

CRAGG

CAIRNGORM, ROTHIEMURCHUS AND GLENMORE GROUP

Meeting on Thursday 25 March 2010, 6pm at Glenmore Lodge

DRAFT MINUTES

PRESENT:

Sally Dowden	Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce
Philippa Grant	Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce
Willie McKenna	RGCA
John Grierson	AVCC
Murray Ferguson	CNPA
John Grant	Rothiemurchus Estate
Jeremy Roberts	RSPB
Keith Duncan	SNH
Alan Rankin	ACDMO
Ian Whitaker	CairnGorm Mountain
Dave Fallows	Highland Council
David Jardine	FCS (chair)
Allan Bantick	SWT
Bob Kinnaird	Glenmore Lodge
Richard Evans	Highland Council
Sue Palmer	Highland Council
Donnie Henderson	Northern Constabulary
Martin Johnston	HIE
Tessa Jones	BSCG

1 Welcome and Apologies

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies

Bill Wilson RGCA

2 Minutes of meeting held 29 September 2009

Minutes were accepted with an amendment to item 7, with the replacement of 'car-park' by 'caravan and camping park'.

3 Matters Arising;

Progress on the action points from the previous minutes was as follows:

AP 1 FCS had developed an agreement with SNH over thresholds for events. A copy of this was tabled and an electronic copy would be circulated to CRAGG members. **Discharged**

AP 7 The first and second events have taken place. **Discharged.**

AP 11 Minute note and summary have been circulated. **Discharged.**

AP 15 SNH and FCS have explored the possibility of funding to repeat the CRAGG area survey. In the current financial climate the opportunity for a repeat survey is slim. **Discharged.**

AP 18 Survey re camping requirements still being considered by Rothiemurchus Estate - **JGr**

AP 19 Language Translation on camping survey will be facilitated by FCS when survey is developed. **Ongoing - FCS**

AP 21 Rothiemurchus Estae have made contact with trail map providers with a view to improving pre-publication consultation. No contact made by RSPB. **Ongoing**

4 Review of visitor management arrangements during periods of heavy snow – Richard Evans and Sue Palmer

Richard Evans provided an overview of the issues faced by Highland Council in relation to coping with the heavy snowfall. The Ward Forum on 26 May would provide an opportunity for everybody to provide feedback. Salient points were:

- It had been the coldest period for 80 years with temperatures below zero for over a month in the Aviemore area
- THC have prioritised route clearance through the Highlands. The Aviemore-Glenmore Snow gates road remains Priority 1 for clearance. Path and pavement clearance is also prioritised
- The pattern of continuous snowfall (without wind) mean that there were challenges for THC in getting salt down across the whole road network before further snow arrived.
- In an average winter THC use 56k tonnes of salt. By 4 January THC stocks had reduced to 12k tonnes. Following that date conservation measures, which were managed at a national level, were introduced, which meant that lower priority roads were not salted and an increased use was made of sand.
- THC has a budget of £4.9m for winter maintenance and has spent £7m this winter.
- THC made extensive use of contractors to assist with snow clearance, with B&S using 15 (of the 60) employed.
- A number of lessons had been learnt and a Review paper has been prepared for Councillors.

A number of questions followed

- Staff availability? - The roads department had staff on duty throughout the holiday period
- Staff enabled to make decisions on laybys and passing places? – Decisions on these were linked to the road priority
- Was the right plant available? No, but more diggers with buckets were hired in when the problems were identified
- Would THC please provide a definitive statement on the procedures for people clearing public areas? THC is keen to enable people to help themselves. It was agreed that basic guidelines would be helpful to take away myths regarding liability etc.
- Pavements not cleared for weeks, leading to people walking on roads? The safety issues were acknowledged and the need to clear pavements earlier was accepted.

A discussion followed - the annex to these minutes summarises features which worked well, did not work well and where improvements could be made.

