



Strathdearn Community Consultation Summary of Main Findings

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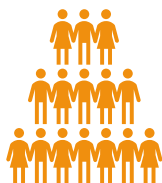
Introduction

This is a summary of the main findings from a community survey, focus groups and interviews carried out among people who live and work in Strathdearn. This work was undertaken as part of a project to develop an updated community plan for Strathdearn. The survey was carried out during September and October 2021, closing on 31 October. Alongside the survey, focus groups were held with children and young people in the area, and interviews were carried out with local business owners.

Survey respondents, focus group participants and interviewees were asked for their views about the needs of the community. Questions in the survey focused specifically on needs in eight areas: (i) children and young people, (ii) community transport, (iii) housing, (iv) village pub / restaurant, (v) visitor management, (vi) tackling climate change and the impacts of climate change, (vii) other ideas for using windfarm funding, and (viii) community communication. A short section at the end of the survey invited responses from people living in Moy, on the needs of that community.

About the respondents, participants and interviewees

The survey analysis was based on 213 responses.



Survey respondents were 56% female / 43% male (1% of respondents said 'prefer not to say' in response to this question). Around a quarter of the sample were aged 50-59. The smallest two categories of respondents were aged 12-16 and 17-19. Twenty-six respondents (about 12% of the sample) said they had a disability and half of those with a disability were aged 60 and over. Around a third of respondents said they had lived or worked in Strathdearn for more than 25 years. A further third said they had lived or worked in the area for 6-15 years. The remaining one-third of respondents were split among those who had lived or worked in the area for less than 5 years or for 16-25 years.



Two focus groups were undertaken among children and young people. These included (i) 19 primary school children aged 7 to 11, in Years P4-7 at the local primary school and (ii) four boys aged 12-13.

Seven interviews were carried out with business owners representing a range of large and small businesses in the area, including those involved in estate management, property development, B&B / self-catering accommodation provision, food production / catering, and electronic engineering.

What do people like about living or working in Strathdearn?

Most survey respondents said that the thing they liked **most** about living or working in Strathdearn was the 'beauty of the countryside'. In addition, between 50% and 75% of respondents also liked (i) the 'peace and quiet' of the area, (ii) the 'accessibility to Inverness and Aviemore', (iii) the 'good local walks' and (iv) the feeling that Strathdearn was a 'good place to raise a family'.



Children and young people said that the things they liked most about the area were (i) the people, (ii) the new community facilities in Tomatin (Hub, café, multi-use games area (MUGA)), and (iii) the rural nature of the community.



The needs of children and young people

There were nine questions in the survey about the needs of children and young people in Strathdearn. The findings indicated that the greatest needs were perceived in relation to (i) activities / clubs for primary-aged children, (ii) activities / clubs for secondary-aged children, (iii) an outdoor space for playing football, and (iv) completion of the planned BMX/skate park. Two-thirds of respondents, or more, agreed that there were needs in these areas.

The only question in this section which did not receive support from at least half of respondents was in relation to the need for a before-school or breakfast club.



There was ambivalence among survey respondents about whether there was a need for a paid individual to co-ordinate / manage young people's activities and services. Almost two-thirds of respondents (63%) agreed that there was a need for this post; however, within this group, only 37% agreed strongly. Moreover, in their comments, respondents often stated that there was a need for parents to be more directly involved in co-ordinating and managing activities for young people in the area. These views were expressed both by those who saw a need for a paid co-ordinator in the area and those who did not.

The views of children and young people

Children and young people identified the main problems in their community as (i) too much litter / dog poo lying about, (ii) a lack of activities / things to do, (iii) the need for improvements to the play parks and MUGA, and (iv) road traffic. Both younger and older children expressed a desire for a local youth group and more activities for children and young people, including football, dancing, mountain biking, gymnastics, skate boarding, swimming, etc.

Community transport

There were four questions in the survey about community transport. Survey respondents indicated the highest level of support for the idea of re-opening the train station in Tomatin – 83% of respondents agreed that this was a need in the area. A similar level of support was expressed specifically for the idea of improving transport between Strathdearn and Inverness. Overall, respondents were less likely to say that there was a need for better / more frequent transport (i) between Strathdearn and Aviemore, or (ii) within Strathdearn.



Housing

A series of questions were included in the survey about local housing needs. Just over half of respondents thought there was a need for additional affordable housing in Strathdearn. Among those who thought there was a need for additional affordable housing – and those who were not sure – the type of housing people thought was **most** needed in the next 5-7 years was **community-owned rented accommodation**. Respondents saw the least need for good quality private rented housing or owner-occupied retirement housing.



Respondents identified the following groups in most need of affordable housing: (i) first time buyers, (ii) young people who want to stay in the area, (iii) single people living alone, (iv) young couples, and (v) growing families with low or average incomes looking for a larger home.

Respondents highlighted several challenges which would need to be overcome in addressing the housing shortage in the area. These were (i) the need to persuade local landowners to sell plots of land for housing development; (ii) the lack of access to services / utilities; and (iii) the objections of some people in the community who do not want housing developments near their own homes.

Village pub / restaurant

The survey included one question asking whether there was a need for a pub or restaurant in Strathdearn. There was strong support for this idea, with 84% of survey respondents agreeing there was a need in this area. However, in their comments, respondents expressed many caveats.

Respondents saw a pub / restaurant as having an important social function in terms of providing a place for people to meet in the evening and 'bringing the community together'. However, respondents often gave reasons why a 'traditional pub' was probably no longer viable in Tomatin, and among those who thought there was a need for a pub / restaurant, not everyone was in favour of a new building being constructed. Instead, respondents suggested that current facilities (including the local café or hall) could be developed to serve this purpose on a part-time basis (i.e. two or three evenings per week).



