

# Cairngorms Economic Forum

## Note of Meeting

**Date:** 24 April 2013

**Time:** 10am

**Venue:** Cairngorm Hotel, Aviemore

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### Present

Colin Simpson	- Tourism Co-ordinator, Highland Council on behalf of Stuart Black
David Duncan	- Principal Planning Officer, Moray Council on behalf of Richard Hartland
David Fraser	- Chief Executive, Strathspey Railway
Drew Macfarlane-Slack	- Highland Regional Manager, Scottish Land & Estates (SLE)
Grant Moir	- Chief Executive, Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)
John McCrone	- Regeneration Manager, Perth & Kinross Council on behalf of David Littlejohn
John Pargeter	- BSW Timber
Kevin Roach	- Chair, Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP)
Marie McIntosh	- Chief Executive, Highland Opportunity Ltd. (HOL)
Martin Johnson	- Area Manager, Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE)
Mike Dearman	- Quarch Technology Ltd.
Patrick Bell	- Frontier Science (Scotland) Ltd.
Paul Easto	- Wilderness Scotland
Roddy Matheson	- Industry Sector Manager, Aberdeenshire Council on behalf of Belinda Miller
Sarah Troughton	- Atholl Estates
Scott Armstrong	- Regional Director, Visit Scotland on behalf of Riddell Graham
Steve Wilson	- Development Manager, Angus Council on behalf of David Littlejohn

### In attendance

Alan Rankin	- Chief Executive, Cairngorms Business Partnership
David Watson	- Economic Development Manager, Cairngorms National Park Authority
Sandra Middleton	- Sustainable Business Programme Manager, Cairngorms National Park Authority

### Apologies

Allan Munro	- RE/MAX Cairngorm
Bob Kinnaird	- Principal, SportScotland National Centre Glenmore Lodge
David Cameron	- Upland Developments
David Mills	- BSW Timber
Debbie Strang	- Saxa Vord Properties LLP
Duncan Mackellar	- Mackellar Sub Sea
Eleanor McFadden	- Frontier Science (Scotland) Ltd
Ian Whitaker	- Chief Executive, Cairngorm Mountain Ltd.
Johnnie Grant	- Owner, Rothiemurchus Estate
Michael Bruce	- Owner, Glen Tanar Estate / LANTRA for Scotland
Neil Francis	- Senior Director Technologies & Sector Deliver, Scottish Enterprise
Richard Gledson	- Factor Balmoral Estate
Roger Clegg	- Chair, Local Action Group
Sam Faircliff	- Managing Director, Cairngorm Brewery
Trevor Buckley	- Glenlivet Distillery

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## 1. Appointment of Chair

- 1.1 David Fraser (DF) was nominated as Chair of the Forum. With no other names being put forward David Fraser was appointed as Chair.

## 2. Purpose of the Forum

- 2.1 Alan Rankin (AR) noted that the establishing a Private Sector lead Economic Forum is identified as a key priority in the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan which is signed up to by all partners. The Forum will oversee the development and support and monitor delivery of an Economic Development and Diversification Plan for the Cairngorms National Park. The make-up of the Forum was informed by the workshop on 27<sup>th</sup> March the report of which was circulated in advance of the Forum meeting.
- 2.2 It was noted that at the previous workshop issues were raised with regard to the high cost to developers of developing small sites with particular reference to planning gain contributions. Sandra Middleton (SM) advised that this issue has been discussed through the CNP Developers Forum but with no specific resolution.

## 3. Feedback from Workshop

- 3.1 The Forum endorsed the report as an accurate reflection of the discussions at the workshop. There is a need to ensure that relevant recent and current research is fed into the process e.g. the up-coming SLE survey of Land Managers in the Park.

*API - All to advise David Watson ([davidwatson@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:davidwatson@cairngorms.co.uk)) at CNPA of any current or recent research that they are aware of that may be relevant to the development of the Strategy*

## 4. Project Brief

- 4.1 The Forum endorsed the Project Brief with the addition to the Communications Plan of 'Business Sector Champions' who are to be identified to help encourage business input and involvement in the process. The Project Board of David Fraser CEF, Alan Rankin CBP, Murray Ferguson CNPA, Martin Johnson HIE will be responsible for:
  - approving the detailed Project Plan;
  - contributing opinions on proposed changes;
  - promoting and maintaining focus on the desired project outcome;
  - briefing and advising those they represent; and
  - finalising key documents ready for approval by CEF & partners.

## 5. Themed Discussion

- 5.1 The workshop report identified a number of key areas of action. The Forum agreed two areas for discussion - Business Development and Infrastructure. The key outcomes of the discussion are outlined below.

**Business development (advice and support, speciality help funding)**

5.2 LEADER - The current funding programme ends 2014. The Cairngorms Local Action Group (LAG), facilitated by CNPA, is developing the Local Development Strategy (LDS) to bid for and guide the next round of funding. Small businesses were eligible for previous programme but uptake was low as it must demonstrate a clear community benefit. It is likely that the new round will have a strong economic development focus. Alan Rankin and Drew McFarlane Slack sit on the Cairngorms LAG and have the opportunity to influence the process. It was noted that Business Gateway may have a role in providing advice, support and training to businesses to enable them to benefit from LEADER funding.

