

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM held at The Ben Mhor Hotel, Grantown on Spey on Thursday 31st March at 6pm

PRESENT

Scott Armstrong	Jack Hunt
Mike Atherton	David MacKay
Dick Balharry	Ken MacMillan
Simon Blackett	Peter Ord
Nic Bullivant	Roger Searle
Helen Geddes	Richard Wallace
Fred Gordon	Andrew Wells
Debbie Greene	Jamie Williamson
John Grierson	Bryan Wright
Dave Horrocks	

In Attendance:

Murray Ferguson (Chair)
Fran Potheary
Kristin Scott
Sandra Middleton
Rona Gibb (Paths for All Partnership)

Apologies

Jo Durno
David Selfridge
Adam Streeter-Smith (Paths for All Partnership)

Summary of Action Points

AP1: Fran Potheary to draw up a paper on Working Procedures for consideration at next meeting

AP2: Rona Gibb to provide CNPA staff with model Communication Strategies from other local access forums

AP3: FP to circulate revised work plan with new dates

AP4: CNPA staff to liase with Andrew Wells re: Glenlivet/Tomintoul ~~half day~~half-day visit programme for June meeting

1. Welcome and introductions

Murray Ferguson (MF) opened the meeting by introducing the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and Paths for All Partnership (PFAP) staff who were in attendance. He said how pleased the staff were to have got to this stage and how excited everyone was by the task that lay ahead, making a success of outdoor access in the National Park. He then asked

the Forum members to introduce themselves and give a brief outline of their hopes and fears for the Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF).

Members typically hoped that the Forum

- would come together quickly and members would work well together
- takes a common-sense view of outdoor access issues
- achieves an integrated, balanced and consensual approach to outdoor access
- assists in resolving conflict at a strategic level
- plays a part in developing a network of routes through and around the Park
- encourages a collective responsibility towards caring for the natural resources
- offers a model of access management
- enhances access opportunities for visitors to the Park
- focuses on proactive parts of the new legislation such as the Core Path Plan
- maintains objectivity in its consideration of outdoor access issues.

Member typically feared that the Forum

- would become a 'talking shop'
- reflects too much self interest
- becomes polarised
- becomes too focused on the detail of the access legislation.

2. Review of the selection process

Fran Potheary (FP) gave an outline of the selection process for members. She summarised the recommendations agreed by the CNPA Board in November 2004 concerning the structure of, and appointments mechanism to the Forum, following on from the September public workshops. She described the composition of the selection panel, including the engagement of an independent advisor to oversee the process. ~~Seventy-five~~Seventy-five applications of a very high calibre had been received. Forum members had been selected on the basis of their personal knowledge, skills and experience but also to ensure a good balance and mix of land managers, recreational users, community representatives and agencies. It was clear that we had a very strong Forum with an appropriate range of skills and experience and had good geographic coverage of the Park.

3. Scene Setting - the role of the Local Outdoor Access Forum

The wider role of the National Park and the Park Authority

MF begun by emphasising the difference between the Park (the 'place') and the Park Authority (the 'organisation'). He reminded members of the four aims of the National Park and the requirement for these four aims to be delivered in a collective and co-ordinated way. This would rely in particular on close working relationships between all public bodies. He introduced the members to the structure of the Park Authority with reference to the Board membership and staffing structure. This was followed by an introduction to the four main statutory requirements of the Park Authority

- to take on responsibility for management of outdoor access in the Park

- to prepare a National Park Plan
- to devise a single Local Plan for the Park area
- to administer the development control function in the Park by “calling in” certain applications

This work is being assisted by the formation of five Advisory Forums of which the LOAF is one, albeit the only one set up by statutory requirement. He outlined that the budget for the Park is £4.5 million for the forthcoming financial year of which £1.4 m comprises programme spend.

The purpose of the Forum under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

FP outlined the purpose and role of the Forum as outlined by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (LRSA). The Forum is tasked with advising the Park Authority, or any other person consulting the Forum, on matters to do with the exercise of access rights, the existence and line of rights of way, the drawing up of the Core Path Plan. The Forum may offer to give assistance in the resolution of outdoor access disputes. The Forum must also be consulted over Section 11 Orders (where proposed for 6 days or more) which would exclude certain areas of land from access rights and on proposed by-laws. She emphasised that the Forum would be expected to take a key strategic role in outdoor access particularly in regard to developing the Outdoor Access Strategy, the Core Path Plan, and the development of broad policy. The role of the CNPA staff will be to facilitate and provide Secretariat for the Forum meetings and to convey the advice of the Forum to the CNPA Board as part of the ongoing programme of outdoor access related work.

Progress of work underway

Kristin Scott (KS) informed the Forum members of the work that has been progressed by the access staff in delivering the four main duties of the Park Authority granted by the LR(S)A. She drew attention to the following areas:

- Establishing the Local Outdoor Access Forum
- Publicising the Code - commissioning roller and popup display banners and delivering training on the Code in conjunction with the Land Based Business Training Project
- Upholding access rights - the early stages of developing procedural guidance and logging queries about outdoor access.
- The Core Path Plan (CPP) - setting the scene for the CPP by developing an Outdoor Access Strategy for the Park
- Other access initiatives - liaising with the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project; leading the consultation on the Speyside Way Extension; and the legacy of the Highland Access Project and the Moray Access Project

In discussion the following issues were raised:

Outdoor Access Strategy: The first stage of the strategy development is the preparation of an Outdoor Access Audit and this is being undertaken by Land Use Consultants. They are currently focusing on four parts: the supply of, and demand for, outdoor access; the key policies driving outdoor access and the resources available. A question was raised about how LUC are carrying out the audit and which users groups they are going to be talking to. The

consultants are talking to stakeholders on a more strategic level at the moment e.g. VisitScotland and Local Authorities, but will be engaging with other stakeholders and user groups at a later date.

