

**CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
FINANCE COMMITTEE**

FOR DECISION

**Title: RATIFICATION OF EXPENDITURE PROPOSAL:
 ANGUS GLENS RANGER BASE**

Prepared by: Pete Crane, Senior Visitor Services Officer

Purpose

To approve the Angus Glens Ranger Base expenditure proposal.

Recommendations

- That the Committee approve the Angus Glens Ranger Base expenditure proposal prior to submission to the Scottish Executive.

Executive Summary

Approval is sought for a new expenditure proposal.

- Give a grant of £82,000 to assist with the financial package to build a ranger base at Glen Doll. The total cost is £546,000 and details of other funders are included in the attached Expenditure Justification Form.
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**RATIFICATION OF EXPENDITURE PROPOSAL:
ANGUS GLENS RANGE BASE**

Discussion

1. The Finance Committee is invited to review the attached Expenditure Justification (Annex 1) and approve if they see fit, allowing the proposal to be passed to the Scottish Executive for final approval.

PETE CRANE
31 August 2005

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CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

EXPENDITURE JUSTIFICATION

1. Title

Angus Glens Ranger Base

2. Expenditure Category

Project		Grant	✓	Consultancy	
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3. Description

- Brief overview of project/activity
- Specific elements for which support is sought (if not whole project/activity)

The Angus Glens Ranger Service is currently based in a combination of rented accommodation and a temporary 'port a cabin' building. This accommodation is of poor quality, does not meet the needs of the rangers or the visitor and is unsustainable in the medium term. The base is tucked away in Glen Doll out of site of visitors and has no reception area suitable for visitors.

The proposal is to build a ranger base at Glen Doll designed to meet the needs of visitors, land managers and the ranger service.

The proposed base will have: -

- Public reception area with information and interpretation
- Public Toilets
- Ranger Offices
- Group Room

4. Rationale and Strategic Fit

- Objectives/intended beneficiaries
- Evidence of need and demand
- Fit with National Park Plan/Corporate Plan/other relevant strategies
- Linkages to other activities/projects

Glen Doll is a significant visitor destination within the National Park receiving some 63,000 visitors per annum (6yr average from 1998-2003). Although total visitor numbers to the Park are based on models not counts this amounts to some 5% of the estimated total visitors to the Park.

The site is within easy access of Perth, Dundee and Fife. Some 315,000 people live within 90 minutes drive of Glen Doll.

The road end at Glen Doll has a car park developed by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS). This is an attractive riverside site with open areas of grass, picnic tables and views of high mountains. The car park and surrounding environment appears to be a destination for many visitors.

4. Rationale and Strategic Fit (continued)

A network of paths leads from the car park into the adjacent forest. This network has been improved by FCS and partners involved in the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project (ECAP). The site is also a starting point for the traditional 'drove roads' Jock's Road and the Capel Mounth. Eight Munro's (mountains over 3000ft) lie within relatively easy reach of Glen Doll.

A small quarry close to the entrance of the car park is popular with group's abseiling and Red Craigs, the rock outcrops to the SE, are a well-used rock-climbing venue.

Corrie Fee Natural Nature Reserve, managed by Scottish Natural Heritage, is some 3.5km from the car park. Located on the southern edge of the Cairngorms, this reserve (formerly part of Caenlochan NNR) is best known for beautiful alpine flowers, golden eagle and mountain hares. The corrie is also popular all year round with hill walkers and is well used for winter climbing - when conditions allow.

This combination of recreational opportunities in close proximity to a large number of people makes the site a popular destination. Recognising the need to balance conservation with the needs of visitors and land managers, Angus Council, working in partnership with FCS, SNH and the Cairngorms Partnership, established a Ranger Service in Glen Doll in 1998. The service also receives European Funding until December 2005.

The proposed base has been designed to the highest environmental standards using locally sourced larch external cladding and geo thermal heating. The chosen site is at the head of the car park where it will be clearly visible to visitors. The existing base south of the car park is hidden from visitors. Staff and information and interpretation in the new building will help in the delivery of the four aims of the National Park.

Conserve and Enhance the Special Qualities of the National Park.

The management functions carried out by the ranger service on the NNR, Glendoll forest and the associated paths are considered essential by Angus Council, FCS and SNH. The need, identified by partners in 1998, for a ranger service based in the area still exists.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

The visitor management role and promotion of responsible access by the rangers is aimed at encouraging visitors to use the area in a sustainable way. This work includes activities from the mundane need to ensure that litter is collected to more subtle messages about low impact camping and wildlife disturbance. This input is needed on site at a nationally designated area that receives such high visitor numbers.

