

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK VISIT FORUM

Draft Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 18th May 2006 10.30am,
Lonach Hall. Strathdon

Present:

Sally Dowden (Vice Chair)
Elaine Booth
Sandy Dear
Ian Dunlop
Patricia Eccles
Murray Ferguson
David Geddes
Fred Gordon
Andrew Harper
Andrew Kirk
Harry Leith
Rita Marks
Pierre Masson
Elma McMenemy
Ann Napier
Colin Simpson
Syd Smardon
Debbie Strang
Hamish Trench
Silvia Woodier

Speyside Wildlife
Scottish Enterprise Grampian
VS Sustainable Tourism Forum
VisitScotland
Nethy House, Nethy Bridge
Cairngorms National Park Authority
Braemar Tourism Association
Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service
Cairngorms National Park Authority
Cairn Hotel
La Mangiatoia, Ballater
Moray Tourism Forum
Moray Council
Royal Deeside & Mearns Tourism Forum
Association of Cairngorms Community Councils
Highland Council
Speyside Holiday Park
Cairngorms National Park Authority
Cairngorms National Park Authority
Brooklynn Guest House

Apologies:

Bruce Luffman (Chair)
Alex Burns-Smith
Anne Angus
Andrew Coleman
Andy Rockall
Roger Edwards
Jim Gillies
John Grant
David Hampton
Steve Hunt
Paul Higson
Bob Kinnaird
James Macfarlane
Alistair MacLennan
Louise Mackie
Garry Marsden
Caroline Mitchell
Mick Pawley
Ian Reynolds
Kevin Shaw
Neil Sutherland
Elizabeth Thompson
Vicky Thomson
Tim Walker
Drennan Watson/Jim Conroy

Auld Cummerton, Strathdon
Pine Bank Chalets
Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Enterprise
UDAT
Scottish Natural Heritage
Moray Enterprise
Forestry Commission
Rothiemurchus Estate
Braemar Tourism Association
Scottish Natural Heritage
ECAP Project Co-ordinator
CairnGorm Mountain Ltd
Muckrach Lodge Hotel, Dulnain Bridge
Balliefurth Farm, Nethybridge
Aberdeenshire Council
Balmoral Estate
Chivas Brothers
Angus Council
Scottish Enterprise Tayside
Heatherlea
Explore Abernethy
Dalwhinnie Distillery
Aberdeenshire Council
SportScotland Glenmore Lodge
Scottish LINK

In attendance:

Gillian McCrum, from Macaulay Institute
Alan Howes, George Eckton, transport consultants from Colin Buchanan

Welcome and Apologies

1. Apologies had been received from a number of members. The Chair welcomed transport consultants, Alan Howe and George Eckton from Colin Buchanan and also Gillian McCrum from Macaulay Institute. The Forum agreed to Gillian recording the interview as part of her Phd research.

Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

2. Matters arising were as follows:-
 - Para 2 - VS had clarified that the landlord is not implicated under GTBS if the business run from their premises has received the GTBS
 - Para 9 - Information from Anne Angus on indicators from the learning journeys had been forwarded to Macaulay Institute.
 - Para 11 - The next steps for the indicator set will become clearer as meetings take place on the Park Plan outcomes and how the indicators sit with these.
 - Para 14 - Some updates had been received from partners, and a revised version of the Action Plan update had been produced for the May Board meeting. A summary booklet of the action plan update had been produced and distributed to all businesses on the Cairngorms database and to all relevant partners.
 - Para 15 - Website update this will be given in agenda item 5.
 - Para 16 The sentence requires rewording to 'Heather Galbraith noted that an on-line course is being produced from the current Cairngorms Connections Course, and this will be available in 6 months time or so, and asked whether a face to face course would still be required once the on-line course is up and running'.
 - Para 17 - Some Review of Membership forms had been returned and members were encouraged to return any outstanding forms.
 - Para 18 - The Chair asked that the word 'keen' be changed to 'happy' and delete from 'representing' onwards.
 - Para 21 - The next two GTBS courses to be run are on 30th May at Crathes and 31st May at CairnGorm, and although these had been well publicised, members were encouraged to spread the word.
 - Para 27 - Harry Leith had also attended the meeting with Philip Riddle.
3. All other matters arising would be covered by agenda items.

