

**Gaelic Street-Names : A Standardised Approach**

**A Guidance Booklet**

**Issued by the**

**Gaelic Names Liaison Committee**

**June 2006**

## Foreword

I am very pleased to introduce this booklet that provides clear guidance for those involved in the naming of streets in Scotland. For some time there has been a desire to encourage a common approach and achieve greater consistency. The guidance within this booklet will serve that purpose.

The Gaelic Names Liaison Committee was formed in 2000 to give guidance on the use of the language within Ordnance Survey maps and data. Since that time our role has expanded through giving advice to BEAR Scotland Ltd and now Scotland Transerv and the Scottish Executive on trunk road signing as well as to the respective local authorities. We have developed and published principles on sound place-name methodology and consistent Gaelic orthography, which build on the Scottish Qualification Authority's publication of revised Gaelic Orthographic Conventions in 2005. As we now move to form the partnership, Ainmean-Àite na-h Alba / Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland, it is very appropriate to publish this booklet.

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 encourages public bodies to give prominence to the language and the use on signing gives a strong statement of our culture and heritage. For those using street-names in a private or professional capacity, or being brought up or educated in Gaelic in the relevant locality, consistency is important.

The Committee is a partnership of many organisations with an interest in the naming of streets in Gaelic, including the Scottish Place-Name Society, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Argyll and Bute Council, The Highland Council, Ordnance Survey, Comunn na Gàidhlig and Clì Gàidhlig. Local authorities interested in using this guide are encouraged to participate in the Committee if they do not already do so.

A number of people have given professional advice as the process has evolved and I would particularly commend Peadar Morgan (Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Scottish Place-Name Society) and Dr Simon Taylor (University of Glasgow and the Scottish Place-Name Society)"

This book does not provide an off-the-shelf solution for those charged with deciding on street names in Gaelic, but instead a standard approach that should result in clear, consistent and well-regarded use of the language in this context.

John C Hutchison  
Chair, Gaelic Names Liaison Committee

## A. Introduction -

Bilingual place-name signage is neither new nor unique to Scotland. However, its previous application has not been as widespread or as well planned as in many other countries. Statutory affirmation of official status and equal respect for the language in the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 give new impetus to bilingual signage, as an environmental expression and reinforcement of this regained status and respect.

One aspect of bilingual place-name signage is street-signage. Previous examples of such signs are to be found in the Western Isles, in some Argyll and West Highland settlements, in central Inverness and Dingwall, and – as the legacy of the Royal National Mòd – in a number of other towns around Scotland. The mainland developments preceded, in a largely uncoordinated and unrecorded manner, the large expansion in bilingual street-signage taking place on a new-build and replacement basis throughout most of the Highland Council area. Other local authorities may follow this example and introduce or extend Gaelic-English bilingual street-signage in their areas.

This document is designed to ensure that the Gaelic names of streets are determined in a coordinated manner to a national standard, thus strengthening their impact on Gaelic development and usage, and minimising the time and uncertainty for those required to implement a Gaelic naming policy.

Name planning, like all examples of planning for the "corpus", or fabric, of a language, relies on a general acceptance of the authority of the body concerned. This document has been prepared by Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland (GPNS), after consultation with interested bodies. GPNS is a formal partnership of public and voluntary bodies which evolved in 2006 from Gaelic Names Liaison Committee, established in 2000. The objectives of GPNS are to:

- determine authoritative forms of Gaelic place-names across Scotland with reference to both research into historical forms and consolidation on current usage,
- apply consistent orthography of Gaelic in place-names, and
- encourage the adoption of these forms of Gaelic place-names.

The work towards those objectives includes:

- applying up-dated and consistent orthography to names appearing in Gaelic in the Ordnance Survey map data,
- development and publication of Orthographic Principles for Gaelic place-names, and
- progress towards the creation of a National Gazetteer for Gaelic names.

However, although this document is designed to give a national lead, it is important to stress that it does not translate individual names; also that it is advisory, and does not detract from the ultimate authority of local authorities to determine these individual names.

What it does do is provide a model of good-practice for the process of determining a Gaelic name (§B); and a template into which new names and translations should be fitted, including issues of orthography (§D) and grammar (§E). In particular, this template provides a list of street-name elements – equivalents for road, street, lane, west, middle, etc – which will be added to as required (§F).

Settling on Gaelic street-name elements is often one of the most contentious aspects of the process, and perhaps the most serious cause of lack of consistency and clarity. An approach to the issue of current bilingual signage is proposed in the template (§C). However, continuity may occasionally be of more value to language development than consistency, and accommodation of existing localised usage will in some cases be necessary, most notably *court* as the English equivalent of *ceàrn* in Stornoway.

