

COMMENTS ON THE ROTHIEMURCHUS AND GLENMORE STRATEGY

The strategy attempts to cover all aspects of management of the area and contains much valuable comment and information that will be useful for the future management of the area. We think however that it could be improved by acting on the following points.

BOUNDARY OF THE AREA

It is important that the area covered by the strategy has a coherent boundary set logically according to social, economic or physical parameters. Without this, management policies become illogical in their application and much less effective. The strategy does not state the rationale on which the selection of boundaries is based, and certain parts of the area included do not make sense and should be omitted if a management strategy is to be coherent. Craigellachie NNR forms no logical part of the area and it should be omitted. Inclusion of some of the further reaches of Rothiemurchus might be partially justified on the grounds of including catchment boundaries but this does not seem to be the prime parameter for defining boundaries and the inclusion of considerable parts of Rothiemurchus should be reconsidered.

Significance and Function(s) of the Area

There is considerable useful description of the area's natural assets but the basic functions of the area in terms of landuse need to be brought out more clearly. Viz:-

a) Recreational

The tourist industry of Badenoch and Strathspey, as in other area of the Highlands, is based on the appeal of its landscape, wildlife, and the recreational experiences it offers in that context. The area concerned is by far the most important asset the B&S has in this respect. Past surveys for example have demonstrated that the Loch Morlich beach is the most visited place in Speyside, both by local people and visitors. The central role of the area in maintaining that broader industry should be made clear.

b) Inherent Scientific and Wildlife and Landscape Value

The wildlife value of the area is fairly fully described but its landscape value is neglected. This are not only provides many tourist with their

most extensive experience of a pine forest but also their most intimate contact with a mountain environment when visiting the Scottish Highlands.

c) Buffer Zone

This is one of the most important functions of the area considered by the strategy but it is not brought out or considered adequately. A core principle of the management of mountain areas throughout the world, and clearly recognised as such, especially in protected areas such as National Parks, is that the attempts to protect them succeed or fail depending on whether development is limited and sensitive in the area immediately surrounding them. Failing this, it is impossible to adequately control the pressures on the central massifs. Hence, a key feature in the management of such areas is the creation of buffer zones around them in which development is strictly supervised and controlled.

Around the Cairngorms, foothills lying before the main massif perform this function naturally except at Glenmore where the bowl formed by it leads easily into the main massif. Glenmore and the contiguous parts of Rothiemurchus thus form a key part of the buffer zone in which development needs close control and the expansionist tendencies of the Cairngorms Chairlift Company have perhaps inevitably collided with this. This is one of the area's most important functions in terms of land use and development control. While there is almost an inherent recognition of this in the comments on the need for the control of visitors at the top of the funicular railway, it needs to be brought out more clearly with respect to the management of the entire area of Glenmore and Rothiemurchus.

The need to respect this buffer zone function is a major principle in the balance between development and environmental protection in the area but this is not really made explicit and should be.

Statement of Impacts of Recreation and Other Pressures on the Environment

There is a tendency to understate or underestimate these. On page 17 for example, the discussion on the impacts of recreation in mountains rightly points to the damage to the ski area but does not mention the very serious

and extensive damage to the summit of Cairn Gorm above that, which has led in the past to some very serious and dramatic erosion events.

Similarly, the miles of eroded footpaths that have developed in the Northern Corries certainly constitute very extensive damage, while the damage to large stretches of the margins of Loch Morlich by trampling of the littoral by fisherman, beach erosion due to heavy use by tourists, insensitive bulldozing of car parks, and creation of boat launching area by infilling of the loch.

2.1 Page 17 Natural Heritage

There is detailed coverage of this aspect but the relevance of these assets needs made clearer, quite part from there value is the basic supporting assets of the local tourist industry.

A major landuse in the area and the contiguous parts of the higher Cairngorms that it protects, is the production of knowledge fundamental to the operation of modern human communities and economies globally. Research in the areas mentioned in recent decades has provided among other things, knowledge of the past performance of climate, early indicators of climatic change and its likely impacts, the likely impact of acid rain pollution on agricultural and other soils, and other information. This should be made clear as an important asset of the area.

In section 2.1.3 on page 21, the central importance of Loch Morlich and in the local tourist economy needs to be made clear.

