

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK VISIT FORUM

Meeting held on Thursday 9th June 2005 at 10.30am
Lecht Ski Centre

Present:

Bruce Luffman (Chair)	Auld Cummerton, Strathdon
Elaine Booth	Scottish Enterprise Grampian
Ruathy Donald	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Sally Dowden	Speyside Wildlife
Ian Dunlop	VisitScotland
Patricia Eccles	Nethy House, Nethy Bridge
Murray Ferguson	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Heather Galbraith	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Jim Gillies	Forestry Commission
John Grant	Rothiemurchus Estate
Alistair Gronbach	VisitScotland
Andrew Harper	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Paul Higson	ECAP
Steve Hunt	Scottish Natural Heritage
Bob Kinnaird	CairnGorm Mountain Ltd
Louise Mackie	Aberdeenshire Council
Rita Marks	Moray Tourism Forum
Alastair MacLennan	Balliefurth Farm / B&B
Elma McMenemy	Royal Deeside and Mearns Tourism Forum
Ann Napier	Association of Cairngorms Community Councils
Andy Rockall	SNH
Debbie Strang	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Deborah Tait	MBSE

Apologies:

Anne Angus	MBSE
Scott Armstrong	VisitScotland
Neil Black	VisitScotland
Simon Blackett	Braemar Tourist Association
Sandy Dear	Tourism and the Environment Forum
Andrew Coleman	UDAT
Fred Gordon	Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service
Paul Higson	ECAP Project Co-ordinator
Andrew Kirk	Cairn Hotel
James Macfarlane	Muckrach Lodge Hotel, Dulnain Bridge
Garry Marsden	Balmoral Estate
Pierre Masson	Moray Council
Mick Pawley	Angus Council
James Rattray	Blair Atholl Tourism Group
Ian Reynolds	Scottish Enterprise Tayside
Neil Sutherland	
Elizabeth Thompson	Dalwhinnie Distillery
Tim Walker	SportScotland Glenmore Lodge
Drennan Watson/Jim Conroy	Scottish LINK

Welcome and Apologies

1. The Chair welcomed all attendees and noted the apologies received.

Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

2. VisitScotland have decided not to offer the CNPA post of Tourism and Economic Development Manager to staff as a secondment opportunity as had previously been agreed. The Chair expressed regret that this was the case and advised that the post will now be subject to internal recruitment before being more widely advertised if necessary.
3. The CNPA will be allocated a single point of contact within VisitScotland at Area Director level. This is likely to be Ian Dunlop, but a final decision has not yet been made.
4. Andrew Harper confirmed that the Place Names Leaflet being produced by the CNPA would include place names of Doric origin as well as Gaelic. Elma McMenemy confirmed that she had been contacted by Rita Callander in connection with this.
5. The CNPA plan to produce a visitor information website and are liaising with other website providers to ensure that there are clear remits for each site. It was noted that the Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce are developing a new site, funded by Leader +, CNPA and the Highland Council. They will have a listing for every business in the Park.
6. Debbie Strang advised that Sandy Dear had reviewed the CNP Marketing Strategy in light of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy. The two strategies do fit together but the Marketing Strategy will be amended to refer to the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and will be included as an annex to the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.
7. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Cairngorms Visitor Survey summary booklet will be sent to all businesses within the park and will advise that the full documents are available on request.
8. The CNPA have started holding meetings with partners to progress the actions contained within the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, and this is also feeding into the Park Plan. Debbie Strang also confirmed that she had met with the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute to discuss the monitoring framework for the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

Brand Management Committee

9. Heather Galbraith updated on the decisions made so far by the Brand Management Committee (BMC), as detailed in Paper 1. The BMC decided that:
 - Use of the brand by tourism businesses will be subject to membership of a quality assurance scheme and green tourism business scheme. For tourism businesses who do not fit into a current QA scheme, VisitScotland will be preparing Code of Conduct agreements, which will be piloted in the CNP.
 - Tourism Associations and Community groups could display the brand on websites and literature alongside a short note explaining the criteria for use of the brand by individual tourism businesses.