The Ward Forum on 26 May would consider these matters further, but the contribution of the meeting in drawing together key issues in an important location was recognised. It was agreed that a pre-meeting should be organised with key parties in advance of the Ward Forum. **AP22**

5 Management of informal camping in the National Park – Murray Ferguson

Concern was expressed that CNPA had not consulted with all the key land-owners/managers before producing the Board paper as other locations experienced problems and had adaptive management approaches to developing situations which could have been highlighted in the paper.

It was agreed that there was need for precise advice relating to the legal situation regarding camping and that land-owners/managers would welcome guidance on this along with other legislation which would also be relevant in situations where camping had associated activities which were detrimental to other visitors or the local area/environment. The support of the Police in dealing with the worst cases, although limited in number to date, was gratefully acknowledged.

The potential conflicts of extending car-parking lanes for winter traffic and summer use by motor-homes was recognised and some guidance of how to deal with camping 'just over the fence' from a provided campsite (which was not full) were recognised as some of the issues which need to be faced.

The role played by the DMO in summer 2009 to ensure that availability of pitches in provided sites was acknowledged and further use of this by operators was encouraged for 2010. The provision of extra facilities for peak periods and the identification of informal sites was all part of the way forward. The opportunity for further income generation was recognised as was the need to ensure that everything was undertaken in an appropriate manner to make visitors welcome.

A seminar for key parties was being organised in late April, when it was hoped that further progress on these issues could be made.

6 CRAGG Events Group and the Proposed Events Liaison Officer for the Park – Sally Dowden

A summary of the timeline for the development of the proposed Events Liaison Officer post was provided. The key issues being addressed by the post were:

- Lack of knowledge of the dates of events
- To ensure that there was a welcome to the area for event holders
- Development of an audit process for events
- It will not take on the organising of event

The formal decision on the post (funding is being sought from LEADER) was due shortly.

In discussion it was requested that this post looked at a broad spectrum of events and that the opportunity for promoting local community events be taken. There over the statement that some events had been turned away from the CNP and FCS confirmed that they had on occasion found alternative event sites outside the CNP where there this was considered an appropriate way forward when all the issues were considered. There was some concern that there had been insufficient discussion by CRAGG (although it was recognised that there had been no December meeting) and it would be good for smaller events and to provide help with dealing with the larger commercial events. Throughout the discussion it was recognised that local land-managers will still be key in event organisation and that this development should not get in the way of existing relationships.

The DMO saw this as part of a major marketing initiative for the NP as a co-ordinated / strategic approach to events was required.

7 Consideration of the future of CRAGG including membership

Discussion on this item was curtailed and it was agreed that the subject should be resumed at the next meeting. There was a dichotomy of views with the majority of those present indicating support for CRAGG, but two members were less sure of the need for CRAGG. They felt that it was just a talking shop and that the issues being discussed could be progressed by other meetings eg Ward Forum, through work between landowners and the CNPA etc. Concern was expressed that CRAGG was a 'closed shop' and only those invited could attend; this was supported by the suggestion that meetings should be 'open' meetings. There was considerable discussion on the history of CRAGG and why it had developed, but it was agreed that at the next meeting CRAGG should:

- Come to a view on whether it should continue
- Consider and agree what its role should be now and for the future (particularly in respect of developing work on the new National Park Plan)
- Review the make up of its membership
- Consider whether some or all of its meetings should be open to members of the public

8 Information Sharing

- The forthcoming Ward Forums were on 21 April (Tourism), 26 May (Winter maintenance), 23 June (Budget consultation)
- Rothiemurchus estate were still seeking to move and improve the reception facilities in the Rothiemurchus Estae caravan and camping park
- Members of CRAGG were invited to the opening of Tree-Zone on 27 May