Priority Landuses

It is important to be realistic in prioritising the landuses in an area as this influences management decisions strongly. Para 3.2 on page 47 states that:-

“While it is important to sustain the essentially undeveloped nature of the area, the primary industries of forestry and farming also need to be considered as the back bone of the cultural heritage, their contribution to habitats and species and the integrity of the resource which visitors enjoy.

This statement is really not true. Farming plays little role in shaping landscapes or cultural heritage over the great majority of the area and its role steadily decreases. Forestry plays more of a role, but increasingly the management of

forests in the area is driven more by consideration of conservation, recreation and landscape rather than timber production.

The Importance of the Glenmore/Rothiemurchus Corridor

The three basic functions of the area under consideration have been defined as:-

- 1) Its function as a buffer zone protecting the Central Cairngorms massif. This is a function of national and international significance.
- 2) The conservation of sites within the area designated at the local, UK, and European Union level
- 3) Its local function as a key basic resource on which the local tourist industry is founded.

The importance of protecting the area for this last function enters into the strategy considerably but a key aspect of this is not tackled adequately if at all and that is the handling of the Glenmore/Rothiemurchus corridor.

In one of the most strongly stated policies in the Local Plan, it states that:-

“GLENMORE: the enormous visitor pressures and international importance of land in this corridor require the highest possible standards of land management and planning. There should be a strict presumption against non-essential development in this area.”

The lack of development in the Glenmore/Rothiemurchus corridor has meant that, from the highly urbanised landscape of Aviemore, it has been nonetheless simple, in a matter of minutes, to enter a rural, semiwild, classical Highland landscape travelling along the corridor towards Cairn Gorm. The visual experience of this “journey to play” as tourist experts have described such routes, is an important part of the visitor’s day and hence of the overall tourist resource. Yet, despite the appreciation of the importance of this scenic, semiwild, scenic drive, one has seen over the years the progressive urbanisation of the Rothiemurchus corridor, which is now being accelerated by the construction of housing.

If the local community, through the strategy, does not protect the national and international functions, it risks losing that broader financial support

that is so important to the tourist industry. If development damages the landscape and wildlife, the industry will be more directly affected.

Whatever the reason for this trend, it is important that the strategy recognises and addresses it!

In General

It is important that the strategy and the Working Group- recognise that there are fundamental tensions between protection of the basic resource and development trends within the park. For example, the major intrusion that development of the road into a broad fast highway that is has become, bringing with it such problems as the traffic hazards from speeding cars, showed the conflict between servicing the ski development and conserving the character of the lower areas of Glenmore in particular. The strategy rightly discusses and emphasizes the need to limit car traffic, but the reality is that, as the information quoted in the report shows, and the stated need for increased carparking at lower levels also demonstrates, developments within the park, chiefly the construction of the funicular, will greatly increase traffic flows. The redevelopment of Aviemore will increase this trend. However, the remedies offered for this (bicycle routes and footpaths to Glenmore) have little impact compared with those factors trend. This scale of problem needs recognised and addressed realistically

Structure of the Advisory Group and Management Group

Following on from all of the above, a general point about the structure of the above groups needs made.

Probably no community in Scotland is more dependent on an effective co-operation between national and local interests for its continued welfare than that of Rothiemurchus/Glenmore. This is as a result of its role as a buffer zone for the central Cairngorms, the national and international significance of the natural resources within the area itself, and their parallel high value for recreation and general tourism which underpins the economy, and the dependence of local development on diverse nationally delivered subsidies. The strategy can only achieve the necessary mutual cooperation of national and local interests if there is appropriate representation of each level of interest on its working groups.

Given this situation, there is an under-representation of national interests on both groups. The recent increased emphasis on local involvement in management of areas such as this is a necessary corrective to past overcentralisation but the proposed structure of these groups is an overcorrection. The national interests in conservation and outdoor recreation represent after all not just a broader view but the interests of major client groups of the key industry that supports the local economy – tourism. Recent studies on the major significance of outdoor recreation and experience of wildlife and landscape for job creation in the Highlands demonstrate this point clearly. The present under-representation of these interests on the Advisory and Management groups will not lead to consensus but is more likely to lead to the production of plans and policies that produce conflict.