Cairngorms Transport Audit

4. John Thorne, Economic Development Officer at the Park Authority introduced this item by emphasising the importance of sustainable transport within the National Park area, and stating that funding was finally in place for the Cross Park bus service (formerly known as the Heather Hopper) to run from the beginning of July to the end of September. He introduced the consultants who had been commissioned to investigate:
 - Latent demand for public transport
 - Achievable actions (new routes, better frequencies)
 - A framework for approaching public transport (and the partners likely to be involved)
 - The potential success of new services such as the Cross Park Service
 - The quality and frequency of services to and from the Park (e.g. from airports)
 - The opportunities for demand responsive transport schemes

5. Alan Howe went on to explain that the early stages of the contract involved data collection and 844 telephone interviews had been carried out with residents ensuring that there was a range of interviewees from a geographical range, age range and balance of males and females. He then covered the initial results noting that 500 out of the 844 had never used public transport in the past six months.
6. The second part of data collection is the visitor survey, and this will involve 6,000 self-administered questionnaires to be distributed throughout the Park area, hoping for a 15% response rate. Alan Howes asked for the help of Forum members in the distribution and Sandy Dear suggested that all GTBS members should be contacted in the first instance.
7. All members were encouraged to take away the final draft version of the questionnaire and submit any comments on the questionnaire to the consultants by the end of May. They were also asked to take away 6 further questionnaires and envelopes for distribution to a sample of their guests as a pilot. This would give the consultants a guide for their future research. **ALL**
8. It was clear from the range of questions asked during the presentation, that public transport is a key issue for the National Park, for both visitors and residents and there was a strong consensus that Alan Howes should be asked back once the research is complete, and this could be a potential topic for the annual tourism conference. **HG**

Park Plan

9. Hamish Trench reminded the Forum that the draft Park Plan had been launched and the consultation period would finish at the end of June. He asked the members to consider two aspects contained within the documents; whether the long term vision was correct, and whether the appropriate priorities that had been identified for the next 5 years are where collective effort and resources should be focussed. The Chair said that a consultation session had been arranged by the Chamber of Commerce on 7 June at Dalwhinnie and all Forum members were invited to attend. **ALL**
10. Three of the seven priorities are particularly relevant to the work of the Forum, and Andrew Harper introduced the priority "Making Tourism and Businesses Sustainable". Actions identified currently under this priority include
 - Supporting strong businesses with high quality standards
 - Managing the impacts of tourism and business
 - Improving environmental performance
 - Supporting entrepreneurship and business development
 He asked for comments on whether the actions listed under the priority were the correct ones and whether any had been missed. The comments are summarised below:
 - The impact of tourism on communities to be considered.
 - The need to define terms such as 'visitor' and "resident". The level of service should always be high, regardless of how far the visitor has travelled, and the visitors could be residents of the Park.
 - The need to educate visitors if the emphasis is to be on local produce, because the local shops are often unable to source fresh local produce throughout the year, and it is particularly difficult to ensure fresh local produce for self catering visitors.
 - It is good to see that the title applies to all businesses not just tourism, but more emphasis is required on 'tourism is everyone's business'.**Action**

11. There was also a discussion on the need to monitor the actions and be able to demonstrate that the Park Plan is making a difference to life in the National Park in due course. Andrew Harper explained that the model that had been described to the Forum at the last meeting to develop the sustainable tourism indicator set was being broadened out to look at how all Park Plan priorities might be measured.
12. Murray Ferguson introduced the two other most relevant priorities to the Forum: 'Providing high quality opportunities for Outdoor access' and "Raising Awareness and Understanding of the National Park", key actions for which are to improve route provision and promotion and to support responsible outdoor access and management. The initial comments were as follows:
 - There should be an emphasis on developing a pride in the National Park by all concerned, and this could perhaps be helped by broadening the range of ambassadors
 - The terms used could be clearer – what is the difference between "routes" and "path networks"?
 - There was a concern that due to the high turnover of ownership of tourism businesses in some Park settlements, there was a constant need to educate 'new' people about the Park, although it was felt that in a number of instances new owners had striven to find out as much as possible about the Park area and what it has to offer.
 - There was a need to reach new audiences about the Park and to make use of the existing local labour force that worked in tourist and other establishments.
 - We should not lose sight of the need to involve with people who live near the Park and who frequently visited for day trips- Inverness and Aberdeen were specifically mentioned.
13. Hamish Trench thanked Forum members for their initial views, and encouraged them to submit any comments during the consultation period. An update on the ongoing development of the final plan will be reported to the Forum meeting in September.

Visitor Guide 2006 and Review of Visitor Information

14. There was a lengthy discussion on the future of the Visitor Guide, and whether the commercially produced *Parki* should be endorsed as the official Cairngorms Visitor Guide with the implication that the previous larger format Visitor Guide would not be produced. The discussion was somewhat difficult as several of the key people who had been directly involved in the discussions to date were not present. At the January Forum meeting the minutes record 'the strong feeling that to avoid the uncertainty over raising sufficient income from advertising there should be a strong consideration of supporting a pan-Cairngorm guide such as *Parki*...'
15. Ian Dunlop noted the mistake under para 3 bullet point 4 that 'Highland' area should be Park-wide area. He said that VisitScotland supported the *Parki* proposal as the brochure had been extremely well received. However, only quality assured businesses would be able to advertise within the brochure as a way to raise quality standards within the industry.
16. There was a strong feeling from the Forum members present that *Parki* should not replace the current Visitor Guide. It was felt that one of the strengths of *Parki* was its inclusive nature, listing all businesses in the Park, but also that it served a different purpose to the current Visitor Guide which, due to its size, generic information and associated photographs, was more suitable as giving an impression of a high quality destination. There was also a feeling that if *Parki* were to be used in isolation there

would inevitably be a biased impression given, due to the location of the commercial operator. A large number of businesses are in the west of the Park. The advice was that if at all possible both Parki and the current Visitor Guide should be produced and that expenditure on quality items such as the Guide fitted well with the Forum's long term aspirations of the Park and the Park Plan priority of raising awareness.

