

**MINUTES OF THE PARK GATEWAYS AND INFORMATION WORKING GROUP
MEETING**

**2pm, Friday 20th February 2004
Cairngorms National Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey**

Present

Bob Wilson	
Andrew Rafferty	CNPA Board
Gregor Rimell	CNPA Board
Debbie Strang	CNPA Sustainable Tourism Officer
Bruce Luffman	CNPA Board
Murray Ferguson	CNPA Head of Visitor Services & Recreation
Graham Smith	Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board
Margaret Wearmouth	Aberdeen & Grampian Tourist Board
Alistair Clunas	Mar Lodge
Jim Gillies	Forestry Commission

Apologies

David Selfridge	CNPA Board
Nick Halfhide	CNPA Head of Strategic Policy Group

In Attendance

Aaron Lawton	Aaron Lawton Associates
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Welcome and Apologies

Action

1. The Chair extended a warm welcome to the new members of the Working Group and explained that their expertise and experience would be extremely useful as the point of entry marking project and information provision in the National Park were taken forward. He also welcomed Aaron Lawton who had been commissioned to undertake Phase 1 of the Point of Entry Signage Project. The apologies were also noted.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

2. The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting held on 15th January 2004.

Matters Arising

3. The initial Information Provision paper should be available for the next meeting.

Presentation by Aaron Lawton Associates

4. Debbie Strang outlined the scope of the Point of Entry Marker project for the benefit of the new members and explained that 5 companies had been invited tender. Interviews had been held on Monday 16th February and Aaron Lawton had been appointed. She noted that Ian Dunlop, Chief Executive of Aberdeen

and Grampian Tourist Board and Murray Ferguson, Head of Visitor Services and Recreation had been part of the selection process.

5. Aaron Lawton introduced himself and provided a comprehensive presentation on his experience and expertise in this area of work. He then went on to outline the categories of signs to be considered, and explained that this was an opportunity to gauge first reactions to some of his suggestions. The powerpoint presentation clearly illustrated the array of options that are open for consideration and a number of issues were raised during the discussion.
 - *Regulations on Trunk Roads.* Advice will be required to investigate whether anything other than traditional brown tourist signs on trunk roads are allowed. The permitted development rights of the local authorities, which mean in some instances that signs can be erected without planning permission might also be relevant but it was thought that the type of marker or structure that was likely to be favoured would require planning permission.
 - *Branding.* Significant work has been done by the Tourism Development Working Group (TDWG) on branding the National Park and this was explained in detail. It was agreed that the brand and the interlinked messages are extremely important particularly at the point of entry to the Park as this will prepare visitors for the resource and experience behind the sign. The Board members highlighted that within the NPA logo it is the word 'Cairngorms' which is key, rather than the picture behind the logo.
 - *Visitor Information Strategy.* It was agreed that ideally the Point of Entry Marker project would be part of a Park wide visitor information strategy. However, Aaron Lawton felt that in the absence of the Park developing its thinking on information provision, this project is one element that can be taken forward separately at an early stage. It was acknowledged however, that some of the connections to other elements within the Parks provision of visitor information and direction maybe lost.
 - *Short Term and Long Term Objectives.* There was agreement that the objectives in the short term for a point of entry marker project might be significantly different to those in the long term. It was agreed that the current priority was to mark the entry points to let all visitors and local people know where the Park is, but in the longer term, more subliminal options, such as the Peak District which utilises a mill wheel on a base rather than the wording as a focal point, could be an option. Aaron Lawton said that as part of his research he would contact the Peak District to find out about the reactions of visitors to this symbol as a marker, rather than clearly identifying the Park by using the name as a centre piece.
 - *Emotions.* It was agreed that the sign should attempt to evoke the emotions that the visitor will experience by a visit to the Cairngorms, but this will be difficult because of the diverse range of emotions and experiences that the visitor will undergo in the area.

- *Type of Marker.* There was a consensus in the Group that the marker should be made of natural materials such as granite. A single, strong image was favoured which might be adapted to reflect different locations, perhaps size of road, different interpretation opportunities etc. One of the Group members had experience of sand blasted timber signage with paint markings, and said that this type of marker is extremely high maintenance. Either the maintenance had to take place during the summer months in situ or the signs had to be taken away to be upgraded which then meant having temporary signs available.
- *Location.* It was agreed that the site of the point of entry marker is not necessarily an appropriate location for interpretation. The issue of the sign being accessible so that visitors can have their photograph taken beside it was also discussed as experience has shown that this is a popular attraction in some cases. This would necessitate a lay-by close to the sign, and Group members felt that this issue should be considered carefully when location options were considered.
- *NP Boundary.* Aaron Lawton explained that his first task was to visit and photograph all the possible point of entry locations. The Group advised that they would prefer to look at the most appropriate locations near the boundary, and that this should be either on the boundary or inside. Markers outside the boundary should be avoided if possible.

Discussion of Entry Point Markers Project

6. There was a discussion on the issue of consultation as various options for the markers are developed and Debbie Strang suggested in the first instance that relevant information from the consultation exercise on the National Park should be sought.
7. The Working Group had previously discussed working with the local communities and keeping them abreast of the process as it progressed. It was agreed that this project did not justify a full blown consultation exercise, but effort should be made to seek the views of the community where appropriate. The Group members felt that there was a strong degree of representation of the communities on the Working Group to allow the development of the options to a reasonable stage, and the elected Board Members should make particular effort to seek the views of their communities.
8. The Group felt that once options for locations for the markers had been determined, the communities located close to these locations might be contacted for their views. These communities are likely to be statutory consultees in due course for the planning permission, and it would be preferable to provide advance notification and seek comments prior to the formal planning process coming into effect.
9. It was felt that other Working Groups or organisations might be consulted in due course, such as the Community Councils Association, the TDWG and the

Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce. It was agreed to keep this issue under review as the project developed.

10. There was a discussion on the use of Gaelic on these signs or markers and Aaron Lawton explained that the safety issues on how much information can be provided on a sign, and the amount of information that is required at each stage needed to be thought out very carefully. Again this issue would need to be kept under review as the project progresses.
11. The Group felt that the National Park newsletter would be an ideal vehicle to raise awareness about the progress and the development of the options. It was agreed that once the Head of Communications is in place he should be contacted for advice on how this might be done.
12. Finally the group discussed their initial thoughts on how many options might be put to the Board. The Chair felt that the Working Group had been delegated to take on this work and it was quite clear that there was sufficient expertise experience and knowledge of the local area to produce options to a fairly advanced stage. It was agreed that it was also important to provide a full account of how the options had been developed and selected for consideration by the Working Group as part of the presentation in due course.
13. Aaron Lawton thanked everyone for their initial views on the first stage of the development of the options. Debbie Strang said that she will make contact with the local authorities, Scottish Executive Trunk Roads Department, and any other organisation that needs to be involved in the siting of these markers. It was also agreed that the outline and actions within the project would be confirmed shortly and this would enable a timescale to be placed on the project.
14. The Chair thanked everyone for their input at the meeting and felt that the discussion had been extremely productive, he encouraged anyone who had any further thoughts to contact Debbie Strang in the first instance who would feed these into Aaron Lawton.

Date of Next Meeting

15. It was agreed that the next meeting should be on Friday 12th March at 9am in Strathdon.

The meeting finished at 4.30pm

Debbie Strang
24/2/04