

# Cairngorm Advisory Group

## NOTE OF MEETING

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HIE, An Lòchran, Inverness Campus  
and online

Wednesday 22 May 2024  
14.00 – 16.00



Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

**Cairngorm Advisory Group**  
**22 May 2024**

**Note of meeting**

**Present – Inverness**

Alistair Dodds (AD)	Chair, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (Chair of meeting)
Kirsty Bruce (KB)	Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust
Mike Dearman (MD)	Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust
Jason Martin (JM)	Destination Aviemore
Ruari Watt (RW)	Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland - Highland
Mark Greig (MG)	Highland Council
Dave Macleod (DM)	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Ghillelan Macleod (GM)	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Chris Roberts (CR)	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
James Turner (JT)	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Johnnie Grant (JG)	Rothiemurchus Estate
Chris Taylor (CT)	VisitScotland

**Present – online**

Bill Lobban (BL)	Convenor, Highland Council (Group Co-chair)
Claire Smith (CS)	Abernethy Forest Estate (RSPB)
Susan Smith (SS)	Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd
Colin Matthew (CM)	Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd
Lesley McKenna (LM)	Cairngorm Mountain Trust
Gavin Miles (GM)	Cairngorms National Park Authority
Rachel Davies (RD)	Disability Snowsports UK
Paul Hibberd (PH)	Forestry and Land Scotland
David Frew (DF)	National Trust for Scotland
Andrew Saunders (AS)	Scottish Ski Club

Apologies had been received from Stephanie Andrew, Euan Baxter, Davie Black, Mark Blyth, Chris Donald, Paul Dzialdowski, Debbie Greene, Audrey MacIver, Craig Mills, Grant Moir, Iain Ramsay-Clapham, Shaun Roberts and Duncan Swarbrick.

<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome and introductions</b>
	AD welcomed everyone to the meeting and recorded apologies. The Chair noted that HIE's premises in Inverness were being used as they offered telecon and that other organisations were welcome to host future meetings.
<b>2</b>	<b>Note of previous meeting</b>
	The note of the meeting held on 9 August 2023 was approved with one typographical amendment. The year had incorrectly been noted as 2024.
<b>3</b>	<b>Matters arising</b>
	The Chair invited comments from CAG members on the Walking the Talk report on visitor management that had been presented at the August 2023 meeting. It was noted that HIE planned to publish the report on its website in due course.

	<p>SS reported that safety was being compromised by drivers choosing to park on the access road to the resort rather than pay the £3 seasonal daily charge to use the car park. It was not unusual for more than 50 cars to be parked on the road each day. It was noted that the charge at Cairngorm was equivalent to other local attractions in the Glenmore corridor and that CMSL had raised the issue with the Highland Council. It was noted that Glenmore Lodge had similar issues with careless parking and SS indicated she would contact them.</p> <p>JG noted that payment for parking at Rothiemurchus Estate was voluntary and portrayed as a contribution to maintain the environment. It had proven helpful to welcome drivers and explain why charging was in place.</p>
<b>4</b>	<b>Funicular remediation works</b>
	<p>DM updated the group on the current status of funicular remediation works being carried out by Balfour Beatty under contract from HIE.</p> <p>He began by explaining the background to the decision to reinstate the funicular after it had been taken out of service in 2018 for safety reasons. Working to designs from COWI, peer reviewed by Mott MacDonald, Balfour Beatty had begun the reinstatement programme in November 2020 and concluded in December 2022.</p> <p>The funicular came back into service in January 2023. That August, however, inspectors picked up problems with tension in some scarf joints being lower than the recommended level and the service was withdrawn again. The subsequent remediation works had proven complex and required inspection and treatment of scarf joints, beams and diaphragms, as well as associated grouting.</p> <p>It was noted that Balfour Beatty was currently bearing the cost of the remediation works.</p> <p>As part of routine maintenance it was also planned to replace bogeys, which form part of the undercarriage on the trains.</p> <p>AD emphasised that HIE understood the funicular's absence was a serious issue for the Badenoch and Strathspey economy and expressed his appreciation to CMSL staff who were continuing to operate and develop the resort while dealing with a very difficult situation.</p>
<b>5</b>	<b>Cairngorm Masterplan 2020-25 update</b>
	<p>DM reported on delivery of early projects that were included in the 25-year Cairngorm Masterplan.</p> <p>The HIE-funded ranger service at Cairngorm was doing a great job in maintaining the environment and educating visitors. There was also very good work on habitat being undertaken by partner organisations, including the prospect of extensive tree planting by Forestry and Land Scotland.</p> <p>CMSL's introduction of family-friendly mountain biking was proving successful.</p> <p>Work was progressing on plans that could lead to the desired development of a Centre for the Mountain Environment (new day lodge) and potential new chairlift. It was noted, however, that the present financial situation meant HIE and CMSL would concentrate first on more readily deliverable items. Recent investments in car park improvements, an</p>

