

Draft Housing Direction Statement

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Summary

A value based statement generated by the Enquiry Circle proposed as reference for all housing development. Regular reviews in consultation with stakeholders aim to ensure that it stays relevant for those doing the work.

Community building

- Community engagement
- Collaboration

Social Sustainability

- Redressing the balance in the age demographics
- Affordability
- Community Ownership

Environment Sustainability

- Construction methods
- Design

Background & Objectives

This Housing Direction Statement captures the values and aspirations of the Enquiry Circle. It has been created by the Housing Group of the Enquiry Circle. It is based on the list of issues generated by the Enquiry Circle.

The purpose of this document is to provide a reference point for making decisions related to housing in the years ahead. It is our aim that all developers, landowners, landlords, investors, Park Planning Group and other relevant bodies sign up to aligning their activities with this statement.

Collective values on housing make decision making and action easier, quicker and more effective. They will shape long-term plans and day-to-day decision making. They create common ground between the perspectives and needs of individuals, organisations and the wider aspirations and values of the community.

This document describes an overall vision for our community in relation to the development of housing. We anticipate that if and when all relevant organisations have agreed to this vision, then a more detailed set of policies will be created to provide more specific and implementable guidelines for developers.

We have primarily been thinking of The Park Eco-Village when writing this, but have tried to formulate it so that it could apply elsewhere.

Common Values

Community Engagement

No development plans are ever going to please everybody in the community. It is therefore vital that we empower appropriate representative bodies to make binding decisions. To inform those decisions, landowners, housing managers and developers agree to run clear, structured and meaningful community engagement and community design processes. This includes good and timely communications. Community members in turn seek to be constructive and engaged citizens. The community affirms an ongoing commitment to using the Common Ground as a basis for engagement.

Park Planning Group already has the authority to approve or reject planning applications at The Park. If all the relevant parties agree to this direction statement, then it would also be PPG's responsibility to ensure that any proposed plans are in alignment with this statement, and with any specific policies created as extensions of this statement.

Note that we also have a Land Sales Group, which supervises the sales of private properties at The Park, and a Land and Housing Trust, which is responsible for allocating some of the affordable housing that has been created within the community. See Appendix 2 for a fuller description of both of these.

When we experience how policies are used in practice, and when new situations and opportunities arise, we usually find there is a need to revise those policies. If the Enquiry Circle were to continue, or be replaced by something like a Community Coordination Circle, as suggested by the Community Change Group, then such a body could be the appropriate authority to organise the revision of this direction statement and any associated community-wide policies.

Collaboration

Community organisations recognise that we can achieve more by collaborating than we can on our own. Collaboration begins by expressing, understanding and respecting the needs and priorities of individuals and organisations. Thereafter a synergy effect arises when different perspectives are explored and integrated creatively.

We are a community whose purpose is to demonstrate new ways for humans to live together in harmony with nature and a spiritual approach to life. New housing projects will seek to use the best ideas, skills and methods that are available within our own community: supporting our purpose as a demonstration centre. At the same time, it is equally important that we engage appropriate professional help from the wider world, especially in areas where we are short of experience.

Effective collaboration also requires trust, which can be created through adherence to the following principles, as defined in Appendix 1, from all of those involved:

- Transparency
- Open Communication

- Representative linking
- Accountability
- Integrity

Social Sustainability

Housing is a basic human need. The design and development of it shapes how our Community evolves: the quality of life and the ability of the community to fulfill its purpose.

Housing design needs to:

- support a diverse, multi-generational community
- support the community's values and principles
- enhance social interaction and connection
- be adaptable to future needs.

As documented in Appendix 3 "Comparison of Age Demographics", the average age of community members has gradually increased over time as those who have settled here get older, and at the same time, the community has attracted relatively small numbers of families with children and other young people. We have to redress this imbalance by actively supporting young people to settle at The Park, if we want to prevent The Park becoming a retirement village.

