

Angus Glens Ranger Base

Background

1. Glen Doll is a significant visitor destination within the National Park receiving some 63,000 visitors per annum (6 yr average from 1998 - 2003). Although total visitor numbers to the Park are based on models not counts this amount to some 5% of the estimated total visitors to the Park.
2. The site is within easy access of Perth, Dundee and Fife. Some 315,000 people live within 90 minutes drive of Glen Doll.
3. The road end at Glen Doll has a car park developed by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS). This provides relatively easy access to eight Munro's (mountain over 3000ft) and to the traditional routes Jock's Road and Capel Mounthrought through the mountains. The existing forest path network has been improved by the FCS and partners involved in the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project (ECAP). Red Craigs, the rock outcrops SE of Glen Doll car park, are a popular climbing venue.
4. Corrie Fee National 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 (which was formerly part of Caenlochan NNR), has one of the best ranges of mountain plants and animals in Britain. The corrie is popular all year round with hillwalkers and a well-known for winter climbing. It is best known for beautiful alpine flowers, golden eagle and mountain hares.
5. Angus Council, working in partnership with FCS, SNH and the Cairngorms Partnership, established a Ranger Service in Glen Doll in 1998 to provide visitor and site management. The service also receives European funding until December 2005.
6. The Ranger Service is currently based in Braedownie Farm House. This rented accommodation is of low standard and not suitable for reception of visitors. The application by Angus Council is to build a new base to replace Braedownie.

The Development Proposal

7. Angus Council developed a partnership comprising SNH, FCS and CNPA to assess the feasibility of developing a new ranger base for the Glens Service. RGA Consultants were appointed to undertake the study. The contract was let and paid for by Angus Council.
8. During the discussions about the proposed new facility a number of issues were difficult to resolve, as described in paragraphs below.

Location and Capacity

9. No single site would effectively cover Glens Prosen, Clova and Mark. A base at Dykehead would cover Glens Prosen and Clova but not Glen Mark.
10. There was a strong steer from Angus Council, FCS and SNH that the visitor pressures and the site management needs at Glen Doll meant that the base needed to be located in that area. The management needs of the NNR were a significant factor in this discussion. CNPA asked for other locations to be considered but after further investigation it was felt that a base at Glen Clova would not reduce pressures at Glen Doll, and that visitors would simply bypass the facility or stop for a short time and move on up the glen. A location at Clova would hinder site and visitor management at Glen Doll. However, the Doll location would not preclude the rangers working in the other glens, it would simply add to journey time.
11. The capacity of the single track road to cater for further traffic has been a continual concern but it was felt that the base was not being developed to encourage more visitors but to better meet the needs of the existing visitors. Glen Doll averages some 63,000 visitors per year with a peak of 75,000 in 1999. RGA estimate from population modelling that the maximum number of visitors likely to visit in any year is 84,000. However, they do not consider that the development of a new base will lead directly to an increase because the factors affecting people's decision to visit are already in place e.g. car park, toilets, picnic area, waymarked walks, good scenery etc. The Ranger Service will need to be careful in promotion of their activities that they do not attract further visitors to the site.
12. The impact of National Park designation and signage on visitor numbers is an intangible.

Function

13. Initial discussions had looked at developing a ranger base with combined outdoor education, dormitory and residential facilities for staff. CNPA staff advised against such a significant facility at the site and the partners agreed that a smaller base covering the existing ranger functions was more appropriate. However, it was agreed that the ability to have a group space for educational work was desirable.

Design

14. All agreed that the design should be to a high standard and explicitly sustainable. The facility should interpret the special qualities of the area and this should be reflected in the design as well as in internal displays. The design should enhance the area.

Assessment against the National Park Aims

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage

15. The management functions carried out by the rangers service on the NNR, Glendoll forest and associated footpaths are considered essential by the partners. The rangers service was established in 1998 to meet a need identified by SNH, FCS and Angus Council. That need still exists.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

16. The visitor management role and promotion of responsible access by the rangers is aimed at encouraging visitors to use the area in a sustainable way. This work includes activities from the mundane need to ensure that litter is not left in the formal car park area to the more subtle messages about low impact camping and wildlife disturbance. This input is needed at a nationally designated site that receives such high visitor numbers.
17. The ranger base has been designed as an exemplar of current best practice in sustainable design. Interpretation of this design will be a feature of the building.
18. The design rationalises the existing structures in the car park and creates a new toilet facility that can be open while the building is unstaffed.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of Special Qualities

19. The promotion of understanding and enjoyment is a prime function of both the rangers service and the building. The location at the 'head' of the car park will ensure that all visitors to the site will clearly have the chance to find out more about the special qualities of the area. The building is designed so that orientation, information and interpretation will be available to the visitor without a direct input from staff.
20. However, the location of the base in the car park will ensure that the rangers have a higher profile with visitors. The current base is stuck away from the public.

21. The group meeting area in the proposed base will allow the service to provide a wide range of educational programmes to visiting groups.

Sustainable Economic and Social Development

22. RGA identified that any development of this scale is unlikely to have a large economic impact particularly when it was designed to better meet the needs of visitors rather than increase capacity. There is likely to be some income generation from sales of small items and an increase in collection of car park tickets. The latter will be achieved by an on-site presence encouraging greater adherence rather than any increase in price or visitor numbers.
23. The base will also have a 'mini TIC' function in disseminating visitor information about the Glens. This is likely to encourage greater spend locally.

Park for All

24. Glen Doll is within 90 minutes drive of some 125,700 people ACORN profiled as of 'moderate means' or 'hard pressed'. This indicates that it is one of the areas of the Park that is accessible to a large number of less well-off people. Lack of good public transport links make the journey to Glen Doll difficult but anecdotalevidence indicates that the site is popular with less affluent visitors from Dundee.
25. The building is designed to allow easy access for all.

Conclusion and Recommendation

26. There is a clear need for a continued ranger service in the Angus Glens and the role that they play within the Park will be part of the wider review that is ongoing. The current ranger base is completely inadequate and reception facilities for such a large number of visitors at the site are very poor. There is a need for both intensive site and visitor management at Glen Doll. While ranger presence is required elsewhere in the Glen the demands are not as critical as at Doll. The location of the facility at Glen Doll will provide some challenges if the ranger service are to work more widely across the Glens but the current proposal is considered the best solution in terms of meeting partners' aspirations, providing for visitors' needs and locating the rangers where most work is required..
27. VSRG support the development of the proposed base and feel that it amply meets the aims of the National Park. The development has great potential for promoting understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park to a population who would not visit other areas of the Park.