	<p>extension to the upper viewing terrace, and an expanded range of activities were all helping to improve the visitor experience at Cairngorm Mountain.</p> <p>It was understood that SSE was considering a new sub-station at the Sheiling, which could create an opportunity to move the Snow Factory from its current location.</p> <p>SS highlighted plans to introduce mountain karting as another strand in CMSL's strategy to strengthen the resort's appeal to the family market all year round. It was also hoped to obtain planning approval for further development of the children's play area, which could be operational this summer.</p> <p>Looking ahead, consideration was also being given to plans for a demountable mountain coaster that could potentially operate from April to October and be taken down during snowsports season. This would also require planning permission.</p> <p>In discussion, it was noted that CMSL was in contact with local businesses and sharing its ambitions to develop the range of attractions at the resort. In response to a question from CS, it was confirmed that two summer rangers had recently been recruited. SS offered to contact CS after today's meeting to discuss effective co-ordination between CMSL and RSPB.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action:</b> SS to contact CS re ranger services.</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<b>Local tourism update</b>
	<p>CT reported on the current performance of the Scottish tourism sector, highlighting changes in both domestic and international customer behaviour arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis.</p> <p>2023 had been a strong year for international visits coming to Scotland and 2024 looked set to continue this pattern. Connecting with nature remained a strong motivation for international visitors and sustainable tourism was in high demand.</p> <p>The domestic market accounted for 75% of visitors, but less than 50% of spend, which was highest among US visitors and Scotland was out-performing the rest of the UK in the international high-spending market. Online booking had extended more into events and activities as well as accommodation and travel.</p> <p>JT and SS were interested in information on demographics, including age, and CT offered to send information and discuss further offline. He noted that, following the pandemic, there had been a significant rise in the number of young people visiting the Highlands, but this had declined during the cost of living crisis and the region was now seeing a rise in older visitors.</p> <p>In response to a question on over-tourism, CT responded that the region generally was performing well, but acute pressures were affecting some areas. Making such areas more resilient and spreading visitors across the country and across the year were part of VisitScotland's current approach.</p> <p>GM highlighted CNPA's tourism action plan and sustainable tourism strategy and visitors' group as examples of how the park authority is seeking to develop tourism in a sustainable way that minimises negative impacts. He noted that plans were in place to</p>

	<p>improve infrastructure and that effective management of sites, particularly the most popular destinations, would play an important role in avoiding conflict.</p> <p>CT added that the national visitor survey and a forthcoming survey in the Cairngorms National Park would provide helpful data and analysis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action:</b> CT to send presentation to CAG members.</li> <li>• <b>Action:</b> CT to share information on traveller demographics with CT at HIE and SS at CMSL.</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<b>Glenmore Visitor Centre</b>
	<p>MD provided an update on Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust's plans following its successful acquisition of Glenmore Visitor Centre. He summarised the history of ACGT, which had formed in 2017 and had initially focused solely on Cairngorm Mountain but now had a broader scope.</p> <p>The opening of Aviemore Ice Rink in 2021 had been a notable success, attracting more than 50,000 visitors and generating over £230,000 turnover. In addition to providing a venue for skating, hockey and curling, the rink had a wider social impact, improving pride and confidence in the community.</p> <p>While the Trust's bid for Glenmore campsite had not succeeded, its interest had moved on to Glenmore Visitor Centre and an asset transfer had now been agreed with Forestry and Land Scotland, with entry planned for November. It was intended that this venture would give local people a stake in decision making to develop an updated visitor centre that would complement other offerings and be capable of generating revenue to invest for community benefit.</p> <p>The purchase had been supported by a loan from Social Investment Scotland and management will be through AGCT Glenmore Ltd, a subsidiary of the Trust. An approach to the Scottish Land Fund was being considered for phase two.</p> <p>AD thanked MD for his presentation, commenting that it was good to see the importance the Trust attached to effective governance.</p>
<b>8</b>	<b>Cairngorm 2030 Heritage Horizons initiative</b>
	<p>GM provided a verbal update on progress by the CNPA with the Cairngorm 2030 Heritage Horizons initiative, a five-year project mostly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which was now entering its implementation phase.</p> <p>Actions were focused on improving health and wellbeing. An active travel package included cycling facilities, access to bicycles, sustainable transport including electric buses and plans to widen and upgrade the old logging way. Under the active communities theme, plans included bus lanes, wider pavements and more dropped kerbs. There was an overall intention to change behaviours by providing more opportunities for people to make more use of sustainable transport and less of private cars.</p> <p>MG expressed an interest in discussions on active travel between the Highland Council and CNPA and GM agreed to pursue this.</p>

9	Any other business
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AD read out a message from Euan Baxter of Snowsport Scotland, who was unable to attend today's meeting, expressing thanks to CMSL and the Highland Council for supporting an initiative to provide 136 school pupils with free skiing lessons over three weeks in March. Almost half of those taking part were beginners.</li> <li>• It was planned to hold the next meeting of the CAG in November 2024. AD invited members to offer to host the meeting and thanked all who had taken part today for their attendance and participation.</li> </ul>

Chris Roberts  
22 May 2024