In addition, many so-called key-workers who have moved to the district to work for one of the community organisations have had difficulty finding affordable accommodation at The Park, unless they can afford to buy one of the relatively expensive eco-houses that have been built there in recent years.

The majority of any new housing development in the Park should therefore aim to provide homes for

- young adults (18-35)
- families
- community key-workers
- community elders retiring from service

New housing should be designed to be both suitable and affordable in the eyes of the people we wish to attract: namely people from the above categories who wish to actively engage in community life and contribute to the community.

Community Self-determination

For social sustainability and community cohesion, new housing projects need to maximise the amount of community-controlled housing, as opposed to privately owned housing. This can, for example, be through

- **community ownership**: properties that are owned by a community organisation, and rented out via our agreed allocations policy;
- **shared ownership**: in which the resident supplies part of the equity and a community organisation supplies the rest, which the resident then pays back over time;

- **mutual ownership:** a member-controlled co-operative owns a set of dwellings, which the members have the right to occupy provided they contribute with an agreed equity stake and/or monthly rent used to pay off a shared mortgage in addition to maintenance and services.

Shared Wealth

We appreciate that wealth manifests in many different forms including skill, experience, finance and creativity. In resourcing new developments the community encourages all those involved to be open to this when considering how they are able and willing to contribute towards the good of the whole when building new homes.

Housing is an asset, whose value in mainstream society tends to increase over time. It is important that we employ effective mechanisms to ensure that the community benefits from any such increase in asset value. It is also important that we build up our stock of community-owned assets, so we are in control of how we use any increase in their value. In particular, appropriate mechanisms should ensure that the relative affordability of community housing increases over its life-time. Further, in the long-term, community housing should generate a significant financial surplus that should be reinvested in creating more community housing.

Recycling

Building more houses on new land is not the only way to meet the housing needs of the community. Reinventing and reuse of existing buildings have a key role to play. Raising funds to buy houses that come on the market across the wider area should also be considered.

Wholeness, Beauty & Enduring Value

We seek environmentally sensitive and efficient buildings. We aim to demonstrate that we are a living practical experiment, creating places of beauty and harmony with nature, through co-creation with the intelligence of nature and demonstrating respect for all living beings.

Buildings will be designed to evolve over time according to changing needs, and to age well and adapt to their environment and advances in technology.

A consultation process needs to be undertaken to find out what the majority of the community find beautiful, so we can aim towards more of that, and likewise what is generally perceived as ugly or inappropriate, so we can avoid that in the future.

We acknowledge that there will often be conflicts between some of the aims included here: for example, affordability versus beauty. Which trade-off is most appropriate for the overall well-being of the community and also practically feasible for the developer will depend on the circumstances. In such situations, the developer can consult with the appropriate coordinating body - e.g. the Enquiry Circle or Coordination Circle - to discuss which options to choose.

Appendix 1

Meaning of terms

Effective collaboration

Transparency: The principle is that everybody should have access to information that can affect their lives. All relevant information regarding major housing developments needs to be available to those people or organisations within our community who may be affected in some way. There will be exceptions - situations where this is not appropriate, e.g. sensitive information about individuals, deliberations that require more time to be discussed with the relevant parties first, or where this is not reasonable for practical reasons. Most factual information: e.g. policies, plans and major decisions that will directly affect the community should be easily accessible to the whole community.

Open Communication: organisations should pro-actively send relevant information to other affected bodies.

Representative linking: each organisation should create appropriate links with the other bodies most affected by their activities. Representatives should be selected by the organisation to promote the interests and viewpoints of the organisation. They leave this role whenever they leave the organisation they represent or if a new representative is chosen.

Accountability: individuals and organisations who hold any role are accountable to those who (explicitly or implicitly) selected them for that role: their support base. They should report to, or meet with, their support base frequently to review their work and to receive supportive and critical feedback, and respond to that review in a timely fashion.

Integrity: all of the above will only work when each individual and organisation does what it says it will do, and owns its words and actions and the results thereof.