The ranger base has been designed as an exemplar of current best practice in sustainable design. Interpretation of this design will be a feature of the building.

The new design rationalises the existing structures in the car park and creates a new toilet facility that can be open while the building is unstaffed.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Special Qualities

The promotion of understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area is a prime function of both the ranger service and the building. The location at the 'head' of the car park will ensure that all visitors to the site will clearly have the opportunity to find out more about the special qualities of the area. The building is designed so that orientation, information and interpretation will be available to the visitor without a direct input from staff.

4. Rationale and Strategic Fit (continued)

The group meeting area in the base will allow the ranger service to provide a wider range of educational programmes to visiting groups. The service currently provide educational days for local school and youth groups.

Sustainable Economic and Social Development

The proposed base has the 'weakest fit' with this aim. RGA Consultants, tasked with undertaking a feasibility study of the base, identified that a development of this scale was unlikely to have a large economic impact particularly as the base is designed to meet the needs of existing visitors rather than increase capacity.

The base will generate some income from small sales and it is anticipated that there will be an increase in the collection of car park fees simply through a greater site presence. The reception area will also have a 'mini TIC' function in disseminating visitor information about the Glens. This is likely to encourage some additional spend locally.

In addition the proposal would meet the desire of encouraging 'A Park for All'. Glen Doll is within 90 minutes drive of some 125,700 people ACORN profiled as of 'moderate means' or 'hard pressed'. This indicates that it is accessible to a large number of less well off people. Lack of good public transport links make the journey to Glen Doll difficult but anecdotal evidence from Angus Council and officers of the Park indicate that the car park/picnic site is a popular destination with less affluent visitors, particularly from Dundee. This appears to be a site that is not just accessible to the 'fit and the few'.

The proposed base is designed to allow easy access for all.

5. Option Analysis

- Are there other ways in which the above objectives could be achieved?
- If so, why is this preferred option?

Angus Council developed a partnership comprising FCS, SNH, and CNPA to assess the feasibility of developing a new ranger base for the Glens Service. RGA Consultants were appointed to undertake a feasibility study:

"Achieving consensus on function and location presented challenges"

It is clear that no one location will serve glens Isla, Prosen, Clova and Esk. A site at Dykehead may 'capture' visitors to Prosen and Clova. Kirmuir and Edzel were considered to be too far removed from the visitor to have any impact. Even a site at Clova Hotel may cause some visitors to pause but no one was convinced that any of these locations would reduce visitor numbers to the Glen Doll site. Building a base away from Doll would remove the rangers from the very people that they need to meet and manage. A site away from Glen Doll would leave a significant visitor management problem in the Glen not to mention a lost opportunity to positively influence a large number of visitors to the National Park. A site away from Glen Doll would also remove the rangers from their management role at Corrie Fee.

Initially Angus Council had wanted to build a much larger residential facility but the other partners were keen to reduce the base to its principle functions. It was also felt that a larger facility was unlikely to be sustainable in the long term.

5. Option Analysis (continued)

Angus Council has consulted with their local advisory group 'the Friends of Glen Doll'. This group comprises land managers, user groups and neighbours. The group is supportive of the new base. However, two residents in Glen Doll have objected to the planning application preferring an upgrade of the existing location.

6. Risk Assessment

- Are there risks to the CNPA in funding this project/activity?
- Are there risks in the project/activity not being delivered to required timescale/quality?
- Comment on the likelihood of such risks occurring, their potential impact, and (where appropriate) any action that would be taken to mitigate the risks.

Construction of an innovative design in a relatively remote location always carries inherent risks. However, Angus Council have considerable experience in project management of this scale (and much larger) and any grant application will be made subject to the building receiving all necessary warrants, permissions and certificates of completion.

There is a risk that essential European funding will not be forthcoming but again any grant application will be subject to all partnership contributions and European funding being in place.

Some residents have expressed concerns that the single track road to Glen Doll is dangerous and the new facility will worsen the situation. Angus Council as the applicant and roads authority do not consider this to be a significant problem.

There is a risk of negative publicity linked to the perception of large public expenditure. There is a unique twist at Glen Doll because a previous facility funded by SNH had to be demolished some time after construction. Ironically the new base is to be located on the site of the old structure. However, the case for this development is so strong that judicious use of positive press releases can reduce this risk.

