

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK VISIT FORUM

Draft Minutes of meeting held on Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2007 10.30am,  
Glen Lui Hotel, Ballater

### Present:

Robert Armstrong	Aberdeenshire Council
Elaine Booth	Scottish Enterprise Grampian
Pete Crane	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Sally Dowden (Vice Chair)	Speyside Wildlife
Murray Ferguson	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Heather Galbraith	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Jane Hope	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Bob Kinnaird	Cairngorm Mountain
Andrew Kirk	Cairn Hotel
Bruce Luffman (Chair)	Auld Cummerton, Strathdon
Rita Marks	Moray Tourism Forum
Garry Marsden	Balmoral Estate
Pierre Masson	Moray Council
Dennis MacFarlane	VisitScotland
Elma McMenemy	Royal Deeside & Mearns Tourism Forum
Ann Napier	Association of Cairngorms Community Councils
Mick Pawley	Angus Council
Ian Reynolds	Scottish Enterprise Tayside
Andy Rockall	Scottish Natural Heritage
Colin Simpson	Highland Council
Francoise van Buuren	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Silvia Woodier	Brooklynn Guest House

### Apologies

Anne Angus	HIE Inverness and East Highland,
Alex Burns-Smith	Pine Bank Chalets
Sandy Dear	VS Sustainable Tourism Unit
Ian Dunlop	Visit Scotland
Patricia Eccles	Nethy House, Nethy Bridge
Roger Edwards	HIE
Jim Gillies	Forestry Commission
Fred Gordon	Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service
Johnnie Grant	Rothiemurchus Estate
Tim Walker	Glenmore Lodge

### Welcome and Apologies

1. Bruce Luffman welcomed everyone and the apologies were noted. James MacFarlane will be leaving the area and has thus resigned from the forum. Everyone introduced themselves around the table.

### Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

2. The following points were discussed in relation to the minutes of the meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006: -

- Para 9: Murray Ferguson advised that he was liaising with Ian Dunlop and Willie MacLeod to set up a joint CNPA / VisitScotland staff meeting. A joint CNPA / SNH staff meeting had already been held to look at joint delivery of the Park Plan.

- Para 13: The Scottish Tourism Prospectus had not yet been circulated. Dennis MacFarlane agreed to follow this up.
- Para 28: Suggestions for a venue for the Tourism Conference 2007 should be submitted to Heather Galbraith, bearing in mind that capacity, facilities and location were all important issues.
- Para 37: Issues raised at the Transport session of the Tourism Conference had fed into an upcoming CNPA Board Paper on transport.
- Para 39: Heather Galbraith will forward dates for upcoming Cairngorms Connections courses to ViSIT Forum. All to forward information on to other contacts. **Action – All**
- Para 41: Murray Ferguson confirmed that Ralia does have a TIC partnership agreement with VisitScotland.
- Paras 6 & 11: Silvia Woodier queried a perceived contradiction in the minutes between VisitScotland's research showing that customers based holiday decisions around products rather than destinations, and most members of the ViSIT forum feeling that the opposite was true. It was agreed that the minutes simply reflected both the presentation of the VisitScotland marketing strategy and the resulting discussion.
- Para 7: Silvia Woodier asked whether an action point should have been allocated to the CNPA on this point. It was agreed that CNPA would write to VisitScotland pointing out the importance of statistics and offering help with monitoring. Colin Simpson pointed out that the importance of a consistent national basis for statistics. Dennis MacFarlane said that statistics were available on visitscotland.org, but acknowledged that these were not as up-to-date as possible. Statistics are not gathered by VisitScotland at a CNP level, but this should be possible. Bob Kinnaird gave a brief update on a new Tourism Research Network which would include a public sector and a private sector group. On the topic of including Aberdeen and Inverness in the International Visitor Survey, Elma McMenemy advised that NESTOUR are pushing for this at the moment. It was agreed that CNPA would write to John Brown at the Scottish Executive on the matter. **Action – CT**
- Para 6: Elma McMenemy asked that the last point of paragraph six be amended to say that there are 4 rather than 3 deadlines for Challenge Fund applications.

3. All other matters arising would be covered by agenda items and the minutes were approved subject to the change above. It was agreed that the agenda would be re-arranged and item 4 would be moved to the end of the agenda.