The timetable for the various Plans: The Forum was advised that the Park Authority is advancing on several fronts in recognition of the fact that several plans (the Park Plan, the Local Plan and the Core Path Plan) require preparation over a concurrent time span. It is hoped that the Outdoor Access Strategy will form part of the overarching National Park Plan as the key access component of that paper.

Resources: A question was raised about the resources available for implementing the Core Path Plan. It was suggested that the Park Authority and other partners would probably have to look beyond government to other draw down other resources (e.g. European money) to implement it.

Relationship with the National Access Forum: Paths for all Partnership have been asked to facilitate links between Local Access Forums (LAFs), and between the National Access Forum and LAFs throughout Scotland. This may be in the form of regional meetings; meetings of the chairpersons of each LAF or an annual gathering and networking day (as had been held recently in Perth).

Responsible Access and the Visitor: a question was raised about how the Park Authority was trying to make connections with visitors in promoting responsible access and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Members were advised that the CNPA Board had recently approved a Sustainable Tourism Strategy which will support the Park Authority's efforts in achieving the Charter for Sustainable Tourism from Europarc. Work that would follow on from this would include establishing a visitor information website, revamping visitor centres and ranger bases and coordinating the work of ranger services within the Park. Currently references to the Code and responsible behaviour have been incorporated in the literature and marketing material produced by the Park Authority - for example, the 2005 Cairngorms National Park Visitor Guide and the 2005 Cairngorms Countryside Events leaflet.

A brief discussion centred around the new access legislation. There was a general feeling that the challenges of integrating land management and outdoor access have been around a long time, and that the new legislation and Code have simply distilled a lot of existing common-sense and existing practice.

4. Working Procedures for the Local Outdoor Access Forum

MF thanked members for returning the forms that had been circulated and made suggestions for working procedures that could be adopted for the Forum under the headings below. It was decided that the results of the discussion (summarised below) and the submissions from the members should form the basis of a paper which will be presented at the next meeting.

AP1: Fran Potheary to draw up a paper on Working Procedures for consideration at the next meeting.

Meetings

- CNPA will provide the Secretariat to the Forum and will write and circulate minutes.
- Minutes will be made available to the CNPA Board and adjacent Local Access Forums (and others, as agreed by Communication Strategy - see below)
- Members would like to receive papers for meetings both by email and hard copy
- Five meetings a year and one annual gathering or conference was favoured
- Early evenings are best for meetings with the exception of the winter time when mid-afternoon is preferred
- Meetings should circulate around the Park to different venues
- Members and staff should attempt to co-ordinate and share transport

Setting Agendas

- Agendas will be agreed between the officers and the Chair/ Convenor and include a balance of regular and new items to fit in with the strategic outdoor access work being put before the CNPA Board

Chair for the Forum

- The terms 'Convenor' and 'Vice Convenor' were proposed as alternatives to Chair/Vice Chair
- Members would like time to get to know each other before electing the Chair/Convenor
- Most other Local Access Forums have waited 3-4 meetings before electing their own Chair/Convenor
- The procedure for electing a Chair/Convenor should be decided by the Forum at the third meeting and the format that had been used for National Park Board seemed to provide a good model.

Duration of tenure for members

- Most members felt that two years was too short a time and that a three year tenure was a better use of the time that would be invested in members' training and development
- There was felt to be merit in a significant proportion of members serving three years in order to see through the drawing up and adoption of the Core Path Plan
- There may be 'natural wastage' with some members wishing to leave after two years, thus allowing ingress of new members at that point whilst maintaining significant continuity.

Communication with others

- A range of methods were noted that would enable good communication to and from the Forum - for example, use of web pages; email newsletters; Parklife; press articles; 'annual gathering'
- There should not be a sole reliance on electronic communication
- Some other Forums have developed a Communication Strategy that sets out how they are going to communicate both internally and externally with stakeholders. This met with considerable support and members felt that such a strategy was an important early task to undertake.

AP2: Rona Gibb to provide CNPA staff with model Communication Strategies from other local access forums

Opening meetings to the public

- The Forum is an advisory, rather than decision-making body
- Open meetings have implications in respect of cost, time, advertising and promotion
- Forum members should feel comfortable in using meetings to explore and advance their thinking fully
- Meetings could have sessions which are 'open' or 'closed' to the public
- Developing an effective Communication Strategy could cover the issue of whether meetings should be open or closed
- In general there was no particular desire to open meetings to the public although this could be reviewed again after a year or so.

5. The Annual work plan 2005-06

This had been circulated to members. FP reiterated that the plan was very much a draft and the items on it may well change. The late summer and autumn meeting dates were moved to accommodate the summer break with meetings proposed for early June, early September, early November and early January. Members indicated that they would like meetings to be set a year in advance

AP3: FP to circulate revised work plan with new dates

6. AOCB

The question was raised whether the Forum would have a strong public face and what the expectations of the Board were in this regard. It was agreed that informal soundings would be taken - however, as a guide, no other Local Access Forum in Scotland has sought a high public profile to date. It was recognised that this would largely be a matter for Forum members and the Chair they elected.

In closing the meeting, MF summarised the responsibilities of the two Outdoor Access Officers and went on to advise members that KS was leaving the CNPA to take up a promotion within SNH. He thanked her for the substantial contribution she had made over the last few months. Recruitment for her successor is under way with interviews to be held on 10 May.

7. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 7 June in Tomintoul/Glenlivet (time to be confirmed)

AP4: CNPA staff to liaise with Andrew Wells re: Glenlivet/Tomintoul half-day visit programme for June meeting