**AP2** - AR and DMS to work with LAG to ensure that business needs are incorporated into LDS

5.3 Business support - Recruitment by small businesses is often constrained by cost and perceived high risk. There are pockets of funding available e.g. HIE/Highland Council (HC) graduate recruitment, HC Employment Grant Scheme, Aberdeenshire Council (AC) first employee grant scheme etc. Business Gateway (BG) provides support and advice and there are various websites that businesses can utilise. It was noted that many business wish one to one advice and support and this provision is limited and inconsistent across the National Park. This is due to the way Business Gateway is supported as a universal and free service to all businesses. In the HIE area, as opposed to Scottish Enterprise area, the local authorities, who have the contract to deliver the service, had decided to resource the service to enable more of a one-to-one engagement than was likely to be the case in other parts of Scotland. HIE and Scottish Enterprise Account Manage businesses of growth potential in the key sectors of the Government's Economic Strategy for Scotland. The Account Management support is closely aligned to Business Gateway, but is different because of the intended outcome of supporting growth, especially through international trade. It was noted that some businesses feel there is a 'big gap' between Business Gateway support and becoming an Account Managed Business.

**AP3** - Local Authority, HIE/SE, Business Gateway/Highland Opportunity Ltd, CNPA to work together to map Business Support Services in the Park with the aim to identify a minimum service level requirement that might be needed, and how this might be delivered in the National Park. - CNPA to lead

5.4 Venture Capital Fund - There is a need for capital funding support for SMEs wishing to start-up or grow. There are also a number of sites in the Park with planning permission which have not been developed due to lack of capital. Public sector funding is limited so alternatives must be sought. A Venture Capital Fund similar to Highland Venture Capital could be established with support from Private Investors willing to invest in businesses locally.

**AP4** - David Fraser and Grant Moir to develop concept and investigate possibility of a Cairngorms Venture Capital Fund

**Infrastructure (accommodation, sites, transport, connectivity)**

5.5 Creating affordable space for small businesses - Issues around rents and long term leases in Aviemore was identified as a key barrier to local businesses. Business units elsewhere in the Park more readily available, however, leases can still be an issue and businesses wish to have a choice of location. Private Land Owners have developed units but find it challenging to demonstrate demand - once built the units can often create the demand. Can be difficult to zone areas for business development in the Park without clear evidence of demand. Some public support available to Land Owners in developing units but need to ensure appropriate occupancy licences. Property demand survey required to examine the gaps and weaknesses and then look at opportunities to fill the gaps.

CNPA and SLE are currently undertaking a land manager survey in the Park which could assist with identifying opportunities and demand.

**AP5** - CNPA/SLE to liaise on Park-wide Land management survey to consider demand and supply for business units

**AP6** - HIE, CNPA and SLE to undertake a property demand survey - CNPA to lead with close support from HIE

5.6 Digital Connectivity - HIE and Scottish Government procurement with BT will deliver Fibre to much of the country but it is likely that much of the National Park will not be covered. These remaining areas will need to be addressed through alternative technologies. An additional challenge is in addressing the link between the cabinets and the residential/business properties. Key role that the CEF can play is in supporting delivery partners and through the CBP as a Chamber of Commerce in lobbying to ensure delivery in the National Park.

**AP7** - CBP to lobby HIE, Scottish Government and Local Authorities to address potential broadband infrastructure shortfall within National Park

5.7 Affordable Staff accommodation - Some businesses provide staff accommodation, others do not. Issues around multiple occupancy can make this difficult. More affordable or mid-market homes are required. There may be an option to look at flexible limits on housing association grants which could enable more properties to be built. CNPA require evidence to inform the planning process with regard to demand and supply of housing for businesses. A survey of existing empty properties on the market may assist this. A wider survey should be carried out to clarify local business requirements for staff housing and any limitations that this may cause to business growth. The existing Business Barometer may be a useful mechanism to achieve this.

**AP8** - CBP and CNPA to liaise on business survey to gather evidence with regard to staff accommodation requirements and issues

## 6 Next Steps

6.1 CNPA will produce a detailed project timeline for approval by the Project Board as identified in the endorsed Project Brief. The timeline will identify key dates for meeting of working groups, the Forum, and key consultation dates. Forum Members will be advised of these dates and will receive regular progress reports. It is likely that consultation on the Draft Strategy and Action Plan will take place in November 2013 to coincide with the annual CBP Business Conference (7<sup>th</sup> November). CNPA will follow up action points identified with relevant parties.

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### **Action Points**

**API** - All to advise David Watson ([davidwatson@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:davidwatson@cairngorms.co.uk)) at CNPA of any current or recent research that they are aware of that may be relevant to the development of the Strategy

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Sandra Middleton, Cairngorms National Park Authority  
[sandramiddleton@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:sandramiddleton@cairngorms.co.uk),  
2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013