during the community action planning process.

Lack of childcare is a problem for parents who wish to return to work or education or seek to expand a business. A number of parents expressed no expectation of returning to work until all their children were of secondary school age. After-school clubs or breakfast clubs would be of interest, but parents commented that this would not resolve issues for preschool children.

A number of residents across the area run small businesses from home, partly as a result of their remote locations. It was widely considered that poor broadband causes problems for a variety of local businesses that range from hindering day-to-day administration to stalling business start-ups or progression.

Some self-employed residents were unclear about the support available to businesses. In addition, further expansion of small businesses is seen to be hindered by a number of factors, including a lack of suitable premises for storage or for service provision, and concern about the implications of taking on employees in terms of administration and costs. There was interest within these groups in receiving information, training and other support.

A significant number of people in the area are employed or run businesses in land industries, including forestry, tenant farming and land management for sporting estates. Particularly

amongst the latter two, concerns were raised about the impact on sustainability of various aspects of land reform and other legislation.

## Theme 5: Access, infrastructure and transport

A number of people in the community expressed the opinion that access to and around the area could be improved in a variety of ways, both to encourage visitors and to support residents in everyday life. The public bus service has been extremely limited: there is currently one service that runs on weekdays only and which has recently been further limited so that it runs during the school term only. The Dial-a-Bus service to Alford runs one day per week, leaving Bellabeg at 9.30am and 1.10pm. Currently, there is no weekend service and no link to facilities on Deeside.

The community understands that issues around public transport are difficult to address because the area is on the edge of Aberdeenshire and is sparsely populated. In addition, many residencies are located far from the main road. Although many people described a need for a fit-for-purpose public transport service, they recognise that lack of commercial viability means it is unlikely there will be significant improvements to public transport in the future and alternative solutions may need to be investigated with public support. Residents explained that the established bus service is not well used as the timetable does not enable people to access larger settlements on its route (Aberdeen and Alford) for normal working hours or for further education or at peak social and recreation times; residents have raised this issue with bus forums previously, but no action has been taken. Young people wishing to access further education and work opportunities were most vocal in expressing their concern.

An alternative service operates through the Silver Circle with some public funding. A minibus takes older residents from their homes to larger local settlements on Friday afternoons for shopping. This runs weekly in summer and fortnightly in winter. Also coordinated by the Silver Circle is a volunteer hospital transport service. There is interest in finding sustainable alternative solutions to transport that will support the needs of the wider population. Residents would like access to larger settlements for social activities and recreation, as well as for education and employment opportunities. They would also like transport within the community to link settlements and there is some interest in exploring the feasibility of a community-run bus service to operate with some public support.

Many expressed the need to further develop path networks and walkways linking the settlements. This would not only allow local young people and other residents to cycle and walk safely to and from the various settlements and facilities, but would encourage tourism in the area.

Further issues relating to services and signage for those using private transport were raised, particularly with regard to the lack of access to fuel between Glenkindie and Ballater or Grantown-on-Spey, and the provision of accurate information about fuel access and road closures due to winter weather. Both local businesses and individuals, particularly in Corgarff, have had to provide essential help to tourists, passers-by and other local people who have run out of fuel in remote areas or have been caught out by road closures in winter. Signage on fuel availability, road closures and new facilities for fuel have been suggested by both residents and businesses. Snow gate web cameras were also suggested.





## Theme 6: Telecommunication

Broadband access is a significant problem in the area and was by far the most commonly mentioned issue as a significant proportion of residents currently have poor or no access. Glenbuchat and Corgarff have been involved in a pilot scheme for the provision of community broadband services, but those involved in the project or living in these areas expressed anger and cynicism that the scheme, despite assurances, was not progressed by supporting agencies, and that communication with these agencies had diminished following much effort by volunteers in the area to fundraise and progress. During the action planning process community groups have been brought back together with the various agencies involved to look at current options.

