

LINK note on the LINK-CNPA meeting, October 2013

Attending:

*Deborah Long, Ross Finnie, Helen Todd, Jen Anderson
Grant Moir, Hamish Trench, Duncan Bryden*

Local Plan - what stage are CNPA at?

The Park is going through objections and reporting for each area to indicate 'accept' or 'reject' and take to Reporter by Christmas. There are just one fifth of the number of objections of last time round, 'no surprises', with housing the main and controversial issue. Oral evidence is unlikely though there may be negotiation with the Reporter ahead of sign-off; in the now revised process the Reporter has greater input now than previously; adoption timed for mid to late 2014; the core Park Plan is on the same timetable; the Park is first authority to be treated in this different inquiry process; and would find better guidance on this useful!

Asked whether the Park was on the SEG or SD trajectory, and reminded of LINK's interpretation as per Brundtland with 'sustainable economic growth' (SEG) as a regression from that, Grant thought this an interesting point. The Park was under no pressure other than the generic National Performance Framework. With both plans, the Park does much on the community/social aspects (CDT, broadband, Tomintoul buy-out support) and in environmental terms. The Local Plan allocates land for development in a relatively minor way, though housing allocation generates debate over sustainability; there is pressure from communities for housing for local people at reasonable rates; this is undoubtedly a problem which the Park is trying to address. The 4 principles of SD guide the Park.

The meeting noted that the new Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) opens the possibility of different interpretations of appropriate balance in dealing with housing requirements (perhaps intentionally unclear) and is worth exploration in consultation responses. 50% of the Park that is under Natura designation; they are looking now at cumulative impact and spatial approach to identifying limits and no-go areas.

Deborah outlined LINK's work to re-issue a briefing on the National Performance Framework and input to John Swinney's roundtable; she summarised LINK work on the SEG debate in relation to the Regulatory Reform Bill. Ross thanked the Park for this discussion, noting that there is no telling where 'statutory phrases' may end up, and that there is separation between the Park and the Government on this point. Grant referred us to the CNPA annual report.

Duncan Bryden joined the meeting at this point, referring to interesting recent discussions on community planning, **at which environment was under-represented**; he said the Park has opportunity to influence planning partnerships in terms of broad-based indicators for environment. Grant felt the Minister sits on a number of panels and fortunately hears a lot about this debate; in response, Ross referred Grant to the Minister's recent defence of SEG.

Access, recreation, rangers

Helen welcomed the Park's effective work on access and recreation and asked if there were plans towards a Park Ranger Service cf. LLT. Grant outlined the patchy and mixed situation in the Cairngorms and the difference in funding from LLT (ie., LLT receive £2m and CNP £180k per annum); the CNPA has no vehicles nor any 'own staff' to train in order to develop a service; meantime, they feel the estates-based service is high value for money although the fact that these rangers are currently 'hefted' to their estates is a downside; there are also gaps in the service in non-estate land, including where numbers are highest in the Glenmore corridor. Whilst resources are lacking for a shift to a park Ranger Service, there will be some review; the Park will look at long-term need, also at volunteer ranger possibilities as part of the picture, with professionals at the top of the arrangement, reporting to the Board in 2014 on how to achieve better spread over the 4500 square km of the Park. **Duncan invited LINK views on what rangers could be doing in CNPA, encouraging flexibility in terms of whose rangers these are, roles of volunteers and professional guides as honorary rangers, willingness to go beyond own hefts, and the need to reach out more to the**

people who don't/can't access the Park and its facilities. Deborah reported this was on same page as LINK thinking, and asked if the Park could provide LINK with this kind of gap analysis. **Grant confirmed the Park would share this with LINK.**

International role/ model and future of parks in Scotland

Deborah asked where the Park was going next in terms of international leadership role, as opposed to the work on taking local communities along. Duncan and Grant both claimed a good profile internationally for CNPA. There was a steady flow of Scandinavians (who have among the oldest parks but excluded community interest originally). US interest was now growing in how to USA parkss relevant to people and fundable so, Duncan asserted, Scotland is the international model. Connecting to local pressures is challenging, he added - 18000 people, local board members, the socio-economic 'push': the Park needs to indicate that the international approach brings in money (so the Minister has hinted), where regional development may not.

Is the Minister supportive, LINK asked? Grant felt that what was needed gain stronger Ministerial support would be better profile, domestically. NGOs tend to be critical and this holds the Park back. Instead, some defence is needed of CNPA's leadership achievements in land ownership, nature management, catchment management - much of which Grant believes is excellent, but not lauded by the NGOs. The international angle is the right angle to play, so how can the Park get LINK support esp. for Cairngorms Nature and what this has demonstrated about what can be achieved against Scotland's biodiversity targets. Deborah responded to note there were definitely elements, and beginnings, which LINK members could voice some support for. Helen felt the report *Unfinished Business* had been strong on Park achievements, but Grant felt this did not enough make enough of an argument about the economic benefit of the existing NPs.

