

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR DECISION

**Title:** ANGUS GLENS RANGER BASE

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#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to provide the background to the partnership work, led by Angus Council, that investigated the feasibility of a new ranger base in the Angus Glens and to present the case for providing grant support for the development of the facility.

#### **Recommendations**

That the Board approves in principle grant support of up to £98,625 for the building of a new Ranger Base in the Angus Glens, as described in Annex 1, subject to equal financial support from partners and detailed approval of spending plans by the Finance Committee.

#### **Executive Summary**

Following a detailed feasibility study led by Angus Council it was agreed by a working group comprising officers of four key partners (Angus Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland and CNPA) that a new, purpose built, ranger base was needed at Glen Doll to serve the needs of visitors, land managers and residents of the Angus Glens. In September 2005 CNPA agreed to provide grant aid to support the development of the new base. However, an application made by Angus Council at that time for European funding was unsuccessful and the project was re-evaluated, down-sized and re-costed. The case for providing grant support to this revised project is presented in the paper.

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## ANGUS GLENS RANGER BASE – FOR DECISION

### Background and Policy Context

1. The background and policy context for this paper is contained in **Annex 1** which sets out the detailed Expenditure Justification.

### Delivering Sustainability

2. The proposed base has been designed to high environmental standards using sustainable sourced materials and high levels of insulation. Economic sustainability will be addressed by the Angus Council commitment to ongoing funding and maintenance as part of their property portfolio. Social sustainability issues are addressed below.

### Delivering a Park for All

3. The proposal will enhance the visitor experience in the Angus Glens for a wide range of people and will contribute towards providing 'A Park for All'. Glen Doll is within 90 minutes drive of some 126,000 people which ACORN profiled as of 'moderate means' or 'hard pressed'. This indicates that it is potentially 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 accessible to a wide cross-section of society.
4. The proposed base is designed to allow easy access for all. The existing Trout Loch Walk in Glen Clova, en route to the proposed base, is a purpose built all abilities trail. The location of the proposed base will fit well with a number of proposed Core Paths.

### Delivering Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency

5. The partnership approach adopted in developing this project will be continued into the delivery phase. This is a good example of joining up the public sector to meet the aims of the National Park.
6. Angus Council and Forestry Commission Scotland have confirmed financial their support for the project and SNH will decide on their support in June 2007.

### Implications

#### *Financial Implications*

7. Funds for this project are not within the approved Operational Plan for 2007/08 so, if the recommendations were approved, CNPA would be making

a commitment for the full amount from the 2008/09 plan prior to any agreement being reached on the CNPA grant settlement. However, work is due to start in August/September 2007 with works substantially complete this financial year so that if there were a shortfall in expenditure in the current year then funds could be directed to the project.

### *Presentational Implications*

8. There is a small risk of some negative publicity linked to the perception of significant sums of public expenditure on one project and the unfortunate history of a previous project on the same site which had to be demolished due to poor build quality. However, the case for this development is strong and it should be possible to jointly manage these presentational risks through use of positive press releases and associated work.

### *Implications for Stakeholders*

9. The implications of CNPA support are demonstration of:
  - a) Strong commitment to partnership working
  - b) Strong commitment to the part of the National Park within the Angus Glens which only has a very limited geographic area within the Park
  - c) Strong commitment to raising the quality of visitor experiences.

### **Next Steps**

10. The Board will be updated on progress at key stages in the development of the project. Finance Committee would be asked to approve detailed expenditure. Planning issues also require to be addressed by Angus Council.

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**May 2007**

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## Annex 1: Expenditure Justification for Angus Glens Ranger Base

### CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

#### EXPENDITURE JUSTIFICATION

##### 1. Title

Angus Glens Ranger Base
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##### 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)

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| <p>a) 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 of 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.</p> <p>b) The proposal is to build a ranger base at Glen Doll designed to meet the needs of visitors, land managers and the ranger service. <b>This Expenditure Justification supersedes a proposal for £82,000 approved in September 2005 which fell due to failure to obtain European Regional Development Fund support.</b></p> <p>c) The proposed base will have: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) Public reception area with information and interpretation</li><li>ii) Public Toilets</li><li>iii) Ranger Offices</li><li>iv) Group Room</li></ul> |
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##### 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

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| <p>a) 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 on visitor counts, this amounts to a very significant 5% of the estimated total visitors to the Park.</p> |
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- b) The site is within easy access of Perth, Dundee and Fife. Some 315,000 people live within 90 minutes drive of Glen Doll.
- c) 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.
- d) 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.
- e) 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.
- f) 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.
- g) 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 received European Funding until December 2005. CNPA have provided financial assistance to the ranger service following the loss of European funding.
- h) The proposed base has been designed to the high environmental standards using sustainably sourced materials and high levels of insulation. 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.
- i) The ranger base will contribute to the following outcomes in the **National Park Plan** (in two Priorities for Action):-
  - i. Residents and visitors will appreciate the special qualities of the Park and understand more about their special management needs.*
  - ii. More people who have visited the Park will have high quality experiences and will tell positive stories about the area.*
  - iii. A wider range of people will have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors.*