Corpus planning can never be static, and attempts at standardisation rarely complete, so it is anticipated that this document represents but the latest stage in a process, and GPNS would welcome comments and feedback to improve the completeness, authority and usefulness of future versions.

## B. Process –

- 1) Background RESEARCH as to the meaning of the specific of a name (bearing in mind the frequent ambiguity between common nouns and proper nouns such as surnames<sup>1</sup>), including
  - i) CONSULTATION of records of the formation of the name/street (council minutes, newspaper reports), or where no definitive archives are available
  - ii) LOCAL KNOWLEDGE or understanding, and
  - iii) COMPARISON with associated streets, looking for any implied theme.<sup>2</sup>
- 2) COGNISANCE of
  - i) local DIALECTICAL FEATURES, such as choice of gender,<sup>3</sup> within the parameters of the standard language, and
  - ii) SEMANTIC PARALLELS, in which a similar English name has been satisfactorily rendered into Gaelic elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>
- 3) Production of a PROPOSED NAME, drawing on the research and following principles of
  - i) maximum onomastic TRANSPARENCY achieved through translation from or into the English form of the name (in the absence of an extant Gaelic alternative),<sup>5</sup> but
  - ii) employing interpretive flexibility where necessary to aim for reasonable comparability of NAME LENGTH between the two languages on signage, using the same font and font size.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Eg, Rose Street (Inverness) named for Rev Rose.

<sup>2</sup> Eg, Cart Lane in a scheme of streets named for rivers.

<sup>3</sup> Eg, Rathad a' Mhuilinn, Rathad na Muilne.

<sup>4</sup> Eg, High Street > Àrd-Shràid.

<sup>5</sup> Eg, Edinburgh Road > Rathad Dhùn Èideann, not an invented name, eg, "An Rathad Mòr".

<sup>6</sup> Eg, Seven Wells Road > Rathad nan (Seachd) Tobraichean.

- 4) Public CONSULTATION on the proposed name, and reasoning behind it.
- 5) Establishment of a clear PROOF-READING system to cover each stage of writing, typing and typesetting.
- 6) RECORDING of names, on completion of the process.

### C. Current Signage –

Where EXISTING BILINGUAL SIGNS conflict with this guidance, the Gaelic will normally be changed in agreement with this guidance on sign renewal, other than where the existing Gaelic form is judged to have popular currency or particular historical resonance.

### D. Orthography –

SPELLING should be in accordance with the current Gaelic Orthographic Conventions, as modified by the orthographic principles for place-names of the Gaelic Names Liaison Committee (but see E.1). This also applies when renewing existing signs.

The ACCENT (length-marker) should be shown on all appropriate letters, whether or not the sign uses lower case or is all in upper case.<sup>7</sup>

### E. Onomastic Grammar –

- 1) In the interest of equivalence of name length, an initial ARTICLE in a street-name will not normally be shown in Gaelic where the equivalent is also absent from the English representation.<sup>8</sup> This does not apply to place-names used as unqualified street-names if the article is integral to the Gaelic name.<sup>9</sup>
- 2) Names of trees, plants, birds, animals, etc, used ATTRIBUTIVELY in English will normally be rendered in Gaelic with the singular genitive and article.<sup>10</sup>
- 3) PLACE-NAMES with a Gaelic name or form will normally be in the genitive, and in the absence of an initial feminine or plural article, lenited where feasible.<sup>11</sup> Non-Gaelic place-names will not be lenited, and names of places outwith Scotland will not be transliterated.<sup>12</sup>
- 4) SCOTS GAELIC SURNAMES will normally be in the genitive.

---

<sup>7</sup> Eg, Pàirc Àrasaig, PÀIRC ÀRASAIG.

<sup>8</sup> Eg, Main Road > Prìomh Rathad.

<sup>9</sup> Eg, Redburn > An t-Allt Ruadh.

<sup>10</sup> Eg, Oak Road > Rathad an Daraich.

<sup>11</sup> Eg, Edinburgh Road > Rathad Dhùn Èideann ; Newcastle Road > Rathad a' Chaisteil Nuaidh.

<sup>12</sup> Paris Road > Rathad Paris.