There are concerns about the long term funding of the rangers located in the base due to the loss of European funding in December 2005. This funding only forms part of the funding which also includes contributions from Angus Council, SNH and FCS. The ongoing CNPA ranger services review has yet to determine our policy on rangers. Nevertheless, while there is uncertainty both SNH and FCS need site management at Glen Doll. Hence their support for the new base. Therefore, new funding support for the rangers will be developed.

CNPA have made a £10,000 short term commitment in the Corporate Plan to fund the 2005/06 shortfall. There is no commitment or any indication of a commitment beyond this one off payment.

7. Costs and Funding

- Detail the financial costs of the project/activity
- Detail the sources of funding
- Detail any non-monetary costs to the CNPA (such as Member or staff input)

	£	
<u>Funding Package</u>		
Angus Council	82,000	(1)
Forestry Commission Scotland	82,000	(1) (3)
Scottish Natural Heritage	82,000	(2)
CNPA	82,000	(2)
European Funding	218,000	(2)
	546,000	
Notes:		
(1) Confirmed.		
(2) Applied for.		
(3) Including some in-kind larch.		
Staff time to date - 15 days; future commitment - 10 days.		

8. Deliverables/ Impact Assessment

- What end products/outputs will be delivered?
- How will success be measured?
- How will the project be monitored and what will be the feedback to the CNPA?

The following outputs will be delivered:-

- A high quality ranger base built to demonstrate best practice is sustainability.
- A greater ranger presence at Glen Doll.
- Improved visitor information.
- Improved visitor management.
- Improved public access
- Improved opportunities for visitors to learn more about the special qualities of the area.
- Improved opportunities to work with groups particularly school pupils and youth groups.
- A rationalisation of buildings at Glen Doll.

As part of the grant Angus Council will be asked to continue to provide data from car and people counts and undertake period visitor surveys to determine the quality of visitor's experiences.

Less tangible benefits include a clear commitment to the Angus Glens from the CNPA, and a commitment to work with three key partners.

9. Value for Money

- In view of the costs, do the deliverables appear to offer value for money? (consider cost of comparable projects, where available).

Cost estimates were prepared by Riach and Hall architects and verified by officers of Angus Council.

Discussion with consultants unconnected with this work but undertaking a feasibility study for a similar scale facility at Laggan indicated that a figure in the region of £500,000 was likely for a new build to the standards outlined.

10. Exit or Continuation Arrangements (where applicable)

- If this is not a discrete, time-limited, project or piece of work, what are the exit/continuation arrangements for when CNPA support ceases?

This is a discrete time limited application.
See also section 6 (Risk assessment).

11. Additionality

- Does this work/project substitute for or duplicate work being carried out or proposed by others?
- What would be the effects of the CNPA not supporting the project? Would it proceed without CNPA support?

Without support from CNPA the project will not proceed in its current form.

12. Stakeholder Support

- Have the organisations and/or communities that would have an interest in this work/project been involved, and are they supportive?

The application has the support of Angus Council, FCS, SNH and Angus Councils advisory group 'Friends of Glen Doll'.

Two residents have objected to the new build suggesting that the existing base at Braedownie farmhouse is upgraded. This site is in a poor location and is not owned by Angus Council.

13. Recommendation

It is recommended that we approve a grant of up to £82,000 to develop a new ranger base at Glen Doll as outlined subject to: -

- (1) Equal grant aid from SNH, FCS and Angus Council and a successful bid for European funding.
- (2) Angus Council developing, owning, maintaining and insuring the base.
- (3) Angus Council gaining all necessary consents, permissions and warrants for the building.
- (4) The building being used as a ranger base with public toilets, visitor reception and meeting room. Any change of use to be agreed by all funding partners.
- (5) The base being clearly linked to the National Park by appropriate use of the Park Brand.
- (6) Officers, Board and employees of CNPA to have reasonable access to the building to undertake their work as a National Park Authority. Such access is unlikely to be more than six times per year.
- (7) Interpretation within the base being developed in partnership with the CNPA and others, to an interpretive plan and in line with the Cairngorms Interpretation Framework.
- (8) Angus Council continuing to monitor visitor numbers and undertaking a qualitative visitor survey every three to five years.

Name: Pete Crane

Signature: _____

Date: 30/08/05

14. Decision to Approve or Reject

Head of Group

Name: Murray Ferguson	Signature:	Date: 30/08/05

Management Team (CNPA)

Approved funds held in Operational Plan.		
Name:	Signature:	Date:

Finance Committee

Name:	Signature:	Date:

Board

Not necessary.		
Name:	Signature:	Date:

Sponsoring Department (SEERAD)

Name:	Signature:	Date: