

CAIRNGORMS
NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Tourism in the Cairngorms
Conference 2005

Wednesday 26th October 2005

Lecht Ski Centre, Strathdon

Draft conference report
Annexes not included

Programme

09.:45	Tea & Coffee on arrival
10:00	Welcome <i>Bruce Luffman, Chair, ViSIT Forum</i>
10.05	Introduction <i>Bob Forsyth, facilitator</i>
10:10	Why Green Tourism in the Cairngorms? <i>Sandy Dear , Tourism and Environment Forum</i>
10:20	Quality Assurance and Green Tourism Business Update <i>Tony Mercer , VisitScotland</i>
10:35	Industry Perspective <i>Rita Marks, Roadside Cottage B&B, Glenlivet</i>
10.40	Industry Perspective <i>Alex Burns Smith, Pine Bank Chalets, Aviemore</i>
10.45	Q & A
11:00	coffee break
11:15	Cairngorms Brand Update <i>Andrew Harper, Cairngorms National Park Authority</i>
11:30	VisitScotland Marketing Update <i>Alistair Gronbach, VisitScotland</i>
11:45	Q&A
12:00	Arrangements for afternoon sessions
12:15	Lunch (buffet lunch provided)
13:15	Workshop sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visitor Information – are the Park leaflets what visitors want?• Outdoor Access and what it means for businesses• Funding for Marketing• Working Together – communicating with each other
14:15	Workshop and Feedback
14:30	Summary & Conclusions
15:00	Close

Presentations:

'Copies of the powerpoint presentations 'Why Green Tourism in the Cairngorms?' and 'Cairngorms Brand Update' are all available on CD from the CNPA.

Industry Perspectives:

Rita Marks, Roadside Cottage B&B, Glenlivet

- Absolutely in favour of some aspects of Quality Assurance such as cleanliness and good customer service
- But there are some greyer areas – spaciousness, ambience and quality – they are often linked to cost and based on subjective perception.
- Some questions relating to niche marketing – surely the message should be that we extend a warm welcome to everyone and offer a range of individual experiences in this very special part of Scotland.

Alex Burns Smith, Pine Bank Chalets, Aviemore

- Support a quality assurance scheme but existing systems can veer towards being overly directive, such as the lighting required.
- We are in danger of confusing visitors with the number of schemes and stickers on our windows
- Businesses already do many of the things required by the GBTS. Fear is that joining GTBS is additional expense when there are so many other schemes (Investors in People etc) that businesses have to consider joining

Questions posed by delegates during Sessions 1 and 2 and Answers

GTBS

Q1: Is it true that we need to be part of GTBS in order to use the CNP Brand?

A: Yes, the Brand Management Group has decided that aim is for the brand to become synonymous as a 'kite mark' of quality and positive environmental management. As a result tourism businesses seeking to use the brand must meet the following criteria:

- Membership of VisitScotland's/ AA/ RAC star rating system or evolving Business Accreditation Scheme outlining codes of conduct agreements for businesses who do not fall within the existing quality scheme.
- A commitment to achieving, within one year, at least bronze level of the Green Tourism Business Scheme (or equivalent scheme such as Green Globe 21 etc).

Q2: Many small businesses are committed to the ideas behind the GTBS but the reality is that it can be expensive – e.g. some businesses are already paying up to £130 per year to have separate uplift for glass. How can this be recognised by the local authorities and can GTBS influence local authorities to address this?

A: Sandy Dear offered to raise this issue with the Scottish Local Authority Economic Development group.

Q3: Some estimates are that it may cost businesses £320-£350 to join the scheme. Many businesses have already invested in environmental measures Can the CNPA to offer any financial support?

A: As a result of feedback from the conference, the CNPA and VisitScotland have joined forces to offer businesses the chance to attend a free training seminar on the Green Tourism Business Scheme, with a free follow-up on-site grading and advisory visit. Furthermore, if the business can demonstrate

that it is already meeting the criteria for at least bronze level of the award, they can become a member of the scheme without paying the usual joining fee. The two seminars will take place on Monday 5 December in Aviemore and Thursday 8 December in Ballater. They will inform people about how the scheme works, the types of measures they need to put in place and how it contributes towards delivering a sustainable tourism industry in the Cairngorms National Park. If demand dictates, further seminars will take place in the New Year.

Q4: How can 'non-residential' businesses be recognised for environmental excellence

A: The Brand Management Group are aware that the GTBS may not be the most appropriate accreditation scheme for all business sectors, and are currently investigating alternative accreditation schemes. Businesses will be notified of any changes or amendments to the current criteria (with agreed alternatives accreditation schemes) as and when they occur. The current criteria can be checked at anytime by contacting Ruathy Donald 01479 870519 or ruathydonald@cairngorms.co.uk

Quality Assurance

Q5: There is talk about raising standards and there are real differences between what is proposed here and what is happening in Wales. Can VisitScotland clarify this?

A: Quality levels have become tougher in an effort to widen out the ranges. The new VisitScotland document for standards will be introduced in Summer 2006.

Q6: There is too small a difference between 4 and 5 in the new scoring system.

A: *Awaiting response from VisitScotland.*

VisitScotland

Q7: We used to be Tourist Board members but have become disillusioned and now 'go our own way'. VisitScotland has shown very little interest in those who have chosen to opt out.

A: Ian Dunlop from VisitScotland said "we are aware in some parts of the country of tourism businesses losing contact with VisitScotland as we go through the process of integration. In some respects this was expected. However, we now have nearly 80% of tourism businesses who were previously in ATB membership signed up to our basic Business Opportunity Package (BOP) and will be making strenuous efforts over the next period to recruit more new and/or lapsed businesses into the fold. The next stage in that process will tend to be the non-accommodation sector who traditionally value the "visitor guide" type business opportunity (of which the CNP Visitor Guide is a good example) and thereafter we will be approaching all tourism businesses on our now very extensive database with Marketing Opportunities for 2007. We also seek to engage with all tourism businesses through a range of communication channels including newsletters, e letters, seminars and conferences, training courses and one to one visits.

At an entry level price of £25 for representation on the VisitScotland website, which has generated in excess of 1m page visits and over £12m of bookings this year alone, I do not believe we can be regarded as "pricing the small tourism business" out of the market. Additionally, while I accept that there is inevitably a cost attached to all supplies and services, I am confident that

VisitScotland provides a good range of cost effective marketing and business opportunities to suit all sectors and sizes within the Scottish tourism industry.

The challenge is to ensure that we help tourism businesses to choose the most appropriate level and range of services, in the most cost effective manner, to reflect their product strengths and market needs. In a nutshell that is the rationale behind the Industry Engagement and Account Management system currently being developed and rolled out to the industry.

Q8: Why is there a delay in the launch of Eat Scotland

A: *Awaiting response from VisitScotland.*

Q9: We like the VisitScotland publicity materials but what happens if you don't fit neatly into one of the niches being targeted?

A: *Awaiting response from VisitScotland.*

Q10: Why does food and drink still come under the 'cities' theme in the internal organisation of VisitScotland?

A: Alistair Gronbach agreed with this view and offered to discuss this at VisitScotland

Organisational Considerations

Q11: Can we ensure that we get the balance right between over-bureaucracy and regulation of tourism in the Cairngorms as we aim to create a world class product

A: That is the aim of the CNPA and the ViSIT Forum, but it is an extremely valid point as we develop new initiatives and one that we should keep uppermost in our minds.

Workshops feedback:

Outdoor Access

- There was generally a high level of understanding on the new rights and responsibilities that have arisen from the access legislation
- There is a need to make tourism operators more comfortable with where to direct visitors. They need to be more aware of what access issues may arise.
- There is potential to extend the Hillphones System to cover more estates and more land management issues, and the system needs to be more widely publicised
- In the development of core path plans, there needs to be community engagement to convince communities of the benefits for them, and the success of the core paths plan will rely on implementation, and the availability of resources is crucial for this.
- The Outdoor Access code needs to be more relevant for the organisation of outdoor events.
- Signposting of footpaths and cycleways can be a useful tool to bring more tourism business into an area.
- Need greater awareness of where to report specific issues concerning access.
- It would be useful to have the 'Know the Code' leaflet more widely available from accommodation providers to send to visitors in advance.
- Some stiles etc. act as a barrier to old and infirm dogs. Ideally barrier-free access should be the norm.
- There should be greater availability of toilet facilities, litter bins etc.

Funding for marketing:

- We need to find ways to make it easier to talk to the funders. There seems to be great opportunity for businesses to access funds in a complimentary way.
- Funding is about working together, support and advice – it is developmental
- There is real value in businesses being supported to share experience of developing funding proposals
- There is a porous boundary – we need to explore benefits both within and around the National Park
- It is difficult for individuals to access funding, you have to go through groups and there is a requirement for more support for groups

Working together

- People need better information on who does what and how to contact them (both CNPA Staff and ViSIT Forum)
- Visit Forum is an excellent way of accessing key partners (VS, local authorities, LECs) with a collective voice
- Annual conference – generally very good, but particularly want more input from industry and more time for answers to questions
- An email database would allow a regular newsletter to be sent to those businesses who wish to receive information, all businesses should be asked whether they wish to be part of this system.

Visitor Information

- Existing published visitor information from CNPA needs to be effectively distributed to tourism businesses and elsewhere in and around the Park

- The Park Authority's database of tourism businesses needs to be reviewed for accuracy and duplication
- Visitor information should not raise unrealistic expectations in visitors' minds (for example of the wildlife they are likely to encounter)
- Information about local walks and opportunities to get out and about was seen as very important
- Tourism businesses were generally aware of opportunities for visitors around their premises but were less aware of Park wide opportunities
- Visitor information should encourage positive visitor behaviour (e.g. dogs under close control) and be matched by infrastructure (e.g. dog dirt bins on popular walks close to communities)
- Visitor Guide should be published at A5 size to match other publications and make it easy to display
- Visitor information should encourage people to visit environmentally robust sites
- CNPA should work closely with others responsible for visitor information to provide information of Park wide interest and to avoid duplication (for example on websites).

ACTION TO ADDRESS ABOVE POINTS

CNPA staff structure at annex 1

List of current ViSIT Forum members, role of the group and dates of meetings for 2006 annex 2

Letter to all businesses to be sent out by end of November to set up e-mail database for quarterly tourism update

Evaluation of the event

1. Administration Arrangements (mean scores out of 10)

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| a) the administration of the conference – 144/18 | 8.0 (range 5<>10) |
| b) the pre-conference information – 126/17 | 7.4 (range 4<>10) |
| c) catering arrangements – 155/18 | 8.6 (range 6<>10) |

- application for the conference arrived the day before the closing date
- it would have been helpful to have the programme emailed to those who responded by email
- we only received the invitation to the conference one day before the reply date, about one week before the conference
- late start influenced the whole day – could we not have been asked if it would be acceptable to finish late, or condense the conference and go with the majority?
- If speakers don't turn up on time you should re-jig the programme to allow to start on time and the facilitator should be firm in keeping to time
- Some information came late. I had the date in my diary but the formal notification was close

2. The event

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| a) the event's accommodation, environment and layout | 8.7 (range 5<>10) |
| b) explanation of the aims and objectives – 133/17 | 7.8 (range 4<>10) |
| c) structure and timing of the event – 129/18 | 7.2 (range 5<>10) |
| d) the relevance and usefulness of discussion workshops | 7.5 (range 4<>10) |
| e) the relevance of the event to you business or organisation | 7.7 (range 5<>10) |

- greater time for the Q & A sessions to gain ideas from conference delegates
- workshops need to be facilitated in a way that allows contributions constructively from all delegates
- some consideration given to activity providers / wildlife tourism operators and an opportunity to develop these themes
- it was very clear that people wished to be allowed to discuss. There was far too much stodgy stuff from speakers. The reaction to Rita and Alex was significant
- The Q&A could have been better facilitated as it degenerated into personal issues
- Meeting started late! Not enough discussion time. Workshops were too close together so too noisy and difficult to hear
- More time for questions would have been helpful. One fewer speakers before coffee break
- What was the theme? Afternoon workshop sessions did not seem to follow discussion and presentations in the morning. Clear that workshop leaders were not trained facilitators
- Would have liked the opportunity to ask questions after each speaker. Too much of a focus on the negative, particularly relating to VisitScotland. Felt that the facilitator should have nipped it in the bud early on

- The workshop sessions gave information and not enough time for comment

3. Future events

Would you be interested in attending a Cairngorms Tourism Conference on an annual basis? 100% said yes

How can we improve things for future conferences:

a) - time of year and timing?

- Ok
- Closed season October – March
- Same. No earlier than October half-term. Many providers holiday in November
- Good time of year don't change things
- Timing was suitable
- More notice!
- October
- Fine
- Perfect
- October / November good
- Excellent time of year

b) - location

- Very good
- Excellent – very central
- Central location in the Park
- Good but not for the skiing months
- Perfect
- Yes, except for the workshop arrangements
- Accessible for all
- Staff at Lecht more than co-operative
- Excellent – probably the reason why businesses from both sides of the hill attended

c) – what topics would you like to see discussed

- Businesses working together, destination management organisations
- Marketing feedback on specific questions that are submitted before the conference
- Slightly more emphasis on activities which bring tourists in rather than on businesses which provide accommodation
- I will feed any ideas back to you
- Anything that might be topical at the time
- Time for discussion – good follow-up information
- Would advise nearer the date based on the experience over the next 12 months
- Q&A – communication / contact of local ad-hoc groups / names / websites etc

- Pride and Passion – follow-on from points raised today
- A question and answer day where agencies are asked to answer and delegates aim to come up with specific ideas to address problems
- Non-accreditation issues
- How to improve the visitor experience
- Workshops with individual actions taken away by delegates

4. Additional comments

- Discussion of criteria for the use of the Brand was important to many people – it was given only a minute or so
- A point was raised about a database of business contacts. Village guides cover most tourist related ones. Quite a few are not VisitScotland affiliated so it hopefully will fill a few gaps if they are willing to be on your database. Nethy Bridge etc will have their own leaflets. Why not contact them to expand your list?

Annex 1 – ViSIT Forum paper 1 14/09/05

Annex 2 – ViSIT Forum membership and current role