- i) If taken as referring to a particular individual, an established Gaelic byname for the person may be employed,<sup>13</sup> otherwise
  - ii) surnames with Gaelic *Mac* employ the genitive *Mhic*,<sup>14</sup> and
  - iii) other surnames employ the singular article and adjectival form of the name;<sup>15</sup>
  - iv) if taken as referring to a family or to bearers of the surname in general, the plural article and any adjectival form of the name are employed.<sup>16</sup>
  - v) Where it is unclear whether an individual, family or clan is referred to, it will normally be assumed that an individual is intended.
- 5) SURNAMES DERIVED FROM IRISH AND MANX GAELIC will be spelt in line with Scots Gaelic, including the singular genitives *Mhic*<sup>17</sup> and *Ui* (not modern Irish *Uí* – no accent, but space retained).<sup>18</sup>
  - 6) NON-GAELIC SURNAMES will normally be neither lenited nor transliterated nor subject to other changes.<sup>19</sup>
  - 7) FIRST NAMES with a Gaelic equivalent will use that equivalent in the genitive as applicable.<sup>20</sup> Where no Gaelic equivalent is available or considered appropriate,<sup>21</sup> the name will be neither lenited nor transliterated.
  - 8) TITLED NAMES given in full will use the article with the title in the genitive or abbreviation, followed by the personal name in the nominative.<sup>22</sup> Otherwise the title may be dropped in Gaelic, particularly for
    - i) names of Gaelic or major saints,<sup>23</sup> or
    - ii) where name length is an issue.<sup>24</sup>

## F. Street-Name Elements –

Following the principle of transparency in A.3.i, one Gaelic element corresponds to one English one. The only exceptions are where slight variation, for example, directional adjectives or the use of the plural, is unlikely to mark distinction between streets. Eg, East(ern) > an Ear; Gardens (plural) > Gàrradh (singular).

---

<sup>13</sup> Eg, Sir Hector MacDonald Road > Rathad Eachann nan Cath.

<sup>14</sup> Eg, McDonald Road > Rathad MhicDhòmhnaill.

<sup>15</sup> Eg, Fraser Road > Rathad an Fhrisealaich.

<sup>16</sup> Eg, Fraser Road > Rathad nam Frisealach.

<sup>17</sup> Eg, MacCarthy Road > Rathad MhicCárthaidh, not Mhic Cárthaigh.

<sup>18</sup> Eg, O'Connell Road > Rathad Ui Chonaill.

<sup>19</sup> Eg, Gladstone Road > Rathad Gladstone.

<sup>20</sup> Eg, George Road > Rathad Sheòrais.

<sup>21</sup> Eg, William Gladstone.

<sup>22</sup> Eg, Doctor MacDonald Road > Rathad an Dr Dòmhnallach ; Captain Stewart's Road > Rathad a' Chaiptein Stiùbhart.

<sup>23</sup> Eg, St Bridget Road > Rathad Brìghde.

<sup>24</sup> Eg, Doctor Livingstone Road > Rathad MhicDhunlèibhe.

## 1) NOUNS – ENGLISH TO GAELIC

English	Gaelic
Arcade	Aircèad transliteration
Avenue formerly 'tree-lined street' originally 'approach to house in its own grounds'	Craobhraid archaic 'path' – related to "aisir" 'pass, path, defile'
Boulevard	Bulabhaid transliteration
Bow	Bogha translation
Brae Scots 'slope' not related to Gaelic <i>bràigh</i> 'upper part'	Bruthach translation
Bridge	Drochaid translation
Buildings	Togalaichean translation
Business Park	Pàirc Gnothachais translation
Bypass	Seach-Rathad translation
Causeway	Cabhsair translation
Circle/Circular	Cuairt-Rathad neologism
Close 'passageway to rear premises' originally 'enclosure, courtyard'	Clobhsa extension of meaning in line with English
Cottages	Cotaichean translation
Court 'complex of buildings' originally 'courtyard at rear of building'	Cùirt 'court, yard'
Crescent	Corran analogy
Croft	Croit translation
Cross(roads)	Crois shortened appellative "crois-rathaid"
Distributor	Sgaoil-Rathad neologism
Drive often 'main thoroughfare' originally 'approach to house in its own grounds'	Slighe 'way, path, route'
Flats	Flataichean translation
Garden(s) originally 'town houses round central gardens'	Gàrradh translation
Gate Scots <i>gait</i> 'street'	Bothar 'lane, street'
Glade(s)	Loinn 'glade, area' – oblique form of "lann" 'enclosure'
Grange	Grainnseach translation

