

# Cairngorm Advisory Group

## NOTE OF MEETING

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14.00 – 16.15

Thursday 26 August 2021

Microsoft Teams



**Cairngorm Advisory Group  
26 August 2021**

**Note of virtual meeting**

**Present**

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| Alistair Dodds   | Chair, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (chairing this meeting)          |
| Bill Lobban      | Convener, The Highland Council (Group co-chair)                          |
| ██████████       | Aviemore Community Council   |
| Uwe Stoneman     | Abernethy Forest Estate (RSPB)   |
| Duncan Swarbrick | Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust                                    |
| Jason Martin     | Cairngorm Business Partnership   |
| Lesley McKenna   | Cairngorm Mountain Trust   |
| Susan Smith      | Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd  |
| Murray Ferguson  | Cairngorms National Park Authority                                       |
| Ruari Watt       | Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland – Highland                        |
| James Gibbs      | Highlands and Islands Enterprise   |
| Paul Dzialdowski | Highlands and Islands Enterprise   |
| Elaine Hanton    | Highlands and Islands Enterprise   |
| Douglas Cowan    | Highlands and Islands Enterprise   |
| Chris Roberts    | Highlands and Islands Enterprise   |
| David Frew       | Mar Lodge Estate (NTS)   |
| David Black      | Mountaineering Scotland  |
| Debbie Green     | NatureScot   |
| Johnnie Grant    | Rothiemurchus Estate   |
| Andrew Saunders  | Scottish Ski Club  |
| Euan Baxter      | Snowsports Scotland  |
| Shaun Roberts    | Sports Scotland (Glenmore Lodge, Scottish Avalanche Information Service) |
| Malcolm MacLeod  | The Highland Council   |
| Chris Taylor     | VisitScotland  |

|   | Item   | Action |
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| 1 | <b>Welcome and introductions</b>   |        |
|   | <p>Alistair Dodds welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies received from Rachel Davies and Karren Derrick.</p> <p>The following changes to attendance were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ██████████ attending for Peter Long, Chair of Aviemore Community Council,</li> <li>- Jason Martin attending for Mark Tate, Cairngorm Business Partnership,</li> <li>- David Frew attending for Jim Whyteside, NTS,</li> <li>- Debbie Greene attending for Chris Donald, NatureScot,</li> <li>- Andrew Saunders attending for Moira Langmuir, Scottish Ski Club, and</li> <li>- Murray Ferguson attending for Grant Moir, CNPA.</li> </ul> | -      |

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| 2 | <b>Approve previous note/actions/matters arising</b>  |   |
|   | <p>The previous meeting note was approved.</p> <p>Previous Actions:</p> <p>James Gibbs and Malcolm Macleod confirmed that the issue of staff accommodation was being addressed. It was noted that Cairngorm Business Partnership had hosted a meeting with Cabinet Secretary Kate Forbes MSP on this issue and that a local task force was being established.</p> <p>Matters Arising:</p> <p>Paul Dzialdowski provided an update on the masterplan and development of an action plan for delivery of the ten strategies contained within it. It was noted that CMSL is developing mountain biking proposals which would be considered at the next meeting of its Board. Susan Smith confirmed that initial proposals focus on a relatively small area confined to the Mountain, but there would be full engagement with Section 50 stakeholders, CNPA and others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action:</b> A fuller item on the Cairngorm masterplan will be on the agenda at the next meeting. (HIE)</li> <li>• <b>Action:</b> CMSL will engage with stakeholders on mountain biking proposals over coming months. (HIE and CMSL)</li> </ul>  | - |
| 3 | <b>Discussion on local economy</b>  |   |
|   | <p>James Gibbs introduced this item and asked Jason Martin and Duncan Swarbrick to share comments and feedback with the meeting.</p> <p>Jason Martin noted that business confidence was more buoyant than at any time since 2018, but noted the following challenges reported by members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bureaucracy remains a barrier to growth for many businesses (as reported by 42% of businesses surveyed).</li> <li>- 74% of businesses surveyed reported ongoing difficulties recruiting, with particular challenges in recruiting cleaning, housekeeping, and catering staff.</li> <li>- Lack of available and affordable housing is a major problem. The Government's Rent a Room scheme may ease pressure.</li> <li>- Delay to the funicular being brought back into operation will have an impact, including the loss of the coach market next summer.</li> </ul> <p>Jason provided the link to Cairngorms Business Barometer, as below:<br/> <a href="https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c90193534c4e2471aa9a6db/t/610074027f88bd68245e0e60/1627419655556/56.123+-+CBB+Q2+2021+-+Final+Version.pdf">https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c90193534c4e2471aa9a6db/t/610074027f88bd68245e0e60/1627419655556/56.123+-+CBB+Q2+2021+-+Final+Version.pdf</a></p> <p>Susan Smith then provided an update from CMSL and noted that the coach market is showing some signs of picking up. CMSL currently has 8-10 coaches visiting per week, mainly from England. She further noted that trade since the end of July has been buoyant, with £60k gross income from the tubing slides alone since the site reopened on 26 April. This was also driving secondary spend in the business and</p> |   |