The mobile phone signal was also reported to be patchy in the area, with some locales receiving zero signal. Landlines were also considered to be of poor quality for some residents and digital radio is not available in parts of this area. The majority of respondents consider that provision of all of these services is unsatisfactory.

## Theme 7: Local communication

The need to improve communication and community coordination in and around the area was expressed by the community through consultation. This was highlighted by the difficulties experienced by the steering group in the community action planning process. Difficulties in communicating with the whole area became apparent and included problems in finding up-to-date contact details and information about established groups and other stakeholders, and in updating the community as a whole on activities. As a result, the steering group resorted to

much outreach, including some door-to-door communication.

There are a variety of volunteer groups coordinating activities, but, although these are often interdependent, there is no formal body to support this interdependence. During the process of community action planning, a steering group member created the Corgarff, Glenbuchat, Strathdon Facebook page, which is growing as a tool for sharing and gathering information. Again, concerns were raised that there is no formal mode of coordination to monitor and ensure that this continues to develop and to function well. An Upper Donside website created a number of years ago is now redundant for this reason. There is also a variety of mailing lists, noticeboards, newsletters and social media sites for individual groups, but these are not coordinated across the area.

Many of the actions identified in this plan initially rely on communication, particularly in terms of identifying community leads and support. Further discussion around actions highlighted that the development of a community trust or association to bring together this interdependent community would be valuable and that it should ideally incorporate representatives of different areas, including geographically based groups such as hall committees and non-geographic interest groups such as the Silver Circle, and arts or parent groups. This group could facilitate communication across the area and perhaps even host and monitor the community action plan. A discussion group felt that it would be useful to employ somebody to initiate such a project and to develop and initially monitor communication and administration for a period.

## Theme 8: Environment

In this very rural and sparsely populated area, there was much evidence that the natural environment is greatly valued by the community. Many enjoy and use the land for work and/or recreational purposes and appreciate the local wildlife and diversity of green spaces. Notably, there was evidence of some conflict around land use for recreation and for business and some strong opinions on how areas of the land are managed were expressed.

During the period of consultation, there was much forestry activity in the area. Various concerns were expressed about the process and aftermath of tree felling; these referred to the lack of information given to households that were impacted by smoke from burning hag piles and the condition of roads after forestry use.

Other residents expressed concerns about the activities of shooting estates and their impact on wildlife and residents' access to green spaces. Some residents involved in managing the land felt misunderstood and drew attention to ways in which recreational land users sometimes disrupt their industry, how they support the established ecosystem and their aspirations to educate the wider population about their practices. Both those involved in land management and those with concerns about land management practices recognised the need for improved communication and possibly even conflict resolution.

One resident offered to coordinate fishing permits across the area by working with different landowners and a business which would administer permits at the point of sale. This idea was supported by other residents.

Through consultation it became apparent that one family regularly and

voluntarily pick up litter in Bellabeg and the surrounding area. This activity masks the litter issue, and the suggestion that their efforts should be supported by a formal community litter-picking group was widely agreed. More strategically placed micro waste and recycling facilities and signage were also mentioned.

## Theme 9: Housing and resident support

Many people across the area, especially farmers and estate workers, live in houses that are tied to their employment. Outwith these, although some residents expressed satisfaction with housing availability and prices, a range of residents, particularly younger people and those with young families, indicated that suitable housing, to either buy or rent, was not affordable relative to income they could generate in the area. It is not uncommon for young people to stay in the parental home into adulthood for this reason. Some residents were also dissatisfied with the condition of housing.

Further, people were not confident that suitable care at home for those requiring support is currently, or will be in the future, available to meet local requirements. This includes the provision of home helps and initiatives such as meals on wheels.

