

Cairngorms Tourism Emergency Response Group
Meeting Note
11th May 2020

1. Welcome and introductions

Present: Geva, Murray, Janet, Pete, Mark, Colin, Alistair, Chris F, Laurie, Chris T, Grant (from 12:00)
Apolo: Rhona

There was a general discussion on recent government messages, and in particular potential confusion between Scotland & UK government advice. National Parks in England will effectively now be open this week as travel for exercise is permitted in England. It was agreed that consistent clear messages needed to come from Scottish government and cascade through government agencies and DMOs to make it clear that exercise should still take place close to home and without unnecessary travel.

Grant joined towards the end of the meeting, having been in the first STERG countryside sub-group meeting with Scottish government, VisitScotland, SNH and NPAs where these issues had been discussed. An agreed clear message about access to the countryside will be agreed with ministers today. Future meetings will look at the questions that need to be answered before restrictions on access to the countryside can be relaxed, and how this might happen, for example a phased approach to the distance that it is acceptable to travel. There are also plans for wider meeting including groups such as Scottish Land and Estates, SportScotland and Environment LINK.

2. RESPOND

Business Support update

Highland Council have, in the last week, launched the multiple property scheme, but there has been no great surge in applications. There are 3-400 applications to process this week, which should be processed within 10 working days. They are mostly straightforward, but need govt clarification on some issues, notably around the requirement for self-catering properties to generate 30% income. Of a total of 4200 grant applications, 90% have been paid already. Half of the outstanding applications are waiting on more information, some are ineligible and there are a tiny minority where there has been an error on the part of the council.

Aberdeenshire Council. The newly self-employed grant scheme has had fewer applications than anticipated, and there have been quite a few incomplete applications that need more information. Alistair flagged up that there has been a total of £621 million paid across country on the £10/25k retail and hospitality grants.

Laurie updated that Moray Council had paid out £12.38 million through 1117 approved grants.

HIE. Rhona sent apologies, but gave an email update (included below at end of meeting note).

Key issues from DMOs/ VisitScotland

All DMOs are finding an issue with the requirement for businesses such as B&Bs to have a business bank account to be eligible for support. Although they should have a business account, in practise, many don't, and the government have shown no flexibility on this to date. DMOs will continue to lobby on this with FSB.

CBP had a call for members with Kate Forbes / Fergus Ewing last week. The call was not recorded so here is no formal record, but members indicated they found it useful. Business survey findings were highlighted in the briefing note to ministers.

CBP have the results of the Business barometer Q1 which closed 23/4 with around 100 responses. As expected short/medium term confidence is at its lowest level ever, but long term confidence (looking 2 years ahead) was surprisingly close to long term average.

VisitAberdeenshire are analysing the results of their business survey. Business workshops on Thursday will guide their work ahead for the year. They echoed the need for consistency on stay home messages, with a different local message about taking exercise locally vs a wider message about not travelling to other destinations.

VisitScotland's DMO support fund went live on Thursday last week in recognition of the fact that DMOs are performing a critical role at the moment, but are also small vulnerable organisations that need support. The scheme has a simple light touch application process and quick turnaround. Chris Taylor is happy to speak to DMOs in advance of application, but stressed that there is no need to gather huge amounts of supporting information.

Chris T also gave an update on the STERG work on developing guidance for businesses on safe re-opening. A VS webinar series with leadership team will start tomorrow with a session on recovery planning with Riddell Graham which will be followed by a marketing update with Vicki Miller in 2 weeks.

3.RESET:

- Overview of consumer insights and other research.

The latest [VS marketing intelligence 06/05](#) report is now available.

Heather ran through some key stats from STEAM 2018 and visitor survey 2019 to give an indication of what a normal summer holiday season (July / Aug) looks like:

Total number of visitors in July & August: 574,000

Average daily visitor number: 18 500 (75% in Badenoch & Strathspey)

Average daily economic impact: £1.27million

Total FTE employment supported: 7,700 jobs

Day trip visitors: 19% / Overnight: 81%

Domestic: 68%. *Of domestic visitors:* Scotland: 66%; England: 32%; NI: 1%; Wales: 1%

Of Scottish Visitors: 50% near visitors (Highlands/Aberdeenshire/Perthshire)

95% of domestic visitors were happy to give their postcode details, which we now have.