#### **Delivering the National Park Plan**

4. Jane Hope introduced Paper 1. The Park Plan has been submitted to ministers and it was hoped that it would be approved shortly. She stressed that the Plan was not just for the Park Authority to deliver and all public sector partners had signed up to it. In terms of implementing the Park Plan, it is thought that 3 levels of involvement would be appropriate:

- Delivery teams – to deliver the actions plans associated with the 7 Priorities for Action.
- Advisory Groups – to monitor the success of delivery in achieving the 3 Strategic Objectives.
- Strategy Group – to take a high-level view of future plans and policy

The paper included 4 questions as a basis for discussion by the Forum.

5. Bob Kinnaird asked what the timeframe for implementation of the delivery framework was. Jane Hope advised that it would probably be around April or May 2007. Francoise van Buuren clarified that a paper would go to the April CNPA Board

Meeting. Some groups may evolve relatively easily from existing groups, others may take slightly longer to set-up but the process should be complete by September.

6. Bruce Luffman asked if the existing ViSIT Forum was part of the picture. Jane Hope advised that it probably would be but that the focus of the group would need to be clarified. Bruce Luffman said that members of the forum would generally be most interested in the Priorities for Action *Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable* and *Raising Awareness and Understanding of the Park* and the Strategic Objective *Enjoying and Understanding the Park*. Chris Taylor pointed out that the role of other existing groups, such as the Economic Development Liaison group and the Economic and Social Development Forum was also being considered. He also acknowledged that members of the groups may wish to input to more than one Strategic Objective.

7. Sally Dowden asked if the delivery group for each Priority of Action would consist only of public sector representatives. Jane Hope said that the public sector was key in terms of funding but that there could be wider input. Sally Dowden asked about the relationship between the 7 delivery teams and the 3 advisory groups - would advisory groups have an overarching function or would they have specific responsibility for some Priorities for Action? Jane Hope said that the advisory groups would have a role in working up the existing action plans and developing solutions, but also in monitoring progress and holding delivery groups to account. Sally Dowden said that there would be an argument for having 7 advisory groups echoing the priorities for Action to avoid 3 groups each with an overview of everything which could lead to duplication. Françoise van Buuren explained that the delivery teams would be quite small and focused on action. The Advisory Groups would allow input from people that had invested interest in the Park, but did not have the resources of time and money to actually help in delivery of actions. They would also have a role in disseminating information to a wider audience. Sally Dowden felt that the Advisory Groups really had two roles – to feed in advice at an early stage and later audit progress.

8. Bob Kinnaird said that he was happy with the proposal and suggested that Destination Management Organisations sit on the Delivery Groups. There was a discussion about how the role of the ViSIT Forum and it was generally felt that, with a little tweaking, it could take on the role of the Strategy Group for *Understanding and Awareness*, looking particularly at the Delivery Teams for *Making Tourism and Business More Sustainable* and *Raising Awareness and Understanding of the Park*. Elaine Booth also felt comfortable with the proposal and saw a clear link with the two Delivery Teams, but felt that the interaction of the Delivery Teams with each other were key.

9. Mick Pawley emphasised the importance of strong joined-up public sector delivery teams. There is commitment to the National Park Plan from public agencies, but they have many competing priorities and the National Park is often pretty low on their agenda. There is a need for strong top-down and bottom-up involvement to ensure that the delivery teams can actually deliver. He also felt that Priorities for Action *Conserving and Enhancing Biodiversity and Landscapes* and *Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access* were relevant to the Forum. Jane Hope advised that the Strategy Group would evolve from the current Joined-Up Government Forum and this would provide the high-level, top-down support.

10. Andy Rockall felt that the selection of individuals for involvement in the Delivery Teams was key, as very often agendas would overlap and thus ensure joined-up working.

11. Bruce Luffman made the point that, in tourism, it was often tourism businesses that actually delivered outcomes on the ground. Of the estimated 800-1000 businesses in the Park, only around 1/3 are registered with VisitScotland and this leaves a large gap in delivery. Ann Napier agreed and pointed out that the Association of Cairngorms Community Councils would be changing to encompass more community groups. Including communities in Delivery Groups would help to plug this gap.

12. Elma McMenemy welcomed the idea of fewer meetings. To aid communication between the Delivery Teams and Advisory Groups she suggested it would be useful to have an information update paper more frequently than the twice-yearly meetings. Jane Hope pointed out that e-mail input had been received from one member in advance of the meeting and suggested that there was role for other methods of communication beyond meetings.

13. Chris Taylor thought that an information update should go more widely than just Forum members. Distributing information in advance frees up more time for in-depth discussion at meetings. Silvia Woodier made the point that information has to be short and snappy for businesses to read it. She also thought that the Strategy Groups should be smaller and mostly private sector.

