



Local Councils Charter for the Lake District National Park



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Local Councils Charter for the Lake District National Park

Introduction

This Charter sets out how local councils and the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) want to work together to improve services for local people. It is the result of local discussions to establish better ways of working and to confirm existing good practice.

Local Councils

In this document, the term 'local councils' includes all town and parish councils and parish meetings whose boundaries lie wholly or partially within the Lake District National Park.

Lake District National Park Authority

This is the statutory body that oversees the management and planning of the Lake District National Park.

This charter is based on the Parish Charter for Copeland District, which was signed by the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Lake District National Park Authority, and the Chief Officer and District Association Chairman of Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) in 2007. This new form applies to the whole area of the Lake District National Park. It replaces the LDNPA's commitments under the Copeland Charter and those of the local councils within the National Park, where they apply to their relationship with the LDNPA.

A Mutual acknowledgement

- 1** Successful partnership working at the parish level can only be achieved if the partners – the LDNPA and the local councils – understand and respect each other's roles and work to complement those roles in serving the community.

- 2** The LDNPA recognises that local councils:
 - a)** are a vital part of democratic local government, representing communities at the most local, 'grass roots' level.
 - b)** are there to address the most local needs and concerns of their communities.
 - c)** are the primary source of information about community aspirations and opinions.
 - d)** provide an opportunity to foster greater community empowerment, particularly through the Quality Council scheme.

- 3** Local Councils recognise that the LDNPA:
- a)** represents wider regional and national interests.
 - b)** has strategic as well as operational roles and responsibilities.
 - c)** has to work within government financial constraints.
 - d)** has to take into account community interests wider than the parish.
 - e)** can work most effectively with local councils that are pro-active and well-organised.

B General communications and liaison

1 In the Lake District National Park there are several tiers of local government. This makes effective communication between the tiers a major challenge. Securing good communication and liaison between the local council tier and the LDNPA is a cornerstone of this Charter. This involves communication at the most strategic level – sharing each other’s aims – right down to careful liaison on specific local projects.

2 The LDNPA undertakes to:

- a)** Meet with the local councils in the National Park to discuss matters of mutual concern at least twice a year. Meeting arrangements are set out in Annex Two.
- b)** Give a considered written response to a written communication (including emails) from a local council within seven working days. Where this is not possible, to reply with an anticipated date when a full response will be given (LDNPA customer service standard).
- c)** Facilitate greater electronic communication and sharing of information between the LDNPA and local councils.
- d)** Nominate a contact person to assist local councils in resolving any difficulties with the LDNPA.
- e)** Nominate a contact person, and any other appropriate people, to participate in the meetings of the local district association of Local Councils.
- f)** Meet with individual or groups of local councils to address common issues as required.

3 Local Councils undertake to:

- a)** Endeavour to be represented at liaison meetings organised by the LDNPA and Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC).
- b)** Cooperate with the appointed contact person at the LDNPA.
- c)** Respond in writing (including email) to a written communication from the LDNPA as soon as possible or, if the matter needs a decision of the council, within five days of the council meeting.

- d) Provide copies of any Parish newsletter (email where possible) to the contact person for circulation within the LDNPA.
- e) Make efficient and effective use of IT and electronic communication methods available to local councils where practical.

C Closer joint governance

- 1 Local councils and the LDNPA share the desire to deliver 'joined-up' local government services to the general public. This requires appropriate governance arrangements where they can work together and share accountability. The LDNPA is committed to ensuring its services are effective in meeting the real needs of the community on the ground. Local councils are well-placed to report on whether or not this is being achieved.
- 2 The LDNPA will support Local Council participation (through CALC) in the County Strategic Partnership, Local Strategic Partnerships, the Lake District National Park Partnership and the arrangements for Local Area Agreements. They will also support local council participation in any future locality working arrangements.
- 3 The LDNPA undertakes to ensure local council members are appointed to the Authority in accordance with the regulations governed by Defra.
- 4 Local councils agree to:
 - a) Participate fully, including through CALC, in relevant partnerships, committees and meetings.
 - b) Ensure, through CALC, that representatives reflect the views of local councils and provide appropriate feedback.

