

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK VISIT FORUM

Meeting held on Wednesday 14th September 2005 10.30am,
Ben Mhor Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey

Present:

Sally Dowden (Chair)
Ruathy Donald
Ian Dunlop
Patricia Eccles
Murray Ferguson
Heather Galbraith
Andrew Kirk
Rita Marks
Ann Napier
Mick Pawley
Debbie Strang

Speyside Wildlife
Cairngorms National Park Authority
VisitScotland
Nethy House, Nethy Bridge
Cairngorms National Park Authority
Cairngorms National Park Authority
Cairn Hotel
Moray Tourism Forum
Association of Cairngorms Community Councils
Angus Council
Cairngorms National Park Authority

In Attendance:

Izabel Kaminiarz

MSc Student, Portsmouth University

Apologies:

Anne Angus
Scott Armstrong
Elaine Booth
Neil Black
Alex Burns-Smith
Andrew Coleman
Sandy Dear
Roger Edwards
David Geddes
Jim Gillies
Fred Gordon
John Grant
Alistair Gronbach
Steve Hunt
Bob Kinnaird
George Inglis
Paul Higson
Bruce Luffman
Louise Mackie
James Macfarlane
Elma McMenemy
Garry Marsden
Pierre Masson
Caroline Mitchell
James Rattray
Ian Reynolds
Andy Rockall
Elizabeth Thompson
Tim Walker
Drennan Watson/Jim Conroy

Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Enterprise
VisitScotland
Scottish Enterprise Grampian
VisitScotland
Pine Bank Chalets
UDAT
Tourism and the Environment Forum
Moray Enterprise
Braemar Tourist Association
Forestry Commission
Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service
Rothiemurchus Estate
VisitScotland
Scottish Natural Heritage
CairnGorm Mountain Ltd
Auld Kirk Hotel
ECAP Project Co-ordinator
Auld Cummerton, Strathdon
Aberdeenshire Council
Muckrach Lodge Hotel, Dulnain Bridge
Royal Deeside & Mearns Tourism Forum
Balmoral Estate
Moray Council
Chivas Brothers
Blair Atholl Tourism Group
Scottish Enterprise Tayside
Scottish Natural Heritage
Dalwhinnie Distillery
SportScotland Glenmore Lodge
Scottish LINK

Welcome and Apologies

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, introduced Izabel Kaminiarz, an MSc student who has undertaken research on residents' attitudes to tourism in Boat of Garten, and noted the apologies.

Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

2. The CNPA and SNH have distributed copies of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code to tourism businesses within the park.
3. There has been a delay in the distribution of contacts from VisitScotland Expo, as appropriate guidance for following up the contacts is pulled together, but this information should be distributed as soon as possible.
4. The Cairngorms Connections course will be produced as an online course, and this will be taken forward by Tourist Board Training and the Scottish University for Industry who are currently working on an online course for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

HG / RD

Clarification of CNPA tourism and visitor services staff roles, and relationship with VisitScotland.

5. Debbie Strang introduced Paper 1, outlining key roles and responsibilities within CNPA tourism and visitor services staff. Murray Ferguson added that Bob Grant had been appointed as Senior Outdoor Access Officer and would be the main contact for any outdoor access queries.
6. The CNPA have an internal ViSIT Officers group to plan meetings of the ViSIT Forum and ensure that there is adequate communication between tourism, visitor services and other relevant CNPA staff.
7. Ian Dunlop has been confirmed as the main VisitScotland contact for matters relating to the Cairngorms National Park, but individual businesses should continue to contact their local network office with enquiries.
8. Ian Dunlop provided an update on the VisitScotland review of Sales and Information, including TICs. The review is in response to changing visitor habits and will investigate new technologies and partnership working. Quality and cost-effectiveness will be key to the process. The commitment to partnership working was welcomed and there was general agreement that there should be flexibility to allow issues to be addressed at a local level. The review will be carried out by VisitScotland, but will include consumer and trade research, and he added that it is not likely that any changes will be in place until 2007.
9. It was agreed that discussing the issue at the CNP Tourism Conference would be too early, but Ian Dunlop welcomed the offer from the ViSIT Forum to be part of the consultative process once it is up and running. Murray Ferguson advised that the CNPA were also thinking strategically about visitor information provision.

Park Plan Update

10. Debbie Strang advised that the Sustainable Tourism Strategy had fed directly into various sections of the Park Plan, and discussions are ongoing with key partners to clarify the relationship between the two documents, and flesh out the detail of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan.

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism

Action

11. The Cairngorms National Park has been awarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. The certificate will be awarded at Apeldoorn in The Netherlands at the end of September. Copies of the certificate will be displayed in all TICs within the Park. Successful accreditation has meant that the CNP can now join the Charter Parks Network to learn from best practice in other European National Parks. There is an annual Charter Parks Network Conference which could potentially be hosted in the Cairngorms in 2007.
12. Part 2 of the European Charter is currently being developed and this will involve individual businesses within a Charter Park signing up to the Charter Principles and therefore being able to use the Europarc Charter Mark. It is likely that any future scheme will be administered by the Charter Park Authority and so this ties in neatly with the ongoing work on the CNP brand.
13. Trish Eccles asked if there was a link to information about the Charter that tourism businesses could use on their website, and DS advised that she would investigate the wording used by businesses in other Charter Parks.