14. Jane Hope said that the framework had to 1) Complete and deliver the Priority for Action action plans and 2) monitor delivery of the outcomes. Bruce Luffman pointed out that a monitoring framework has to be delivered for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. Sally Dowden thought that the Advisory Groups should focus on monitoring outcomes rather than giving advice.

15. Françoise van Buuren explained that it was the role of the CNPA to make sure that all the groups worked in a complementary, joined-up way and that there was clarity between the various levels of involvement.

16. There was some discussion about whether visitor needs should be the key focus for the Strategy Group, or if community needs should also be considered.

17. Sally Dowden thought there should be clear links between Advisory Groups and Delivery Teams. Jane Hope said that there would inevitably be overlaps and acknowledged that there was a tension between clarity and overlap. The specific issue of transport was discussed as something that cut across many different priorities for action. Bruce Luffman suggested that having only one advisory forum rather than 3 would help to join things up. He commented that there was not currently much interaction between the various existing Fora. Jane Hope said that inevitably you had to draw dividing lines somewhere.

18. Jane Hope summed up the discussion with the following points:-

- The ViSIT Forum could easily evolve into an Advisory Group looking at several Priorities for Action.
- There was an overlap in the work of Priority for Action Delivery Teams
- The Delivery Teams should not consist only of public sector representatives
- There is a need for systematic collection of information
- There needs to be clarity on the role between Delivery Teams and Advisory Groups
- There may be a role for electronic media in disseminating information

19. Any further comments on the proposals should be e-mailed to [janehope@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:janehope@cairngorms.co.uk) or [francoisevanbuuren@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:francoisevanbuuren@cairngorms.co.uk).

### **Cairngorms Brand**

20. Chris Taylor introduced Paper 3, a draft CMPA Board Paper on the Cairngorms Brand. The paper updates on uptake of the brand so far, and sets out targets for future uptake. It also clarifies the relationship between the Park Brand and Park Authority Corporate logo. Bruce Luffman welcomed the fact that the ViSIT Forum had a chance to comment on the paper prior to it going to the Board.

21. Silvia Woodier raised concerns about the GTBS criteria for use of the brand. Businesses that had joined the scheme didn't feel that they were getting value for money, particularly as there had been a recent increase in fees. She asked if it was possible to continue to use the brand without continuing membership of GTBS. Dennis McFarlane advised that cost savings from improvements to energy consumption should make the scheme more cost-effective. In terms of marketing, all businesses were listed on the Green Tourism website and [visitscotland.com](http://visitscotland.com) will allow consumers to search for GTBS businesses from Spring 2007. Andrew Kirk felt that many businesses, especially those in more modern premises, were already doing enough to meet the criteria for a bronze GTBS award, so the cost-savings weren't significant. He also pointed out that VisitScotland may also introduce a lower entrance-level award.

22. Sally Dowden re-iterated the commitment of the Brand Management Group to the criteria of quality and sustainability. She stressed that working through existing accreditation schemes was the only logical path to minimise bureaucracy, ensure a level playing-field, and avoid consumer confusion. However, there was a need to ensure that the accreditation schemes delivered value for money and it was important that any issues were flagged up. The CNPA is unable to provide ongoing financial support to businesses for GTBS, and it is ultimately the responsibility of businesses to decide if the value of the scheme, and use of the Cairngorms Brand, makes participation worthwhile. CNPA will work with VisitScotland to maximise the value.

23. Bob Kinnaird felt that the National Park and its commitment to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas were important in adding value to the GTBS. He pointed out that, as green issues move the political agenda, there will be benefits for GTBS members, for example as public sector workers are expected to use GTBS accommodation when away on business. Rita Marks felt that it was important to maintain stringent standards and not lower the criteria that had been set.

24. In response to a question from Elma McMenemy, it was confirmed that the use of the brand without the words 'National Park' in the 'family brands' had been agreed and confirmed.

25. Ian Reynolds updated on a Perthshire initiative to promote green tourism where businesses had only to sign an environmental charter as a first stage in engaging them with green issues. Heather Galbraith advised that some businesses had expressed an interest in a similar green network in the Cairngorms. This would focus on best practice and shared green issues, and businesses would not have to be GTBS to get involved. GTBS would, however, continue to be the basis for marketing and the group would not itself get involved in marketing.

### **Information Update**

26. Chris Taylor gave a bit more information on Update 9: Website Scoping Study. The study is ongoing and anybody who would like to input should contact [christaylor@cairnngorms.co.uk](mailto:christaylor@cairnngorms.co.uk).