There followed discussion on the decisions made by the Brand Management Committee.

10. Concerns were expressed that the VisitScotland Green Tourism Business Scheme is too expensive for small tourism operators. Alistair Gronbach advised that membership of the scheme starts at around £50 and that the VisitScotland scheme was the largest in Europe with 700 members. He

added that the CNPA were in a position to influence development of the scheme. VisitScotland are also planning a marketing campaign to raise awareness of Green Tourism with consumers. Bob Kinnaird advised that CairnGorm Mountain had found the GTBS audit process really useful.

11. The Chair expressed concern that allowing the use of the brand by Tourism Associations and Community Groups missed an opportunity to promote QA membership, as he felt it could potentially allow businesses to gain advantage through association with the brand without meeting any of the criteria. There followed extensive discussion on this point, with many varying opinions expressed. It was felt by some members that tourism groups should only be granted use of the brand if all members met the individual criteria for use. Others felt that the brand should simply indicate a geographical region, rather than also conveying the brand values of quality and sustainability. The majority of these points had been considered and discussed at length by the BMC at their last meeting. It was agreed that the full minutes of this meeting would be distributed to the group again, and a paper incorporating all the comments made and further developments would be discussed at the next meeting.

HG

Europarc Assessment

12. Debbie Strang updated on the recent Europarc assessment visit. The visit had gone well and Richard Partington had been particularly interested in the concept of directly-elected board members. The feedback from him during the visit was largely positive.

Sustainable Tourism Conference

13. Debbie Strang updated on plans for the first annual sustainable tourism conference, to be held in October 2005. Ideas for possible topics were welcomed, and John Grant suggested that it would be useful to look at the role of land managers in delivering the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.
14. The date for the conference was set as Wednesday 26th October, and the Lecht was suggested as a potential venue. It is expected that around 70 people would attend. Any comments or suggestions should be fed to Debbie Strang.

All

Outdoor Access

15. Murray Ferguson updated the group on the management of Outdoor Access within the Park, as detailed in Paper 3. The new Scottish Outdoor Access Code has been welcomed by commentators, and Richard Partington, the Europarc assessor, had been impressed by the new legislation.
16. The Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF) has been set-up and members have had 2 meetings to date. A Chair will be elected in due course, but Murray Ferguson will act as Chair in the interim.
17. Bob Kinnaird asked if there were any plans to set up an access trust on the Western side of the Park. MF replied that it was too early to say, but that potentially there could be more than one trust set up within the Park. Rita Marks queried the relationship between neighbouring Outdoor Access Forums and MF assured her that information is shared to ensure a consistent approach.
18. Alastair McLennan noted the key role that tourism providers have in ensuring that visitors understand the legislation and Andy Rockall advised that SNH provide information to tourism businesses. There was concern that some businesses had found it difficult to obtain multiple copies of these publications. The role of VisitScotland in relation to the new legislation was discussed. VisitScotland have a representative, Scott Armstrong, on the LOAF and may also be represented on the National Forum. It was agreed that all tourism businesses should have at least one copy of the full outdoor access code, and that training for TIC staff should be considered.

Scottish Enterprise Grampian - Royal Deeside Study

19. Elaine Booth gave a presentation on the current SEG study looking at the economic impact of tourism within the SEG area of the Park.
20. Ian Dunlop said that he was surprised the figures showing a drop in QA levels of serviced accommodation in the area. Elaine Booth agreed that the consultants would also look at levels of GTBS participation in the area. The impact assessment had looked only at economic impact.
21. The next stage in the study is a series of three action planning workshops which will take place in Dinnit, Ballater and Braemar. They will be held in the morning, afternoon and evening respectively and are aimed at partners and industry representatives.
22. MBSE have also been running a tourism study, focusing on Badenoch and Strathspey. The importance of thinking at a Park-wide level was stressed. There are plans to set up regular meetings between the Economic Development Officers of the CNPA and the LECs.
23. It was noted that changes to the LEC boundaries mean that Badenoch and Strathspey will in future come under the umbrella of Inverness and Nairn Enterprise while the former MBSE will focus solely on Moray.