- The ski area remained open and with the forecast snow for the following week it was anticipated that Ski-ing would continue until 3 May and possibly at weekends beyond that date
- A public consultation on the Management Plan of the Invereshie & Inshriach NNR was due to take place from May-July. A drop-in meeting was programmed for 5 May.
- AVCC are undertaking a feasibility study for a countryside park on the banks of the River Spey adjoining Aviemore in conjunction with Rothiemurchus estate.
- The oral history project publication '*No rivalry, but different*' was now at the printers and copies would be supplied to CRAGG members.
- Work on the Glenmore WWTW was almost complete; work to replace the sewer pipe network had been delayed by snow and would now hopefully take place between Easter and Whitsun to minimise impacts on visitors.
- The Core Path Plan has been adopted by the CNPA and Core Paths were now 'operational'. CNPA would be formally writing to land-owners in the near future.
- Andy Ford had returned to work and would be looking to take forward interpretive work on 'The old Logging Way'.
- Copies of the new Cairngorms Explorer map were made available to members

9 AOCB

MF reported that the CNPA Tourism Delivery Team had been asked to investigate the signage 'clutter' around Glenmore village with a view to providing improvement for the benefit of all tourists.

Date of next meeting and Chair: Glenmore Lodge on 24 June at 6.00pm
Chair: Keith Duncan

It was proposed that the chairs for subsequent meetings would be Ian Whitaker, Bob Kinnaird, Jeremy Roberts and Sally Dowden by rotation.

ANNEX

Review of visitor management arrangements during periods of heavy snow

This summary includes all views provided

Things which worked well

- Apart from during the holidays snow clearance was good in the CRAGG areas
- there was no wind, so the job was relatively easy
- quite a lot of self help – some private hire and volunteer ploughs were used
- organisations collaborated more
- Extra traffic wardens deployed
- No loss of key services (water & power)
- sharing of equipment
- assistance to get key staff in
- early starts to clear snow before traffic built up
- ambassadors from Cairngorm Mountain going along the traffic queues talking to drivers
- use of larger contracted-in equipment to lift and move snow
- Police (sergeant) review of road traffic issues underway
- not a lot, sadly since road clearance was split and the trunk roads franchised this has meant that the Local Authority simply does not have the road plant. I don't think there should be criticism of either body, they simply did not have the resources to cope
- working with Cairngorm Mountain staff
- Staff turning out at 4 am in order to beat the skiers
- a willing contractor who also turned out at 4am
- working with Forest Holidays staff to keep things moving
- Extra cash from another budget to engage a contractor
- Opening up of FC car parks asap in order to allow MOPs to park off road
- Bacon rolls from Mor @ Glenmore and cafe

Things which did not work well

- Stopping cars at Inverdrurie when the road was blocked beyond Glenmore: caused tailbacks right into Aviemore and prevented access to businesses in Rothiemurchus and Glenmore; this was sorted quickly
- Lack of car-parking at Glenmore
- No pavement clearing service carried out from Aviemore to Coylum Bridge
- When salt ran out no attempt to use grit or sand in its place
- No incentive for people to use winter treads or 4 wd on the Cairngorm Mountain road
- Information provision
- A national shortage of salt
- Plant break downs
- Perception by the public very poor
- Cars blocking roads / accidents
- Laybys not cleared
- Long layby needed between the Glenmore Campsite entrance and Glenmore shop, to assist with queuing for ski hire
- Cars without winter tyres, irresponsible 4x4s
- Insufficient width of road cleared
- Apparent lack of priority given to ski-road
- Skiers booking on line, thus feeling they had paid and therefore wanted to get onto the hill
- Communication issues, what messages were put out to the public and how they received it