27. Jane Hope pointed out that all updates were from the CNPA. Partner contributions would be very welcome for future papers. Ann Napier asked that updates be kept as short as possible and should answer 'why' things are happening rather than 'what' is happening.

28. On Update 3: Pre-arrival Directional Signage, Elma McMenemy advised that the route of the Highland Tourist Route may change to include more of the National Park, by entering the Park from Inverness by the A9 at Carrbridge rather crossing the Dava Moor and entering near Grantown. Highland Council are currently trying to ascertain the cost of the proposed change. Colin Simpson also advised that Bear Scotland are looking for comments on signage from the A96. It was agreed that Pete Crane would discuss this further with Highland Council.

**Action - Pete Crane**

### **AOCB**

29. Elma McMenemy raised the issue of coach drop-off and parking provision in some National Park settlements. A survey of blue-badge guides showed that Ballater, Tomintoul and Crathie have good provision, Aviemore and Dinnet are 'appalling' and there is room for improvement at Braemar and Grantown. She felt that unless improvements were made, guides would simply vote with their feet and visit other places. Any comments on this issue should be fed to [heathergalbraith@cairnngorms.co.uk](mailto:heathergalbraith@cairnngorms.co.uk).

30. Rita Marks raised the issue of public toilet provision in Moray after hearing that all facilities could be closed due to lack of funds. Pierre Masson advised that council budgets were tight and that the budget would be agreed on 7<sup>th</sup> February, after which he would be able to update the Forum. It was noted that Aberdeenshire Council were reviewing public toilet provision after changes made 5 years ago. There would be a £100k investment in Ballater's public toilets which would be staffed.

**Action - Pierre Masson**

31. Andrew Kirk raised ongoing issues with visitscotland.com about the representation on the site of businesses, but also communities. Chris Taylor advised that he had a meeting with visitscotland.com the following Monday and asked for any information on such issues to feed into that meeting. Andrew Kirk also raised an issue about incorrect bus stop information in Carrbridge. He had notified the bus companies, Highland Council and CNPA but received no response. Colin Simpson agreed to follow this up with Highland Council's transport department.

**Action – Colin Simpson**

32. Silvia Woodier asked who had designed the VisitScotland Spring Campaign and how much industry consultation had gone into it. She felt that offering discounted prices was not appropriate for a quality destination and that value-added offers would have been more appropriate. Dennis MacFarlane agreed to follow-up the query.

**Action - Dennis MacFarlane**

33. Elma McMenemy asked if CNPA were aware that the Cairngorms were on the tentative list for World Heritage Site status and Murray Ferguson confirmed that he was.

### **Visitor Information Review**

34. Murray Ferguson introduced Paper 2 on the Visitor Information Review prior to the Forum breaking into three separate workshop groups to discuss the paper in more detail. The scope of the review is described in the paper – for example it considers only print material. The main points that came out of the discussions and which were fed back to the group directly were:

- People generally have a positive view of current publications. Design, content and overall quality considered good.
- We need to know if they deliver value for money - are they meeting needs? Are they helping deliver the Park Plan i.e. are people more aware? etc
- Need to target & segment visitors and their information needs, and the intermediaries we use to distribute. For example, a B&B can give out information in a very different way to Landmark Visitor Centre.
- Make it 'live'. Need a way to download '10 things to do in the Park today' type of information that accommodation providers could print off for their guests.
- Strong feeling that the design of leaflets should be more unified including a front cover template that place the National Park brand and title of the publication so that it could be clearly seen in racks. The use of different colours every year was thought to be too sophisticated; changed photo and the date would make clear it was this year's leaflet.
- Once the content was understood the visitor guide was considered to be good but the presentation undersold it's existing qualities. It was suggested that *'Essential Guide, everything you need to know about the Cairngorms National Park'* or some such might encourage more use.
- Distribution of the existing visitor information was the first and probably most important topic to be addressed.
- In particular, we collectively need to be better at promoting the good work we had done, making the right information available at the right place and presenting it in a way that drew attention to the strategic nature of the information.
- There are gaps in information provision, specifically:
  - Things to do, especially wet weather
  - Personal recommendation / referrals
  - Foreign languages
  - Links to wider area – Pitlochry, Inverness, Loch Ness etc. Recognise the Park is part of a wider tourism picture.

35. The other work described in the paper will now go ahead including a feedback survey for front line staff. Murray Ferguson indicated that the review was likely to take a couple of months to complete and that the ViSIT Forum would be involved before final recommendations and changes were made.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place at 10:30am on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> March at Highland Wildlife Park, Kincaig.