Current communication priorities

Most messaging remains the same, with the exception of the increased opportunities for local exercise, and this should be reinforced in light of recent changes. Francoise van Buuren will be attending CTERG next week for fuller discussion on communications.

4.RESTART

Scenario Planning for Visitor Management. A draft paper was circulated in advance of the meeting, planning for the worst case scenario of having to manage recreation pressures in the countryside as lockdown is eased. This was discussed with CNPA board on Friday, with support for CNPA quickly employing seasonal rangers to help where necessary. A follow-up meeting with key land managers and CBP will take place on Friday. Pete to share ranger recruitment details with CBP to promote posts as they will need experience and local knowledge. All to email any other comments to Pete or Murray.

It was agreed that we should include weekly updates at the meeting on how likely we think we are to have a sudden explosion of visitors. VisitAberdeenshire are running a webinar with a consumer insights specialist on Thursday, which will look at consumer behaviour triggers. All are welcome to attend, contact Chris F for details. CBP are seeing pent up demand for visiting the area showing on

social media, from repeat and near visitors, and will be running a visitor survey in the next couple of weeks to get an idea of customer demand. They are working with MoraySpeyside, Visit Inverness Loch Ness and Outdoor Capital UK on the questionnaire to allow comparison between destinations.

CBP ran workshops over 2 sessions looking at the challenges associating with opening in a way that gives communities, staff and visitors confidence. Follow-up sessions are planned to take forward some of the workshop outcomes. Heather and Mark to agree CNPA input to the groups.

5. RECOVER

Cairngorms National Park Recovery Plan was previously circulated as a draft paper. It should be signed off at June board meeting, but will remain a work in progress. Grant will be drafting a new version later this week and asked for any comments ASAP.

6. Any Other Updates

None

7. Date of next meeting.

Monday 18th May, focus on communications.

RESPOND (March 2020 – May 2020) Immediate provision of information and support to businesses

RESET (June 2020 – September 2020) Support, planning and preparation for restart

RESTART (June 2020 – February 2021) Support and guidance for safe re-opening

RECOVER (September 2020 – December 2022) Guidance and support for operating in a new post COVID-19 environment

Remit of Group: The group has been set up to provide consistent and comprehensive analysis of the implications of Covid-19 for tourism, to coordinate communications with the tourism industry, ensure close working between key agencies and the private sector, to gather, share, facilitate, interpret and disseminate information and agree relevant actions and delivery plans.

Membership: The Group consists of representatives from Cairngorms Business Partnership, VisitAberdeenshire, MoraySpeyside, VisitScotland, Aberdeenshire Council, The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and CNPA (Chair).

HIE email update:

Pivotal Enterprise Resilience Fund

Additional allocation of money to this fund is encouraging for those businesses who have submitted applications. A very high number of applications into the fund and HIE working night and day and throughout the weekend to assess.

VS new DMO fund – Chris T likely to update.

HIE continues to feed into STERG – agenda and minutes of that are available on VS site. Most recent agenda covered:

1. Scenario planning – led by Scottish Gov
2. Industry survey – VS proposing another industry survey maybe in June
3. Action Plan for STERG – continued development – phase 1 & 2 online [VS.org](https://www.visit-scotland.org) already
4. Destination support – VS new fund

5. Preparing for opening – STA leading work with UK Hospitality and others re consistent approach to reopening (social distancing rules, modifications, cleanliness standards, self-certification etc)
6. Funding packages update – PERF, Hardship, Self Employed etc
7. Community concerns around exposure to COVID-19 from visitors

Cairngorm Mountain update

COVID-19

As you will know, the COVID-19 lockdown has temporarily closed Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd and most staff are currently furloughed. The economic impact of the pandemic is being felt across all of Scotland's business sectors and communities and is currently the prime focus for Highlands and Islands Enterprise. HIE remains open for business throughout the region, with staff able to work from home. Information on government support for businesses and communities affected by COVID-19 is available at www.findbusinesssupport.gov.scot

Business case / options appraisal

HIE staff are continuing to do as much as possible to progress an options appraisal and business case for future investment at Cairngorm, though the timescale for completing this work has been affected by COVID-19.