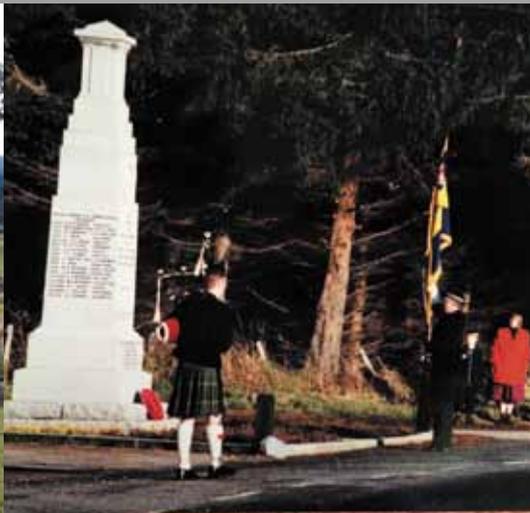


This table summarises the issues identified in the extensive community engagement to prepare the action plan, as detailed in the foregoing narrative. Where no community lead is listed, there is no identified group to progress the action.

| Title   | Issues   | Short-term actions  | Medium-term actions   | Long-term actions   | Key Partners   |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Theme 1: Recreation and social life</b>    |  |   |   |   |  |
| Social activities, projects and events        | Support for established and emerging groups<br>Expand on the activities available, start up new activities and bring back old activities:<br>• Scrabble, debating, bee-keeping groups, community gardening, keep fit)<br>• Film nights, cookery classes<br>• Bellabeg community café/coffee morning<br>• Strathfest (or similar) | Local groups and individuals seek support to develop activities and events<br>Obtain funding and volunteer support to start and develop projects                                      | Develop events committee<br>Explore and develop promotion strategy across area  | Local volunteers  |  |
| Children, social and sports activities        | Children and parents would like more groups for young people (e.g. football coaching, Brownies or Scouts)  | Parents and children seek volunteer and other support to start and develop activities   | Obtain set-up funding or other support to help ensure activities are well set up and sustainable  | Scouts Scotland, Local volunteers, Aberdeenshire Council (AC), Active Schools   |  |
| Young people: social and sports activities    | Young people want space to hang out<br>• Youth café or club<br>• Access to larger settlements in evening and at weekends (see Theme 5: Access, infrastructure and transport)   | Identify community lead and potential spaces<br>Seek volunteer and other support to start and develop activities  | Explore options and feasibility   | AC, Community Learning & Development, Local volunteers, Young people, Donside Community Council (DCC)                           |  |
| Venues sustainability                         | Utilising and supporting village halls and other venues; support for established, emerging and new activities  | Link halls, groups and other venues to support each other   | Complementary events strategy<br>Explore promotion strategy across area   | Community transport links between halls<br>Marr Area Partnership (MAP), AVA   |  |
| <b>Theme 2: Assets and facilities</b>         |  |   |   |   |  |
| Build and develop community assets            | Interest in exploring the potential use of the Clubby Rooms by the community; seen as key location<br>Heritage project<br>Village halls; continued improvement and sustainability of halls   | Develop local group with representation from Lonach Society and existing facilities (i.e. Lonach Hall)<br>Local groups identify projects<br>Identify improvements to sustain hall use | Explore feasibility of Clubby Rooms for community use<br>Identify and obtain support  | Obtain support and funding to take forward  | MAP, AVA, Historic Scotland (HS), CNPA, AC, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)                                    |