- j) The proposal helps take forward the following actions in the **National Park Plan**:-
- i) Develop a cohesive approach to management of ranger services that meets needs of visitors, land managers and communities and of the National Park.
  - ii) Enhance the role of ranger services, tourist information centre staff and other key professional groups who have contact with public in the promotion of responsible behaviour.
  - iii) Identify the other key places in and around the Park where there is a need or opportunity to get messages across and then make suitable modifications.
  - iv) Make information available about the key, easily accessed features in the Park that best represent the special qualities of the area.
  - v) Support the existing Tourist Information Centres, visitor centres and ranger bases as some of the key places to get information about the Park and visibly link these places to the Park in a significant way.
  - vi) Promote and interpret the suite of National Nature Reserves as being best suited for the experience of special natural qualities in the Park.
- k) The **Outdoor Access Strategy** for Cairngorms National Park identifies the area around the proposed site as part of an upland area with a fragile environment which can be susceptible to damage by recreational users that requires promotion of responsible behaviour to minimise impacts to the sensitive natural and cultural heritage of the area. Glen Doll is recognised as a key point of intensive access into the mountains and also the nearest road access to Caenlochan NNR.
- l) Glen Doll is the centre of a small network of proposed core paths in Cairngorms National Park **Core Paths Plan** Interim Draft.
- m) The Cairngorms National Park **Draft Local Plan** also supports the development of the base:-

***Glen Clova & Glen Doll:***

*Policy GC1: a visitor centre will be developed by Angus Council (and partners) in the Glen Doll car-park. The Braedownie steading could be utilised for appropriate development when no longer required by the rangers.*

In addition the proposal would meet the desire of encouraging 'A Park for All'. Glen Doll is within 90 minutes drive of some 126,000 people which ACORN profiled as of 'moderate means' or 'hard pressed'. This indicates that it is potentially 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?

- a) 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. It would be fair to say that achieving consensus on function and location presented some challenges.
- b) It is clear that no one location will serve Glens Isla, Prosen, Clova and Esk. While a site at Dykehead may have allowed wider interaction with visitors to Glen Prosen and Clova there are also significant disadvantages to this approach. Kirrimuir 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.
- c) Initially, Angus Council had wanted to build a much larger residential facility but the other partners were keen to reduce the base to its core essential functions. It was also felt that a larger facility was unlikely to be financially sustainable in the long term.
- d) Angus Council consulted with their local advisory group 'the Friends of Glen Doll'. This group comprises land managers, user groups and neighbours. The group is broadly supportive of the new base. However, two residents in Glen Doll have previously objected to the planning application, preferring an upgrade of the existing location at Braedownie.

## 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.

- a) Construction in a relatively remote location always carries inherent risks. However, Angus Council have considerable experience in project management of this scale (and much larger), a large contingency for remote working is built into the costs and any grant application will be made subject to the building receiving all necessary warrants, permissions and certificates of completion.
- b) 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.

- c) There is a small risk of some negative publicity linked to the perception of significant sums of public expenditure on one project and the unfortunate history of a previous

project on the same site which had to be demolished due to poor build quality. However, the case for this development is strong and it should be possible to jointly manage these presentational risks through use of positive press releases and associated work.

- d) There are still some concerns about the long-term funding of the rangers who are to be located in the base due following the loss of European funding in December 2005. This funding only forms part of the funding package which also includes contributions from Angus Council, SNH and FCS. The ongoing CNPA ranger services review has yet to determine CNPA final policy on rangers although the vision for ranger services and the role they should play in the NP Plan has been agreed. Nevertheless, while there is some uncertainty, both SNH and FCS need site management at Glen Doll and will require some staff presence into the foreseeable future, hence their support for the new base. CNPA made a commitment of £10,000 per annum on short-term basis in the Corporate Plan to fund the shortfall in the costs of employing the rangers. A similar amount is projected for 2007/8. There is currently no commitment or any indication of a commitment beyond these payments.

## 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	98,625 (1)
Forestry Commission Scotland	98,625
Scottish Natural Heritage	98,625 (2)
CNPA	98,625
	<b>394,500</b>
Notes:	
1. The site at Braedownie is currently rented and so there is no capital element that had be recovered.	
2. Includes £10k for provision of the site.	
Funding from Angus Council and FCS is confirmed. SNH will decide in June 2007.	
Staff time to date – 15 days; future commitment – 4 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?

- a) The following outputs will be delivered:-



- b) 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.
- i) A high quality ranger base built to sustainable standards.
  - ii) A greater ranger presence at Glen Doll.
  - iii) Improved visitor information.
  - iv) Improved visitor management.
  - v) Improved public access
  - vi) Improved opportunities for visitors to learn more about the special qualities of the area: better interpretation.
  - vii) Improved opportunities to work with groups particularly school pupils and youth groups.
  - viii) A rationalisation of buildings at Glen Doll.
- c) 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).

- a) Cost estimates were prepared by officers of Angus Council with appropriate specialist input.
- b) Discussion with consultants who are 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 in a remote location. This helps demonstrate Value for money.

### 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?

- a) This is a discrete, time limited application.
- b) 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?

- a) 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?

- a) The application has the support of Angus Council, FCS, SNH and Angus Councils advisory group 'Friends of Glen Doll'.
- b) Two residents have objected to the original application for a 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

- a) It is recommended that we approve a grant of up to £98,625 to develop a new ranger base at Glen Doll as outlined subject to: -
- (1) Equal grant aid from SNH, FCS and Angus Council. .
  - (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 and Park wide information/interpretation.
  - (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: 11/05/07