Brief Project Updates

Signage

24. Debbie Strang updated on the entry point signage project. Signs are now in place at all the mainline railway stations within the Park. The interim road signs are in place on Highland Council and BEAR Scotland roads. Aberdeenshire and Moray council signs will follow shortly. The permanent granite markers have been mocked up in banner form. Care has been taken to keep stakeholders as up-to-date as possible, without overloading them with information as the project constantly evolves. A briefing update has been prepared for community councils and this can be more widely circulated.
25. As regards timescale, the first granite marker should be in place by the end of the year. The funding package is still being confirmed. The likely cost of the granite markers has been reduced from £930,000 to around £650,000, but exact costs are not yet known. Some sites will more expensive than others, especially where landscaping and visitor information provision are included. It was noted that there is still some negative feeling about the cost of the project.

VisitScotland Expo

26. Heather Galbraith introduced Paper 4, summarising the CNPA's presence at VisitScotland Expo with industry partners. Detailed information was gathered from the buyers and this will be circulated to businesses within the park through the Chamber of Commerce, along with guidelines on how these should be followed up. Trish Eccles advised that she had found the contacts from Expo 2004 very useful and had successfully pursued the German market in particular.

MBSE Learning Journey

Action

27. Sally Dowden updated on the recent learning journey to Slovenia and Austria as part of the MBSE tourism study. The group visited Bled in the Julian Alps region of Slovenia and Zell am See / Kaprun in Austria, both world-class tourist destinations. Both areas had strong destination management companies, funded by locally generated tourist bed taxes. There were also clear individual remits for all tourism stakeholders.
28. On the subject of a bed tax, Ian Dunlop stressed that the both areas visited would have a very different tax regime to the UK, where VAT is charged at the standard 17.5% on tourism products with little coming back to support tourism. He also noted that 25 years previously the Spey Valley Tourist Board had considered a similar private-sector led bed tax initiative. Bob Kinnaird advised that the Scottish Tourism Forum and Tourism Innovation Group are looking at the issue of tourism VAT levels. John Grant pointed out that, in a similar case, the tax on river fishing was successfully changed to allow revenue to be directed to the Rivers Board for direct improvements.
29. The ABSC Marketing Ltd AGM will take place on Tuesday 14th June at 11am at Aviemore Highland Resort.

AOCB

30. Elma McMenemy advised that the majority of Blue Badge Guides are based in the central belt, but regularly guide tours to the Cairngorms area. She suggested that some sort of distance learning guide to the area might be useful. Heather Galbraith agreed to investigate the possibility of amending the Cairngorms Connections course into a distance learning pack. **HG**
31. Alistair Gronbach advised that he was meeting with Martin Fitton, Chief Executive of the Association of National Park Authorities to discuss the new UK National Parks branding project. Andrew Harper will also be attending the meeting.
32. The Chair reminded members that they are entitled to claim mileage expenses for attending meetings. This does not apply to members representing public agencies. Anybody who would like a claim form should contact Heather Galbraith.
33. Concern was expressed about the impact of new draft European Drinking Water Regulations 2005 on small tourism businesses within the Park. The Scottish Executive has issued a consultation paper "The Draft Private Water Supplies (Scotland) Regulations 2005" The paper is open to industry consultation with the consultation period closing on 17th June 2005 and members were encouraged to respond. Heather Galbraith agreed to distribute information on the consultation to members. **All**

Date of Next Meeting

34. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 14th September 2005.

The meeting finished at 1.15pm

Heather Galbraith
June 2005