



Winter 2006/2007

A Happy New Year to you all.

In August 2004, we had our first meeting with the Scottish Executive at Ministerial level when we met with Allan Wilson MSP. The meeting was useful in getting to know each other and learning of the problems faced by Ministers in pursuing the National Park role. It was agreed to meet on an annual basis. However, before our second meeting, Allan Wilson moved on to be replaced by Lewis Macdonald MSP. All was not lost because he agreed to continue with an annual meeting. Sadly, before it could happen, he also moved on to be replaced by Rhona Brankin MSP. Being positive, we could see advantages in this because she had done the job some years earlier and would not be coming to it cold. After some delay, we managed to meet in October 2005, 15 months after our meeting with Allan Wilson. We met again in September 2006, a degree of continuity not previously enjoyed. Both meetings with Ms Brankin were useful to us and we hope, to her.

On 9 January 2007, the First Minister announced that Ms Brankin was being moved to be Communities Minister and that she would be replaced at Environment and Rural Affairs by Sarah Boyack MSP. We have, therefore, our fourth Minister in 28 months. If Scotland's environment and environmentally sustainable development in rural areas is as important as the Scottish Executive say (SCNP does not need to be convinced of this), there must be disadvantages in running matters in this way!

Looking to the positive, Sarah Boyack comes to the job with excellent credentials. She is a professional Town and Country Planner with experience in local government at both Regional and District levels as well as academic experience teaching future generations of planners. In the first Scottish Parliament of the modern era, she had a wide ministerial remit dealing with land use, environment, transport etc., a job that required thinking in the round and seeing the total picture. This is the kind of approach which will be needed to develop strategy on National Parks across Scotland both land and marine based.

We look forward to working with Ms Boyack.

Robert Maund /Chairman

SPP11 Physical Activity and Open Space: Consultation Draft.

In November last year we were pleased to respond to the above consultation draft, another in the series which SEDD are progressing. The Scottish Executive is making considerable efforts to encourage a healthier lifestyle and secure proper standards of open space as an integral part of that stance. SCNP confined its response to those aspects of the draft that have particular relevance to our concerns over the threatened industrialisation by windfarm development of some of our most important recreational assets and the consequent loss of access rights over substantial areas. In particular, we welcomed the statement that Regional Parks, Country Parks, local nature reserves etc should be safeguarded through development plans. In this respect, we pointed out an apparent inconsistency with the current draft of SPP 6 Renewable Energy, which affords no protection for Regional Parks in the development plan processes mentioned in that SPP. **We considered this to be a serious omission and urged that SPP6 be brought into line with SPP11.**

Clyde Muirsheil Regional Park

The efforts to ensure that the Regional Park is not destroyed by windfarm development continues. We should not lose sight of the fact that the Park (108 sq.miles) is an IUCN Category V Protected Area. The heart of the Park is a proposed Special Protection Area and SSSI amounting to about 35 sq.miles with the key justification being the national and international importance of the site for breeding hen harriers. Hen harriers are ground-nesting birds and should any consents be given, the area will be dug up for roads, foundations, cable trenches etc over a period of several years. Quite apart from the irreversible damage that would be done to extensive areas of blanket bog, water courses and the landscape, it is clear that the protected area could not survive such disruption. **We were very pleased to be notified, therefore, that SNH has confirmed the Renfrewshire Heights SSSI.** This must bode well for the final decision on the proposed SPA which has to be decided in April this year.

The largest proposal, by Wind Hydrogen Limited, for 125, 410ft turbines has been reduced to 24 smaller turbines, all concentrated in North Ayrshire south of

the pSPA. This has brought the application within the remit of a single local authority who statistically deal with matters more speedily than the Scottish Executive. This has been done on the advice of WHL's consultant who has acknowledged in a public meeting that it is a tactical approach designed to get an approval and bring some money in, before coming back for possible extensions. The application is expected in the Spring.

Clearly some players in the wind energy industry consider that planning policy does not apply to them. As long as they get a willing landowner, strong wind, cheap access to the grid and a substantial public subsidy, they will try any justification they can to secure a departure from approved policy.

It is for this reason that, when the Scottish Executive bring out the final version of SPP6 within the next few months, it must be clear and unequivocal in its guidance on keeping industrial type developments out of National and Regional Parks, NSAs, SPAs SSSIs etc.

This could be an early test of the new Minister's influence and commitment.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP

In December last year, the Park Authority submitted the National Park Plan to Scottish Ministers for approval. This step marks the culmination of an enormous amount of work reflected in the State of the Park Report and the draft National Park Plan which went out for public consultation. Many thought the Plan and the background information to be comprehensive and well-intentioned pieces of work but were concerned about priorities and what might be achieved in the early stages with the resources available.

As a result, much effort has gone into producing a final version that is more focused, prioritising the first five years' work and making it clear who should do what in the many partnerships that will be necessary to achieve an integrated approach to land management and environmentally sustainable development.

A concentrated effort is now needed on producing the Park Local Plan which will be the key document in matters of Policy delivery and Development Control.

Cairngorms National Park

The Cairngorms Park Authority has also been pressing forward with its planning processes and submitted its National Park Plan to Scottish

Ministers in December last. They hope to get the plan approved by February/March and start implementation in April 2007. The Park Authority will not be publishing the Plan formally until it is approved, but the text, together with the Consultation Report and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement are available on their website www.cairngorms.co.uk

The Public Inquiry into the Beaulieu-Denny overhead powerline proposal is looming large and a group comprising The John Muir Trust, the Ramblers Association Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, the Scottish Wild Land Group, and the Mountaineering Council for Scotland have come together under the title the Beaulieu-Denny Landscape Group to fight the proposal. Whilst not formally linked to BDLG, SCNP has expressed its support and made a modest contribution to the extensive costs that will inevitably be incurred at such a major Inquiry. Over 17,000 objectors gave landscape and visual amenity concerns as their top issue.

Coastal and Marine National Parks consultation

Just as we went to press with the Autumn newsletter, Ross Finnie launched the consultation on Scotland's first coastal and marine National Park. SCNP has long argued the case for CMNPs as part of a Scotland wide strategy for managing our most important landscapes and habitats positively and in a manner that will benefit local communities whilst providing an environmentally sustainable future. Our response advocates that the first CMNP should be on the West and based on a combination of Argyll Islands and Coast and Ardnamurchan, Small Isles and the South Skye Coast. Our full response is available on our website.

STOP PRESS: The AGM will be in Stirling on Friday 20 April 2007. Please put it in your diary and be with us.

Executive Committee.

Since the Autumn Newsletter, the Executive has met on 14 November and 16 January and further meetings are scheduled on 15 February and 13 March 2007.

We have responded to the following consultations:
Scottish Planning Policy (SPP11): Physical Activity and Open Space Consultation Draft.
Scotland's first coastal and marine National Park: a consultation.

It was decided not to respond to the consultation on *Draft West Edinburgh Planning Framework 2006* because it was felt that this was too remote from our key areas of interest.

SCNP The Barony, 2 Glebe Road, Kilbirnie, KA25 6HX.
Tel: 01505 682447

E-mail info@scnp.org.uk