Brand Management Update

DS

14. Ruathy Donald introduced Paper 2, summarising the criteria for use of the Cairngorms Brand. Based on the current criteria, there are around 400 businesses and community groups eligible to apply to use the brand at the moment. Procedures to check eligibility are in place with VisitScotland.
15. The Forum were also advised that the Food Marketing Group will meet in early November.
16. A Communications Plan to raise awareness of the brand and the European Charter is being drafted by Park staff and in the meantime a letter has been sent to all businesses on the CNPA tourism database with information on the brand and criteria for use. Businesses were also sent the Sustainable Tourism Strategy summary booklet.
17. The CNPA database includes more businesses than just those that are quality assured, but is not comprehensive, and it was suggested that local contacts could check their areas of the database and update with local knowledge as applicable.
18. Trish Eccles stressed the need to stress the brand values of quality and sustainability as there were businesses in the Park who just wanted a geographical brand. There was a discussion on the Green Tourism Business Scheme and whether a bespoke scheme might better suit the Park circumstances. It was explained that the feeling was that it was preferable to improve an existing scheme than to re-invent the wheel. The quality assurance team at VisitScotland have been very helpful in taking on board feedback on GTBS and developing a pilot code of conduct agreements for businesses who do not fall into an existing quality assurance scheme.
19. Ian Dunlop advised that the GTBS is operated by a private company under license from VisitScotland, and it might be possible to investigate special arrangements for the CNP area, and this eas being pursued.
20. In terms of policing the use of the brand, VisitScotland can check the use of the CNPA logo in the same way as they can check QA, GTBS, Walkers / Cyclists Welcome etc. However neither VisitScotland nor CNPA have the resources to thoroughly police websites etc. and to a certain extent the scheme will have to be self-policing although the brand will be trademarked and CNPA will hold the copyright.
21. Murray Ferguson stressed the importance of the brand being accepted, as it will appear on the permanent entry point signage for 30 years, and at some point in the future there will be a need to check visitor reaction to, and understanding of, the brand.
22. Debbie Strang advised that Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park were considering using the same criteria as they investigate brand development, and Heather Galbraith reminded the Forum that during her research she had found that National Parks had opted for different schemes, and there was no one particular solution. Some National Parks have a tourist

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association who develop their own brand independently of the National Park Authority, some develop bespoke accreditation schemes.

Cairngorms Tourism Conference

20. Heather Galbraith introduced Paper 3, a draft programme for the Cairngorms Tourism Conference on the 27th October 2005. The programme is designed to be as relevant to businesses as possible, giving information on the European Charter and Cairngorms brand, along with industry case studies, in the morning. The afternoon sessions will consist of workshops to allow delegates to feed their views into the CNPA. The conference will be promoted by mailshot to the CNPA database, through the Chamber of Commerce and other local associations, and through adverts in local papers.
21. There was a general discussion on the proposed programme, and concerns on timings will be re-worked slightly. It was agreed that the industry case-studies should be as relevant as possible to some of the smaller players in the industry. The afternoon workshop session topics were discussed and it was agreed that these should be partly a progress update as well as a chance for delegates to input. As this will be an annual conference, there should be a chance for delegates to contribute ideas for next year's topics.

Integrated Grants Scheme and Marketing Update

22. Ruathy Donald updated on the CNPA Integrated Grants Scheme, which was launched in August. Together with Leader + funding the grants scheme can support projects of up to £20k with up to 90% funding. There are a number of themes within the scheme, including marketing & events, and interpretation. Ruathy Donald is the champion of the marketing events strand and is thus the first point of contact for any enquiries relating to this theme.
23. The CNPA and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park have taken a joint advert in the VisitScotland UK guide, under the Association of National Park Authorities strapline 'Britain's Breathing Spaces', and copies of the advert were circulated.

Brief Project Updates

Point of Entry Signage

24. Murray Ferguson updated on the Point of Entry Marker project. The first granite markers are likely to be in place by Spring 2006. Due to funding arrangements, the highest profile roads (the trunk road sites) will not be the first in place. The project budget includes £650k for the markers, £100k for associated information and £550k for upgrading and landscaping of lay-bys. This is a long term project, and the materials used have been chosen to ensure that the signs are not high-maintenance. Pete Crane is now the officer leading on the project.
25. In the first instance, the lay-bys will contain park-wide information and interpretation to raise awareness of the special qualities of the park.
26. There was more detailed discussion on issues surrounding two of the proposed sites.

Visitor Guide 2006

27. The 2006 visitor guide will be produced in a similar format to previous years, with some updating. Members were asked to feed any comments on the 2005 guide, and suggested changes for the 2006 guide to Heather Galbraith. There was some discussion on the size of the guide and whether it should continue in the same size as before or change to an A5 format to allow for easier racking and posting.

28. Ian Dunlop noted that in a recent edition of Parklife, the Visitor Guide was described as having been produced by the CNPA, when in fact, VisitScotland had led on the project. Heather Galbraith apologised for the oversight.

Action

Outdoor Access Strategy

29. Murray Ferguson updated on the development of the Outdoor Access Strategy. There are a variety of issues arising from the Outdoor Access Audit. The strategy should be endorsed by the CNP Board in February 2006. The presence of a VisitScotland representative on the Local Outdoor Access Forum was welcomed.

AOCB

30. Isabel Kaminiarz gave a short presentation summarising the findings of her recent MSc research into local attitudes to tourism in Boat of Garten. Generally respondents were positive about tourism in the village.
31. It was agreed that membership of the forum should be kept under review to ensure adequate industry representation, and the suggestion of evening meetings might be considered.

HG

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 16th November 2005 in Deeside.

The meeting finished at 1.00pm

Heather Galbraith
September 2005

DRAFT