Duncan was critical of NGOs pushing for more parks in Scotland, whilst indicating 'not this type' about the existing ones; the NGO model was 60s/70, out of date, he said, and Ministers feel things have moved on now. He referred to the Harris study where local support was strong but WICouncil objected on grounds of what they expected would be the outcome; in fact, legislation allows what the LA wants to see happen, and broad public support needs to help demonstrate that.

Grant invited a 'wider' view on parks from LINK. Jen reported significant wider member support for *Unfinished Business*. Ross felt there were separate points at issue here on which the principles should be established; local objectors seemed to be being presented as in opposition in principle, whereas they were in fact opposing only specific issues. Jen felt LINK members needed confidence that the Park can be robust. Deborah reminded the Park of the diversity of LINK members' views and explained that a great deal of work goes on under the 14 task forces, much of which relates to the work of the Park. **The meeting agreed to ensure the Park is aware of LINK outputs in these respects.** Deborah urged the Park to use LINK where it can at the same time as being ready for strong debate.

In response, Duncan challenged LINK for debate in the context of a more up to date model of NPs, and not on the expectations of 1975, for example; for discussion on what to do about outcomes, jobs, people, ensuring good park experiences. He reported the Peak District Park CEO as saying he "would give anything to have the Scottish model in the Peak District". Duncan felt we should not be insular, we could have some confidence that things are going okay in the Cairngorms; the Park was keen to build on this and improve. His view was that if we can jointly prove to Ministers that there is some support for Parks, Ministers may agree that on some issues things should be done differently. He suggested members tell the Park more about the positive things they see it does, talk up its contribution to NPF3 and the SPP, biodiversity strategy, wind farm strategy, hilltracks; promoting shared ground rather than putting the Minister off, with negatives.

Helen reported that various members had written to the Minister in support of *Unfinished Business*. Duncan responded asking if LINK was looking at how Scotland would develop and address the many challenges facing it in future; he cited expansion of Inverness, dualling of the A9 and the impacts such development would have, the increasing trend for day visitors to the area - all of which would be huge on the Park, the Spey valley, inevitably. Ross reported that LINK does indeed take a broad

view, through a range of issues, and would be very glad if the planning tools encompassed this breadth better; he cautioned that the planning documents and aspirations are currently only draft.

The meeting noted that earlier versions of the planning documents had been less clear about differing roles of Parks and Planning Authorities. CNPA said the Park must provide enough housing land to meet the needs of the LAs involved in the Park. So, looking ahead, flexibility via the planning tools about type of housing for whom is vital - local, affordable, the right sort for people to live and work in the area. Where should development go, what type of villages, where is the tipping-point, where to say no, and how to explore all that with Government - these issues are to the fore for the Park. Ross agreed that the overlaps of LA control are a poor legacy but were the best that could be achieved at the time of the Park's establishment. Duncan spoke of the need for LINK to support things on the 'golden goose' analogy alongside all the pressure for development. This he felt would help the Park to get ahead of development and able to control the nature of that development.

Deborah summarised actions for LINK to consider: supporting flexibility in the SPP; talking up Cairngorm Nature; thinking and communicating on the Spey valley reaching development potential.

Other issues

Significance of capercaillie - If this is to be promoted as the iconic species much more needs to be done to sell the message behind this, say CNPA; the buffers are being reached in the HRAs. The issue is development; are the current designations right? Re-present the 'bird that likes to say no'.

SLU - CNPA are involved in the Aberdeenshire pilot though don't see it going much further; what's needed is land use that is not just nice words, and regional land use strategies set up and delivering; Government had declined the Park offer to be a pilot, preferring to focus on areas more representative of Scotland in the Ministers' words.

Contact with LINK members Which of LINK's members does the Park have good regular engagement with at high level, LINK asked? Mainly RSPB. NTS to some extent though not at strategic level. Other NGOs less so.

Hilltracks - CNPA noted LINK's campaign report and plan to take Minister out, and limitations of Pentlands for that. Were the Park in support of LINK's case? Yes, their position was already published, they wish to see tracks brought within the planning remit, and with separation of forestry, field sports and farming, in relation. They have cogitated on options for that separation eg. to emphasise high-level tracks. The meeting noted that LINK is saying 'all tracks' because of loopholes available to estates in the 'high only' approach. Helen felt that a big push is needed by NGOs and that the Parks might usefully support this. Grant indicated that the Beauldy-Denny tracks are being called in on grounds of impacts in relation to eg., tourism and economics.

Buffer zones Grant indicated that another important aspect of the draft SPP was that the 'settings' of National Parks are recognised as areas where development such as windfarms should not be built; possibly this could be interpreted as requirement for de facto buffer zones around parks.

LINK & CNPA site visit Grant issued an invitation to members to go out on a site visit 'day' with Park staff in the summer of 2014.

LINK work on deer management LINK outlined the position which LINK is beginning to draw up on deer management, and the various interests within LINK which are concerned (ie, landscape, recreation, historic environment, as well as biodiversity and woodland) and CNPA said they were very supportive of further controls on deer numbers. There are numerous examples within the Park which could be used to show detrimental impacts of deer being 'out of control'.

It was noted that JMT, NTS, SNH and the 2 NPAs will hold a conference on John Muir in May 2014.

The meeting closed.