D General participation and consultation

- 1 Public participation and consultation is one of the cornerstones of open government. It can lead to better constructed policies and a more engaged general public. Local councils represent the opinions of a particular community rather than a specific interest group. They welcome the opportunity to provide views to the LDNPA on emerging policies and plans. Consultations with local councils require careful preparation if all parties are to benefit from such exercises.
- 2 The LDNPA undertakes to:
 - a) Seek the participation of and consult with local councils on:

- i)** Community strategies, the Vision for the Lake District National Park, Management Plans and other policies that affect parishes.
 - ii)** The detailed programmes and plans for the implementation of policies that affect parishes.
 - iii)** Any specific scheme being promoted by the LDNPA that affects an individual parish.
 - iv)** Any Parish or Community Plans as necessary (see **F** Community-led planning)
 - b)** Invite local council representatives to participate in appropriate committees, working parties and meetings where emerging policies and implementation plans affecting parishes are being discussed.
 - c)** Invite local council to any public meetings and exhibitions about policies and plans affecting the parish.
 - d)** Ensure that all consultation documents, originating from the LDNPA that are sent to local councils, are prepared in accordance with the 'Consultation Protocol' set out in Annex One
 - e)** Discuss with the local council concerned at the earliest possible stage, any LDNPA-promoted plan or scheme that affects that specific parish.
 - f)** Take local council views into account before making decisions.
 - g)** Allow appropriate officers to attend local council meetings to explain and discuss policies and plans.
 - h)** Encourage members to attend similar meetings.
 - i)** Meet with the local council when particularly contentious issues cannot be resolved in any other way.
- 3** Local councils undertake to:
- a)** Respond positively, where possible, to invitations to attend consultative committees, working groups and meetings.
 - b)** Respond to all consultations (even if it is a simple 'no observations').
 - c)** Adopt a standard procedure, including arrangements for delegation, which enable the council to respond within realistic consultation deadlines set by the LDNPA in accordance with the Consultation Protocol (Annex One).
 - d)** Work constructively with the LDNPA to seek mutually acceptable solutions to contentious issues.
 - e)** Ensure the LDNPA is aware of their views and aspirations, for example through the production of a Parish or Community Plan. (see **F** Community-led planning)
 - f)** Respect the final decision of the LDNPA.

E Town and Country Planning – including participation and consultation

- 1** Most local councils are keen to become involved in the town and country planning system. Planning policies and decisions can have a substantial impact on the future of local communities. Planning policies and procedures can be very complex. They require active partnership working by LDNPA and local councils to ensure community interests are properly addressed.

- 2** The LDNPA undertakes to:
 - a)** Assist local councils to participate in and influence the statutory planning system.
 - b)** Ensure that local councils are given full opportunities (beyond statutory minimum requirements, where possible) to participate in the preparation of Local Development Frameworks. This is in accordance with the LDNPA's Statement of Community Involvement.
 - c)** Ensure all planning consultation documents prepared by the LDNPA are in accordance with the Consultation Protocol (Annex One), the LDNPA's Statement of Community Involvement and the planning regulations.
 - d)** Consult local councils on all planning applications (including revised plans where relevant) in accordance with statutory procedures. Inform the local council which person from the planning team is handling the application and be in accordance with the LDNPA's Statement of Community Involvement.
 - e)** Allow a person from the planning team to attend a local council meeting to explain the planning process with regard to major applications, when necessary.
 - f)** Invite a local council representative to attend any committee site inspection held by the LDNPA in accordance with the protocols.
 - g)** When the LDNPA's decision varies from the local council's recommendation of the local council, send a letter and copy of the report to the local council fully explaining the LDNPA's decision.
 - h)** Respond in writing to enquiries by individual local councils for further information on planning applications and changes in revised plans.
 - i)** Provide up to date information (and training where appropriate) to local councils on planning, planning policy and procedures.