| Facilities for eating, drinking and meeting   | Protect hotels and pubs from closure or decline  | Identify potential courses of action and community lead   | Health check and identify how current facilities can be supported<br>Explore potential for community involvement/support                | AC Economic Development (AC ED), Scottish Enterprise (SE)   |  |
| Community playing field                       | Explore feasibility of having a playing field for community and school use, suitable for football and other sports, close to amenities, school and preferably with some lighting   | Identify potential sites and courses of action and community leads  | Obtain support and develop community group to further explore specific need and feasibility   | Develop site for use by the community   | MAP, Local landowners, Local volunteers, AC, CNPA  |
| Children's facilities                         | Playpark facilities not suitable for older school-aged children; little room for expansion on current site   | Identify community lead, potential sites and courses of action  | Obtain support and develop community group to further explore specific need and feasibility   | Fundraise, purchase and install new equipment   | MAP, AC, CNPA, Local volunteers  |
| Community revenue                             | Community revenue raising; social enterprise, tourism or small-scale renewable project   | Identify possible projects  | Identify and obtain advice and support<br>Explore feasibility   | Take forward feasible revenue-raising projects  | AC ED, AVA, MAP, SE  |
| <b>Theme 3: Local attractions and tourism</b> |  |   |   |   |  |
| Cohesive approach to tourism                  | Promote as a visitor destination; raise profile of Upper Donside as a tourist destination  | Establish a local tourism business group<br>Gather information on all tourist attractions and opportunities and publicise   | Develop marketing strategy to promote tourism in the area<br>Tourist information area and promotion materials<br>Support tourism assets | Explore feasibility of alternative accommodation (bunkhouse, camping)<br>Identify and develop other assets that support tourism | AC ED, CNPA, Visit Scotland, Local tourism group   |
| Heritage projects                             | Develop and support projects which protect and/or enhance the heritage of the area   | Local groups to identify projects   | Identify/obtain support and explore feasibility of a museum<br>Historical documentation   | Heritage buildings/sites  | AC ED, CNPA, SNH   |
| Pathways                                      | Pathways underexploited as tourist attraction and underused recreationally by locals (see Theme 5: Access, infrastructure and transport)   | Local groups to identify projects including signage, access, paths development, improvement or promotion  | Identify/obtain support and explore feasibility   |   | Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT), AC, CNPA, Walk to Health groups, Local tourism group, Local landowners |
| Local service industry                        | Sustainability and quality of local service industry (hotels, cafes, restaurants, accommodation and bars) and support for emerging attractions   | Identify potential courses of action and community/business leads involvement   | Health check and identify how current facilities can be supported<br>Explore potential for community involvement/support                |   | Local people & businesses, Local tourism group, AC ED, CNPA  |