Visitor management



The survey included 10 questions regarding services / facilities for visitors. Space for parking – at Loch Moy and at The Strathdearn in Tomatin – was seen to be the greatest need, and there was widespread agreement (in the comments) that the parking problems in these two areas needed to be addressed. A few respondents offered suggestions about how this could be done, including by (i) relocating the MUGA, (ii) providing alternative parking for Hub staff elsewhere, and (iii) identifying land near Loch Moy which could be developed for car parking.

In terms of visitor accommodation, the responses to the survey indicated that there may be a need for certain types of tourist accommodation, but the general view (from the comments) was that it should be left to the private sector to provide this.

The comments in this section highlighted ongoing tensions and ambivalence in the community about encouraging tourism.

Tackling climate change and the impacts of climate change

The survey included a range of questions about possible ways of addressing climate change at a local level. Respondents were most likely to identify a need for improved local recycling facilities – 86% of respondents agreed (strongly or slightly) that this was a need in the area. There was also relatively strong support for the development of local allotments or a community orchard – 72% agreed (strongly or slightly) that there was a need for this.



Respondents also made a wide range of suggestions for other ways that community windfarm funding could be used to tackle climate change and the impacts of climate change in Strathdearn. The three main suggestions involved (i) providing support (through a loan or grant scheme) to local residents and businesses to make their homes / premises more energy efficient, (ii) investigating the opportunities for the community as a whole to generate its own energy, and (iii) planting more trees, shrubs and flowers and supporting local wildlife conservation efforts.

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they supported possible future renewable energy developments in Strathdearn. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) indicated that they supported such developments (strongly or slightly). Inadvertently, the survey did not include space for comments following this question. However, some respondents did comment. These individuals expressed general support for renewable energy developments but were concerned about the visual impact of an increasing number of wind turbines on the hills in Strathdearn.



Other ideas for using local windfarm funding



There were six questions in the survey inviting views and comments on other ideas for using local windfarm funding. Of the options offered, the strongest support was indicated for (i) making improvements to the physical environment of the community – 91% of respondents agreed (strongly or slightly) that this was needed, and (ii) improving or extending the local path network – 84% agreed (strongly or slightly) that this was needed.



Respondents also made other suggestions for how local windfarm funding could be used for the benefit of Strathdearn. Those mentioned most often included (i) development of additional leisure / recreational facilities, (ii) establishing a community wealth fund, (iii) purchasing land for a community woodland, and (iv) offering support for local economic development. Some people made more general statements about how windfarm funding should be used. Whilst there was no clear consensus in these comments, the issue of ‘sustainability’ was a recurring theme – as was the view the community benefit funding should not be given to individuals who do not really need it.

Community communication

The survey included a series of questions about community communication. Respondents were most likely to say that they had enough information about what the Strathdearn Community Council and Strathdearn Community Developments were doing, and they were least likely to say they had enough information about what the Strathdearn Community Charitable Trust was doing. Respondents were also more likely to say that they felt able to make their views known in relation to Community Council discussions, as compared with the other two groups.



Respondents offered a range of suggestions for how communication between the three groups and other members of the community could be improved. These suggestions included (i) making available better / clearer information about the purposes of, and differences between the groups, (ii) changing the timing and format of meetings, (iii) ensuring greater transparency through better reporting; and (iv) holding democratic elections (and providing information about how members of the community can stand for election).

The Strathdearn newsletter is an important vehicle for community communication and 75% of respondents to the survey said they **always** read the newsletter; a further 22% said they **sometimes** read it. In addition, respondents were most likely to say that they preferred to receive information about what is happening in their local community **through print or by email** – rather than through Facebook, by visiting a website, or through local notice boards.

The needs of Moy



The last five questions in the survey sought views about the needs of the community at Moy. There was unanimous agreement that support was needed for winter preparedness in that community. There was also relatively strong support among Moy residents for the idea of a part-time ranger, based at Loch Moy, and for the creation of a Moy community hub. However, in relation to both of these ideas, there were caveats and concerns voiced.

In their comments, respondents from Moy often highlighted concerns about parking problems at Loch Moy and suggested that these needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The needs of businesses in Strathdearn

Interviews with business owners identified a number of challenges facing businesses in the area, including difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff (attributed to the lack of affordable housing) and a lack of local storage and office space.

Business owners suggested ways that windfarm funding could be used to support social and economic development in Strathdearn – which would lead to a growth in jobs and help young people in the area to establish their own businesses. Suggestions included providing office space or storage containers to rent; creating an online business portal; providing micro-loans to small business; and offering basic recruitment services. There was also a suggestion that community leaders should find ways of telling the story of the local area – both to local people and visitors. This would lead to a sense of shared community and generate pride in the area.



Conclusions

The findings of this consultation have identified a range of needs in the local community. In that sense, they provide useful information for local community groups in their future planning. It is possible, on the basis of these findings, to say (for example) that there was a broad consensus among the residents of Strathdearn that there are needs in relation to (i) activities for young people, (ii) affordable housing, (iii) a railway service, (iv) a pub / restaurant (for evening meals), (v) the physical environment (particularly in and around Tomatin), (vi) parking (at The Strathdearn and Loch Moy), (vii) the local path network, (viii) recycling facilities, etc. However, in many respects, the findings may be seen as presenting a 'wish list'. What these findings do **not** indicate is where the community's priorities lie. The community event, held on 4 December 2022, provided the necessary prioritisation of the wish list, and identified where action should be taken first.

However, it is also important to bear in mind that, even if certain needs are **not** prioritised highly by the community in this current exercise, this does not mean that no action will necessarily be taken to address those needs. Community priorities will be kept under review during the lifetime of the new community plan, and there is the option to bring forward less highly prioritised needs if there is sufficient community support and the resources (including funding) to do so.