Funicular strengthening plans

HIE's application to carry out an extensive programme of strengthening works to address structural failures in the Cairngorm funicular infrastructure is due to be considered at a virtual meeting of the Cairngorms National Park Authority on 22 May. Planning documents and comments from statutory consultees and the wider public can be viewed on the [CNPA website](#)

It had been HIE's intention to carry out the strengthening works during 2020, subject to planning and other statutory consents being granted, a full options appraisal and approval of a detailed business case, as previously reported. However, uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 outbreak means that this timescale is currently being reviewed.

Masterplanning

The specialists commissioned by HIE to carry out a wide-ranging masterplanning exercise for Cairngorm expect to share findings from their initial engagement sessions and online survey shortly. Virtual meetings are being planned with key stakeholders this month, with wider public engagement due to follow in June. More than 1,600 individuals and businesses submitted responses to the survey in February and March.

Audit Scotland

Audit Scotland is progressing the detailed Section 23 review of Cairngorm Mountain, covering the period from 2014, when HIE procured a new operator, to 2020. The auditors have conducted extensive research, including interviews with many stakeholders. HIE is continuing to engage with the audit team and has provided full access to all the information we hold covering the period in question.

VisitScotland Email Update (from Jo Robinson)

Updates from VS this past week:

- Vicki's most recent market intelligence report attached.
- We announced a VisitScotland led [funding package for destination and sector organisations](#). This is being funded out of VisitScotland's core budget and the objective is to mitigate some of the losses of membership income that many tourism organisations will experience over the coming months. We have had a good geographic spread of applications so far, with over 100 downloads of the guidelines and 45 of the application form.

- A [programme of live webinars](#) with VisitScotland Directors begins tomorrow, with a line-up of Riddell Graham (my director in Industry & Destination Development), followed by Vicki Miller (Marketing & Digital), Paul Bush (Events) and Chris Greenwood (Insights).
- We've seen many more virtual events and training around the country taking place for businesses; [collated here](#), including a VisitAberdeenshire webinar on [Where next for tourism in North East Scotland?](#)
- Digital Tourism Scotland: the content currently available on [digitaltourismscotland.com](#) has been moved to [VisitScotland.org/supporting-your-business/digital-skills](#). Anyone visiting the old site will be redirected to this new page. This move will help to ensure that digital advice content is available to support industry at each stage of the COVID-19 crisis and to support with recovery when the time is right. As appropriate we'll be linking it to our dedicated COVID-19 advice, which will see more digital content and webinars added in the coming month.
- A sub-group of [STERG](#) is looking at advice for businesses and organisations relating to cleanliness, safety and social distancing. They met for the first time last week. You may have heard/seen an announcement by VisitBritain last week regarding their kitemark proposal for businesses. The kitemark option is not favoured by some tourism partners, so we will continue to consult across the tourism sector through the STERG sub-group, to develop an agreed approach.
- Helpful funding flowchart shared by our Engagement team attached.
- Some further sources of tourism insight/innovation that have been shared with me this past week:
 - [Tourism after COVID-19](#)
 - Webinar about destinations [handling the future tourism uncertainty](#)
 - [7 top tips for destination marketing and investment promotion during the covid-19 pandemic](#)
 - [Travel-in-the-time-of-coronavirus](#)
 - [Steps out of lockdown – what's next for safety in the outdoor](#)
 - [BMC launches Covid 19 recovery plan for climbing and hillwalking](#)
 - [Virtual tourist in the Faroe Islands](#). Explore the Faroe Islands as a Virtual Visitors by interacting - LIVE - with local Faroese, who will act as your eyes, ears and body on a virtual exploratory tour of the destination. [www.remote-tourism.com](#)