- Electronic signage at Coylumbidge not working
- Road blocked by one vehicle; situation changes very quickly
- Challenge of getting key staff in to assist with preparation/clearance
- Letting 4 wheel drive vehicles ahead of other vehicles
- Venom of frustrated members of the public
- The hill had to return its snow blower to help clear main roads, leaving the hill delayed opening and probably losing business
- People not realising the competing priorities for the Police Force (other roads to deal with and other policing issues)
- Selfish skiers who from 7am parked anywhere that had been cleared of snow regardless of resulting congesting/accidents
- Locals and staff having to wait in mile long queues (on 3 January as far back as Aviemore roundabout) resulting in staff not getting to work until after 1030hrs
- Parking at the Glenmore shop in spite of police placing 'no waiting' cones....up to 40 vehicles some days
- Same in the afternoon with traffic trying to return to Aviemore being severely delayed by the bottleneck at the same premises
- Deal with irate MOPs who couldn't understand the problems involved in opening up the ski road
- Emergency vehicles denied access due to queuing traffic (two fire engines / ambulances and HC snow ploughs)
- Planning for husky weekend

Things where improvements could be made

- Have approved contractors ready to deal with emergencies eg GF Job
- Ensure that routines are in place to deal with unplanned events, that at all times it is clear who is in charge and that the person is capable of taking charge to sort out an unexpected situation: this comment relates to public and private organisations
- Practice scenario planning, using as appropriate the memories of retired front line staff
- Sharing realistic expectations with the public
- Self help updating our own snow clearing capacity
- Stock piling sand and mixing with grit
- Encourage winter tyres, everyone should carry a shovel in car etc
- Extra traffic wardens would have been helpful earlier
- Need to work smarter
- Development of Communication strategy essential
- Communications can influence signs further south on trunk roads
- Work together more
- Organise a pre-season meeting for Ski-road in October to increase preparedness
- Improve public understanding of the need to clear the ski-road and parking areas throughout the glen in advance of letting traffic up the road (Major land-owners, major businesses, major services, DMO)
- Develop adaptive management approaches for changing situations
- Ensure turning circles are available at key points
- Plan for a snow storm (did not happen this year) with additional impacts
- Look at re-prioritising the upper ski-road
- Investigate and provide (if necessary) parking lanes on key stretches
- Provide more ski-hire away from traffic pinch-points
- More police control of the public road / adhoc parking in the village
- Enforce the temporary no waiting cones by booking motorists who disregard them or indeed toss them into the ditch
- A true report about conditions posted on the CM electronic notice boards
- More information via hourly press releases to radio stations about the conditions
- Turn back all vehicles at Coylumbidge except staff or locals who have a legitimate right to proceed if the ski road is closed

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- Turn back all vehicles with low profile tyres (as used to be the case) on the hill road at the snow gates

Other comments

Email from Bill Wilson ; Ref heavy snow causing road problems at Glenmore. I feel HC managed very well under the exceptional circumstances. However I have a few personal concerns. It seems we have created a great demand for ski and other sliding equipment at Glenmore Shop Ski Hire. This seems to cause some parking issues during heavy snow periods when the road is restricted. Of course we have been encouraged by all sorts of organisations to promote skinning...the DMO etc and success has created this traffic problem. A concern is there may be moves afoot to restrict parking outside our premises. There are some issues:

- 1 We have no agreement with FC for clearing our car park. If we did this it would alleviate some of the problem immediately. We have a machine but it had no chance of coping with such deep snow this season
- 2 Highland Council (HC) almost never cleared the layby outside our premises. It is just a few seconds job and would create around 10 more parking spaces immediately
- 3 HC closed the public toilets at Glenmore and the consequences have been from 7.45 on a snowy morning people park to use our toilets. The official replacement for the toilets is the Visitor centre and the toilets in the woods (*beach toilets*). The woods toilet is completely unviable in winter conditions and the Visitor centre toilets are an uphill walk. Our toilets are very convenient hence parking by skiers who may have driven from the central belt. If the VC was opened at 8am instead of 9 there would be further alleviation of the parking problem. Closure of the public toilets has more implications than many people think!

I need to stand up against any move to restrict parking as the hire of sliding equipment maintains employment creating a viable rural community. There are many things that can be done before no parking signs are put up!