17. CNPA and VisitScotland explained that the current guide required significant public sector funding, and whilst other Highland Council guides were self-financing, it would be difficult for the Cairngorms Park-wide guide to become so because it is a much better quality document. The feeling from the Forum was that if further revenue needed to be raised from advertising then, as a last resort, adverts from the accommodation sector should be encouraged even though this would mean that the Guide would take on a different role from that originally agreed. A further suggestion was significantly reducing the print-run and making sure that distribution arrangements were cost effective.
18. It was agreed that Murray Ferguson/ Heather Galbraith would discuss further with Scott Armstrong and Ian Dunlop of VisitScotland to find a solution to the provision of next years Guide. The Forum asked that they cost out the production of the guide purely as a marketing tool with no advertising, that they cost the guide in its current format with activity and attraction advertising and finally that they cost out the guide with accommodation advertising included. The Forum was aware that time was now of the essence and that decisions would have to be made prior to the next meeting. The Forum would therefore be kept informed of progress through email.

MF/HG
ID/SA

Themes for 2006 Tourism Conference

19. Debbie Strang said that since writing the Paper there were a couple of useful updates for Forum members to consider. A half-day workshop will be held by Scottish Enterprise in March for tourism businesses, and the provisional topic had been agreed as outdoor activity providers, local access etc, and this could be opened up Park-wide if there was sufficient interest. Secondly, the Park is looking to host the Europarc Charter Park Network conference in June 2007 with cultural heritage as the topic to tie in with the Highland Year of Culture 2007, and it would therefore be useful to avoid this subject area.
20. It was agreed that public transport should be one of the key topics and because the provisional date, 1 November coincided with the monthly, Chamber of Commerce lunch it was decided to bring both events together with the CCC lunch held in the middle and public transport being the topic for the afternoon session.
21. There were a number of subjects suggested for the morning session, and it was finally agreed that short presentations on local tourism events and the value they can bring to the local community should be the main focus. There would be enough time built into the programme for discussion to take place. It was also suggested that any questions that people had once the programme had been fixed should be submitted in advance so that answers could be given on the day, if possible.
22. Debbie Strang said that all the other comments on the format and arrangements from the previous conference would be taken into account when the draft programme was put together which would be presented at the September Forum meeting.

Action

Forum Members' Information Sharing

Brand Management Update & Green Tourism Business Scheme

23. Debbie Strang said that the uptake of GTBS was still strong, and 10 businesses had already signed up to take part in the next seminars at the end of May. Targets of 80 businesses (20% of all QA businesses in the Park) using the brand, and 100 businesses (25% of all QA businesses) being within the GTBS scheme had been agreed. There had also been significant interest in the start up of Green Business Clubs.

Point of Entry Marker Project

24. Murray Ferguson said that the granite marker project was progressing well. Granite had now been sourced within the Park and the markers were being manufactured. The contract had been awarded for the installation phase and it was hoped that the first granite markers would be in place in June.

ABSC update

25. A public meeting on the new Destination Management Organisation for Aviemore and the Cairngorms is scheduled for 31 May at 6.30pm in Aviemore. Strong views were raised by some Forum members who felt that the Organisation was dominated by the larger organisations and companies, there was no accountability and too much public funding had been committed. There was also concern that the number of DMO's being set up was causing confusion, and may have a serious effect on the current marketing and co-ordinating groups.

SEG Deeside Businesses

26. Elaine Booth said that there was significant interest in the setting up of a DMO on Deeside and a Steering Group had met recently to develop the aims and objectives, potential structures, and an action plan, and these initial thoughts would be presented to the wider group within a month.

AOCB

27. Murray Ferguson sought the views of Forum members on an application for a brown tourist sign to be erected on the A9 at Blair Atholl headed 'Gateway to the Cairngorms'. A range of views emerged but it was agreed that if the sign were to be erected there was potential for confusion in the minds of visitors about a "gateway" so distant from the National Park. The proposal to include this kind of marketing information on road signs of this type was thought likely to lead to further controversy and would not be in the best interests of visitors. CNPA and VisitScotland will discuss further and advise the Scottish Executive who will make a final decision.
28. The Chair noted that Debbie Strang would be taking a career break for the next two years and she would be replaced by Chris Taylor from Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Date of next meeting

29. Wednesday 13th September: Aviemore

Debbie Strang 22/05/06