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|   | <p>catering and retail revenues had increased by one third. She noted that trade is expected to be buoyant until the end of the summer holiday period and in October.</p> <p>Duncan Swarbrick reported the following anecdotal feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overall, businesses are busy, especially those who have been able to adjust and diversify.</li> <li>- Retail sector has not enjoyed the same level of recovery as other sectors.</li> <li>- Hospitality is busy but temporary closures due to Covid are continuing to cause problems.</li> <li>- Accommodation sector is running at full capacity.</li> <li>- Recreation sector is seeing demand outstrip supply, and</li> <li>- Traditional trades are busy but challenged by rising prices and material shortages, both of which are set to continue over the next year.</li> </ul> <p>Murray Ferguson confirmed the CBP survey results had been presented to the most recent meeting of the Cairngorm Economic Steering Group. Malcolm Macleod noted that the take-up of Kick Start grants in the Highland Council area had been good, but encouraging applications from younger people was proving challenging. He further noted that Highland Council still has some discretionary grant funding available, and that Scottish Government had confirmed that some flexibility over the use of this funding would be allowed.</p> <p>Shaun Roberts confirmed that despite running at reduced capacity Glenmore’s forward bookings were strong and higher than in previous years. Three quarters of bookings were new users, with many coming from Scottish and University cities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action:</b> Highland Council to share information with members on Highland Employment Recruitment Offer (HERO) funding for businesses in need.</li> </ul> |  |
| 4 | <p><b>Operating and governance review:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context and background</li> <li>• Lessons learned – interactive session</li> </ul>   |  |

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|          | <p>Elaine Hanton introduced the workshop session, and described the process being followed to consider and assess future operating models for Cairngorm. Members were invited to offer their views on what has and has not worked in the past, and the lessons which need to be considered as plans for the future are developed. She noted that there would be further consultation with stakeholders, including this group, and that HIE would not be rushing to reach a conclusion. She also noted that HIE would be happy to discuss this separately with any members who wished to do so.</p> <p>James Gibbs was then asked to facilitate the discussion. James introduced the session with a short history of Cairngorm’s different operating periods, noting the uniqueness of the Mountain and the very special connection many feel with it. He invited members to share their experiences and reflections, whether from an operating, sporting, cultural or wider perspective. The points raised were captured on power point slides as the discussion progressed and were reviewed by the group during and at the end of the workshop.</p> <p>Alistair Dodds thanked all members for their constructive comments and noted the positive and wide range of contributions. He reiterated that HIE is genuinely listening and wants to work with this group and others to develop a future operating model for Cairngorm. He noted that it would be difficult to bring all views together but committed to HIE doing all that it could to find an agreed way forward.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action:</b> HIE to share summary of points recorded at meeting.</li> <li>• <b>Action:</b> All members invited to send any further comments, questions, and information to HIE.</li> </ul> |  |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Heritage Horizons</b>  |  |
|          | <p>Murray Ferguson updated members on the £12.5m award from the National Heritage Lottery Fund:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 45 different partners have signed up,</li> <li>- Two-year development phase, followed by 5-year delivery phase.</li> <li>- A further bid would be submitted in 2023 for the remainder of the funding.</li> <li>- David Cameron, CNPA director, has overall responsibility.</li> <li>- An external advisory board will be established.</li> <li>- The project involves 23 separate projects, not all of which will be led by CNPA.</li> </ul> <p>Two projects directly relevant to Cairngorm are the active travel project which CNPA is leading, and a project to develop the wellbeing economy which is being taken forward with the Wellbeing Alliance.</p> <p>The project is an at early stage, but further information can be found on the CNPA website which will be kept updated.</p>  |  |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Funicular update</b>   |  |

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|          | <p>Douglas Cowan described the strong progress which has been made on site by Balfour Beatty, but also the significant challenges relating to the technical complexity of the reinstatement work, challenges presented by Covid, impact of severe weather earlier in the year, and additional efforts required to source materials which have been in short supply UK wide. He noted that while every effort had been made to enable completion during winter 21/22, it was clear that this was no longer achievable, and it was inevitable that works would now have to complete next year. With a five-month shut down over winter and a testing and recommissioning process to be undertaken after works complete, it is now expected the funicular will return to operations in Autumn 2022. He noted that the revised programme was still being developed, as were the cost implications of this delay.</p> <p>Alistair Dodds emphasised that it was with considerable regret that the programme had to be extended, and that HIE does recognise the challenges this presents for the local area. He also noted that HIE was keen to ensure this information was shared with all stakeholders at the earliest opportunity and that HIE would make public the revised programme and costs as soon as these were known.</p> <p>Euan Baxter questioned the impact of the delay on snowsports at Cairngorm this winter, both in terms of access to snow and avoiding any construction materials remaining on site over the winter. Elaine Hanton confirmed that efforts would now focus on planning with CMSL for winter snowsports. A workshop was being arranged with contractors to work out how the construction area could be made safe with as much access as possible for snowsports. Euan offered to help develop the strategy to communicate information to the snowsports community.</p> |  |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Any other business</b>   |  |
|          | <p>No other matters were raised. Alistair Dodds thanked everyone for their contributions and encouraged anyone who wished to follow up further with HIE to contact any of the HIE team.</p> <p>Date of next meeting: 1<sup>st</sup> December at 1400.</p>   |  |

26 August 2021