- 3** Local councils undertake to:
 - a)** Respond to all consultations in relation to Local Development Framework documents within the LDNPA's deadlines.
 - b)** Respond to all consultations on planning applications within the LDNPA's deadlines.

- c) Adopt standard procedures that enable the council to respond to consultations on planning applications and Local Development Frameworks within the LDNPA's deadlines.
- d) Ensure that the council representative at any committee site inspection is well briefed and, if asked, presents the views of the council (not personal views) that are material to the planning application.

F Community-led planning

1 Community-led planning is an area where the LDNPA and local councils are increasingly working together. Several local councils have participated in or are undertaking Community-led Plans. The challenge is to ensure full community participation in such plans and link them with LDNPA policies and strategies.

2 The LDNPA undertakes to:

- a) Support and give guidance in the preparation and implementation of Community-led Plans as far as resources allow.
- b) Adopt a process for the consideration and assistance with the implementation of identified actions in Community-led Plans.
- c) Identify a dedicated contact/liaison person to assist the development of Community-led Plans.

3 Local councils undertake to:

- a) Consider engaging in Community-led Planning for their parish or joining with adjacent parishes to produce a group or ward cluster plan.
- b) Keep the LDNPA informed of any updates or amendments made to an existing Community Plan, where one exists.

G Developing the Partnership

1 This charter is written against a background of national trends towards more effective community governance through partnership working between all tiers of local government. Capable and effective local councils are a cornerstone of this process. Those with a high standard of best practice will need to maintain it. Those wishing to improve will need to be encouraged, supported and given the tools to achieve it.

2 The LDNPA undertakes to support the implementation of the Cumbria Training Strategy for Town and Parish Councils.

3 Local councils undertake to:

- a) Examine the wide range of training, development and best practice sources available which can include Principal Authorities, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), CALC or other bodies.
- b) Ensure that the identified training needs of their councillors and clerks are met.

H Monitoring and review

- 1 It is important that this document is maintained as an up-to-date statement of the partnership arrangements between the local councils and the LDNPA.

The following arrangements will be followed:

- a) A report on the implementation and effectiveness of the Parish Charter for the Lake District National Park will be on the agenda of the inter-Authority meetings described in B.2 above. (see also Annex Two below) This report will be based on feedback obtained from local councils and the LDNPA.
- b) Any complaints about the operation of this Charter (from either the LDNPA or local council side) are to be sent in the first instance to the relevant contact person.
If the matter is not resolved it will be placed on the agenda of the inter-Authority meetings (see B.2 above).
- c) The Parish Charter for the Lake District National Park will be reviewed no later than 2012.

Annex One

Protocol for written consultation documents that are prepared by LDNPA and sent to local councils

- The document should be written in 'Plain English'.
- Check whether statute or local content requires the document to be sent to all councils. Consider if CALC could provide the response on behalf of local councils.
- Check that the information required cannot be obtained by any other means or from another source.
- Ensure that enough information is available to assist consultees in making comment.
- Allow a six week minimum consultation period except where this is clearly impractical.
- Prepare a summary document or covering letter not exceeding two sides of A4 highlighting issues likely to be of particular interest to parishes. Sometimes there may be a statutory reason preventing this.
- Provide an easy to use response form. Where appropriate, use headings and questions to structure the response.
- Provide a freepost or prepaid envelope for the response.
- Send a copy of the consultation to CALC.
- If possible, make the consultation document and response forms available on a website, in a format that makes responding easy.
- In the covering letter explain how and when the results of the consultation will be considered and the decisions made. Explain how these results will be made available to those local councils that wish to see them.

Annex Two

Meetings between local councils and the LDNPA

There will be at least two meetings between local councils and the LDNPA every year. One will be hosted by the LDNPA and the other by CALC. Venues and agendas will be agreed beforehand and will include a mixture of items from the local councils and the LDNPA. National Park members will be encouraged to attend.

The LDNPA will organise 'parish tours' every year, to which local councils are invited, to meet staff and members and see the work of the LDNPA in the field.

The LDNPA may organise other events for local councils to promote their work and consult on other issues as they arise.

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