| Title  | Issues   | Short-term actions  | Medium-term actions  | Long-term actions   | Key Partners  |
|--|--|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Theme 4: Employment, business, training and education</b> |  |   |  |   |   |
| Childcare  | Need childcare provision locally   | Identify group to take forward  | Explore issues and needs   | Address issues and need   | AC, School, Parent Council (PC), other parent groups                              |
| Young and working age people                                 | Improved employment and business opportunities and support to retain younger people  | Identify community lead and support   | Explore issues and needs   | Address issues and need   | AC, CNPA, SE, local businesses, Skills Development Scotland (SDS)                 |
| Business and education infrastructure                        | Poor broadband provision is a barrier to business set-up, sustainability and improvement<br>Lack of suitable business premises<br>Limited transport  | Support for established groups<br>Local businesses to obtain support to explore   | Explore feasibility of small business units locally  | Address issues and need   | AC, CNPA, Broadband Scotland, Local broadband group                               |
| Business development and support                             | Supporting established, emerging and new business  | Identify people to take part in business group(s)<br>Identify and promote sources of advice and support   | Explore options for supporting local business start-up and employment/training skills  | Address issues and need   | AC, CNPA, SE, local businesses, SDS, local business group                         |
| Sustainability of land industries: tenant farming            | Concerns about impact of land reform and other legislation on established land industries, including farming and sporting estates and sporting estates                                       | Identify community lead(s) and support  | Explore issues and identify support to raise issues and identify way forward   | Address issues and need   | Scottish Agricultural College (SAC), Young Farmers, CNPA, AC, Scottish Government |
| <b>Theme 5: Access, infrastructure and transport</b>         |  |   |  |   |   |
| Public transport   | Extremely limited; only one bus from Alford to Bellabeg, Strathdon and no service for the majority of the area   | Develop local transport group<br>Raise issues with Aberdeenshire bus forum  | Publicise and lobby for improvement of services<br>Feasibility of more frequent buses, bus links and buses at weekends   | Feasibility of social enterprise transport scheme   | DCC, AC, Local volunteers, bus forum  |
| Peak time transport  | No access to larger settlements in the evening and/or during working hours for people without private transport  | Request re-introduction of services<br>Identify group to explore issues and need<br>Support established schemes (shopping bus, volunteer hospital transport scheme) | Explore car share scheme to be hosted on community website<br>Develop options for community bus<br>Develop and improve cycle paths and paths including a 'Donside Way'                         | Feasibility of social enterprise transport scheme<br>Links with other bus services<br>Community transport options                                     | DCC, AC, Local volunteers, bus forum, local volunteers                            |
| Getting around in the community                              | No transport options between settlements in the area   | Identify group to explore issues and need   | Explore car share scheme to be hosted on community website<br>Develop options for community bus<br>Develop and improve cycle paths and paths including a 'Donside Way'                         | Feasibility of social enterprise transport scheme   | AC, MAP, CNPA, COAT, Local volunteers   |
| Infrastructure between settlements                           | Improve/develop footpaths and cycle paths, particularly those linking settlements  | Support established walking groups<br>Support working group: collate information about existing paths; identify sources of support                                  | Develop signage for existing paths; publicise<br>Explore possibility of developing new paths including a 'Donside Way'   | Reinstate bridge links<br>Develop and maintain new paths  | AC, CNPA, COAT, Local volunteers, Walking groups, MAP                             |
| Accessing the area   | Bus links, access to fuel and road closure signage/approach  | Establish local group to explore issues   | Info/warnings around limited access to fuel<br>Explore ways to ensure road closure signage is appropriately updated and accurate<br>Public bus service including seasonal bus to be re-visited | Look at possible fuel points<br>Possible snow gate web cameras including at Corgarriff for roads to Ballater and Lecht<br>Explore community solutions | AC & DCC, Tourist group, Aberdeenshire Bus Forum                                  |
| <b>Theme 6: Telecommunication</b>                            |  |   |  |   |   |
| Internet access  | Broadband: low speed in villages, inadequate service from satellite providers and no access in some areas<br>Corgarriff and Glenbuchat have ongoing problems despite being promised solution | Obtain information on current proposed solutions including timescales<br>Lobby to prioritise area for broadband upgrades/solutions                                  | Explore options for mobile broadband 3G/4G<br>Explore options for broadband public access point<br>Explore options for community broadband scheme  | Address issues and need   | AC, CNPA, Broadband Scotland, Local broadband group                               |
| Mobile phone and radio signal                                | No signal or poor signal in some areas   | Identify community lead   | Explore current coverage and planned improvements of services  | Address issues and need   | Telecommunication companies, Volunteers, AC ED, Business group                    |