Key workers:

1st alternative definition: Community members whose main work involves making a positive difference in the world in a way that is aligned with the community's principles and values.

2nd alternative definition: The applicant's fit with the community, their capacity to contribute, and their length of service, measured by years of employment with or continuous part-time service (including paid self-employed status or recognised voluntary service) to any organisation affiliated with the Ecovillage project. In the case of individuals aged 65 or over, a prior demonstration of committed work shall be an acceptable criterion.

Appendix 2

Description of current allocation systems

The allocation process for **community-owned affordable housing** is currently coordinated by the **Land and Housing Trust Committee**, a representative group (with representatives from FF, NFA, Ekopia). In addition to financial criteria that may be required by Moray Council policies such as Section 75 agreements, the community has chosen its own criteria for allocating affordable housing, which have also been approved by Moray Council, and are intended to be used on an on-going basis. These criteria were created through extensive community consultation in 2011 and 2016, and used in the allocation of affordable housing in East and West Whins.

The legislation also allows the option of **landlord-generated criteria** for specific properties. This option was used by Park Eco-village Trust in the first West Whins allocations: applications were only accepted from specific groups (e.g. single person, couple, single person with young child), and an age mix was deliberately ensured through the selection process.

To summarise, the **main criteria** used in the **latest allocations** (version 7) were:

- Applications are welcome from any member of the community who wishes to be supported to reside in the area and who supports the purposes and aspirations of the Ecovillage and its associated community. These aims are broad and may be described as an intention to create a human settlement that is ecologically, economically, socially and spiritually sustainable. A commitment to the ideals expressed in 'Common Ground' is expected.
- Applicants must have been resident in the counties of Moray or Nairn for at least six months.
- Length of service to the community: This shall be measured by years of employment with or continuous part-time service (including paid self-employed status or recognised voluntary service) to any organisation affiliated with the Ecovillage project. In the case of individuals aged 65 or over, a prior demonstration of committed work shall be an acceptable criterion. Whether or not any given organisation has such an affiliation shall be determined by the Land & Housing Trust Committee from time to time.
- Candidates are expected to make a full disclosure of their financial circumstances to the Land & Housing Trust Committee. The Committee shall take cognisance of the following criteria which are based on those provided in an earlier version of the Scottish Government 'Lift' scheme (see Appendix A). This currently excludes those whose gross household income is:
 - more than £21,700 for a single adult household
 - more than £27,600 for a 2 or more adult household.

In addition, the Land and Housing Trust provided financial support to help create more affordable homes for some of the members of the **Station House Cooperative** and **Soillse Co-Housing Community**.

The **sale of privately owned housing** at The Park is supervised by the **Land Sales Group**, which is made up of representatives for the Titleholders Association, the Findhorn Foundation, New Findhorn Directions and New Findhorn Association. Its role is to check that buyers know that they are moving into an intentional spiritual community with strong ties to the FF.

Prospective buyers are sent an application form which asks them e.g. if they have done or intend to do FX, to sign up to the CG and NFA; it asks them why they want to live here and what their spiritual path is; what they bring to the community and what they seek from it. After receiving a completed application form the THA invites them to a face-to-face interview.

The LSG has the power to block a potential sale to someone who it deems would not fit in with the community, but if the seller does not agree to this, then the LSG has to pay the proposed sales price to the seller, and arrange a new sale. In practice this has never happened, and the LSG does not possess the funds to implement this.

Once a private property has been purchased, the new owner is free to rent it out to whoever they please.

Other housing within the community, e.g. owned by the FF, NFD, Station House Cooperative or Soillse, use their own allocation procedures.

Appendix 3 Comparison of Age Demographics

<u>Age range</u>	<u>Scotland 2017 %</u>	<u>The Park 2016 %</u>
18-24	8.4	1.9
25-34	17.3	2.8
35-44	15.6	18.5
45-55	18.5	24.1
55-64	16.6	32.4
65-74	13.2	18.5
75+	10.5	1.9
Over 55	40.3	52.8