English	Gaelic
Green	Àilean translation
Grove	Doire translation
Heights	Bràigh 'upper part'
Hill	Cnoc translation
Houses	Taighean translation
Industrial Estate	Raon Gnìomhachais translation
Industrial Park	Pàirc Gnìomhachais translation
Interchange	Snaidhm-Rathaid 'knot of road'
Junction	Ceann-Rathaid 'end of road'
Lane originally 'narrow way between houses or behind terraces'	Caolraid compacted compound
Loan(ing) 'grassy track to or between fields'	Lonaig translation
Mall	Malla neologism
Medway often 'link road' originally 'central, main thoroughfare'	Meadhraid neologism
Mews 'stabling' originally 'falcon cages'	Marclann 'stable' (archaic)
Orchard	Measlann neologism
Parade	Pairèad transliteration
Park also 'recreational area' originally 'field, grazing land'	Pàirc translation
Passage	Cadha 'narrow pass, entry'
Path	Stairean 'path to house, stepping-stones' from stair 'path through bog'
Pend 'vaulted or arched passageway, esp. to back of houses'	Stuagh 'wave, gable, arch'
Place originally 'residential square with garden or open space in centre'	Ceàrn 'area, quarter (region)'
Precinct	Àrainn 'precinct(s)'
Promenade	Promanàd translation
Quay	Cidhe translation
Retail Park	Pàirc Reic translation



English	Gaelic
Ring Road	Iadh-Rathad neologism
Rise	Uchd 'ascent or side of hill'
Road	Rathad translation
Roundabout	Cearcall shortened appellative "cearcall-rathaid"
Row	Sreath translation
Square	Ceàrnag translation
Stairs	Staidhre translation
Steps	Steapaichean translation
Street	Sràid translation
Terrace row of joined houses, formerly along hillside: originally 'shelf in hillside'	Barraid compacted compound (established)
Tower	Tùr translation
Track	Frith-Rathad translation
Trade Park	Pàirc Malairt translation
Vennel French <i>venelle</i> 'small vein'	Aisir archaic 'pass, path, defile'
View	Sealladh translation
Villas formerly 'detached houses'	Aitreabhan '(large) buildings'
Walk	Ceum translation
Way	Bealach 'pass'
Wynd originally 'small winding street or lane round obstacles from a main street to rear premises'	Caigeann archaic 'winding pass'

2) ADJECTIVES – ENGLISH TO GAELIC

English	Gaelic
Central	Meadhain
East(ern)	an Ear
Great	Mòr
Inner	A-Staigh
Lower	Iarach
Main	Prìomh
Mid(dle)	Meadhanach
New <i>'newly made'</i>	Ùr
New <i>'replacement'</i>	Nuadh
North	a Tuath
Old	Seann
Outer	A-Muigh
South	a Deas
Upper	Uarach
West(ern)	an Iar

3) GAELIC TO ENGLISH – NOUNS & ADJECTIVES

Gaelic	English
a Deas	South
a Tuath	North
Àilean	Green
Aircèad	Arcade
Aisir	Vennel
Aitreabhan	Villas
A-Muigh	Outer
an Ear	East(ern)
an Iar	West(ern)
Àrainn	Precinct
A-Staigh	Inner
Barraid	Terrace
Bealach	Way
Bogha	Bow
Bothar	Gate
Bràigh	Heights
Bruthach	Brae
Bulabhard	Boulevard
Cabhsair	Causeway
Cadha	Passage
Caigeann	Wynd
Caolraid	Lane
Ceann-Rathaid	Junction
Cearcall	Roundabout

Gaelic	English
Cèarn	Place
Cèarnag	Square
Ceum	Walk
Cidhe	Quay
Clobhsa	Close
Cnoc	Hill
Corran	Crescent
Cotaichean	Cottages
Craobhraid	Avenue
Crois	Cross(roads)
Croit	Croft
Cuairt-Rathad	Circle/Circular
Cùirt	Court
Doire	Grove
Drochaid	Bridge
Flataichean	Flats
Frith-Rathad	Track
Gàrradh	Garden(s)
Grainnseach	Grange
Iadh-Rathad	Ring Road
Iarach	Lower
Loinn	Glade(s)
Lonaig	Loan(ing)
Malla	Mall
Marclann	Mews
Meadhain	Central
Meadhanach	Mid(dle)
Meadhraid	Medway
Measlann	Orchard
Mòr	Great
Nuadh	New ' <i>replacement</i> '
Pàirc	Park
Pàirc Gnìomhachais	Industrial Park
Pàirc Gnothachais	Business Park
Pàirc Malairt	Trade Park
Pàirc Reic	Retail Park
Pairèad	Parade
Prìomh	Main
Promanàd	Promenade
Raon Gnìomhachais	Industrial Estate
Rathad	Road
Seach-Rathad	Bypass
Sealladh	View
Seann	Old
Sgaoil-Rathad	Distributor

Gaelic	English
Slighe	Drive
Snaidhm-Rathaid	Interchange
Sràid	Street
Sreath	Row
Staidhre	Stairs
Stairean	Path
Steapaichean	Steps
Stuagh	Pend
Taighean	Houses
Togalaichean	Buildings
Tùr	Tower
Uarach	Upper
Uchd	Rise
Ùr	New ' <i>newly made</i> '