| Title   | Issues  | Short-term actions   | Medium-term actions  | Long-term actions   | Key Partners   |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p><b>Theme 7: Local communication</b><br/>Sharing information and working together</p> | <p>Improved sharing of local information, for groups, activities, businesses and tourism; working together<br/>Improved assimilation of information from outwith the community, including on available support and services<br/>Keep the community action plan live and activate action</p> | <p>Identify community volunteers across area to lead, including key groups and village hall committees/associations, Lonach Society, service industry<br/>Identify all existing newsletters, websites and social media sites</p>   | <p>Explore employing a communications coordinator to establish fit-for-purpose and sustainable communication networks<br/>Tasks could include: assessing need for and establishing additional newsletter, websites, noticeboards, social media; building links between existing sources; ensuring and monitoring links between key groups and community as a whole, and establishing ways to bring useful information into the community</p> | <p>Develop or re-establish Strathdon and wider area community group (e.g. trust/association [previously Strathdon Charitable Trust]) to coordinate sharing of information and support the community in working together</p> | <p>Hall committees, other established local groups, CNPA, AC, MAP</p>                          |
| <b>Theme 8: Environment</b>   |   |  |  |   |  |
| Litter and waste  | Litter currently an issue on main road through Strathdon; one volunteer collecting excessive amounts unsupported  | Identify lead and establish coordinated regular community litter pick  | Strategically placed recycling facilities/bins<br>Signage to dissuade littering  |   | Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB), PC, Local volunteers, AC, CNPA                                  |
| Biodiversity  | Protection, management and enhancement of wildlife and wild areas   | Identify lead projects   |  | Protection, management and enhancement of wildlife and wild areas   | SEPA, RSPB, CNPA, AC, KSB, Local volunteers  |
| Fishing the Don   | Coordinated approach to fishing permits for the Don   | Identify lead stakeholders and support to take forward   |  |   | Local sporting estates, local tourist group, local volunteers                                  |
| Forestry  | Process and aftermath of felling and replanting; concerns around methods and poor communication   | Identify group to take forward   | Establish formal communication   | Education about land use/management for existing residents and potential residents  | Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), Local volunteers, Landowners, CNPA, AC                     |
| Access and environment  | Sensitive relationships around land use issues between land industries and other residents in some areas<br>Working with landowners/managers to develop and sign paths  | Identify neutral support; and then local group to take forward<br>Identify community lead (see Theme 5; Access, infrastructure and transport)  | Set up land industries and communities forum   | Formal process for communication  | Local sporting estates, FCS, Local volunteers, Landowners, CNPA, AC, SAC                       |
| <b>Theme 9: Housing and resident support</b>  |   |  |  |   |  |
| Housing availability  | Ensure there is sufficient housing for rent or sale at affordable prices to match demand  | Identify group to explore issues and need  | Explore options for use of derelict properties/sites   | Community housing initiative?   | AC Housing Department, Private landlords, Rural Housing Service, DCC, Local people, Landowners |
| Housing condition   | Ensure privately rented houses are in appropriate condition, including for energy efficiency and related fuel costs; consider solutions   | Identify group to explore issues and need  |  | Tenant association?   | AC Housing Department, Rural Housing Service, Private landlords, DCC, Local people             |
| Health and social care<br>• Care at home<br>• Care in the community                     | Practical support, services and facilities to ensure all people have the option to stay in the area<br>Health visits not always available   | Explore sustainability of established and valued projects (Silver Circle, shopping bus, volunteer taxis)<br>Local groups to explore identified and emerging issues and obtain support to take forward<br>• Transport/housing<br>• Meals on wheels<br>• Care at home services | Identify issues and support sustainability of established projects<br>Project planning and feasibility of new projects   | Develop projects around health and social care  | NHS, Local GP, AC, Health & Social Care teams, AVA, Silver Circle, Local people                |



This booklet is one of a series produced by Local Rural Partnerships for a number of communities in Aberdeenshire.

This initiative is sponsored by Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership and run by Aberdeenshire Local Rural Partnerships. The aim is to provide community action plans in an attractive, easy to read, professionally printed format.

This information can now guide the community and Community Planning Partners in drawing up detailed action plans to implement the top priorities as well as addressing the other issues which have been identified. For each priority or issue this will involve agreeing who should be involved, what resources will be needed and target dates for completion. It is hoped that this process will be driven by representatives of the community with support - moral, technical and financial - from the relevant Partners.

It is important that this booklet is seen by all concerned as an account of the community's views at the time of the latest consultation, and that it will have to be regularly reviewed and updated. As some projects are completed, other issues will arise and take their place in future versions of the community plan.

We recommend that this Plan has a maximum life of three years.

**Thanks are due to all of the Strathdon Area Community who submitted their views, checked and rechecked the issues and crucially discussed and enthused about the actions. Thanks also to the volunteers who researched, wrote and checked the introduction, past and present text and to those who patiently proof read various drafts and finally thanks to all those who submitted the fabulous photos. Also thanks to the agencies who supported our Community to undertake this process.**

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