



Winter 2007/2008

Once upon a time, I was involved with a satirical Planning Revue called the Grotton Road Show which entertained conferences all over the country in the 70s and 80s. It comprised humorous songs, outrageous sketches and zany news items. One of the latter concerned the former Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council and its entrepreneurial Planning Officer, Richard Hargreaves, sadly no longer with us. In the news item, we reported that Sir Richard, as we called him, had persuaded the Council to declare the whole of the Borough an EFZ – an Enterprise Free Zone – with everything shown as Greenbelt, a Conservation Area or Listed, and with a presumption against development of any kind.

The outcome of this EFZ designation was for the Borough Planning Department to be inundated with planning applications for developments of all kinds from developers all over the world, far exceeding Sir Richard's wildest expectations!

It occurred to me that there might be certain parallels between Richard's EFZ and SPP 6: Renewable Energy. SPP 6 was supposed to produce a clearer plan-led approach to the location of windfarms. In addition, in announcing new, more ambitious targets for renewable energy production, Ministers have also stated their determination that this should not be at the cost of our finest landscapes and sensitive habitats. Meanwhile, the wind energy industry is pressing on regardless with applications in regional parks, on the fringes of national parks and in areas that in due course may be national parks if they are not destroyed in the meantime. Murdo Fraser MSP has described this as a failure of the planning system and in one sense he is right. However, it is more a failure of the last administration and those who advised them. If the current administration does not revisit the situation soon, it too will have failed us all.

Nora Leipner our placement student from Germany has completed her time with us and returns home shortly. She has gathered all her thesis research material, taken the opportunity to attend meetings with the Minister, SNH at Director level, Windfarm Action Groups, SCNP Executive etc. Nora has been a pleasure to work with and we wish her well for the future.

A Happy New Year to you all.
Robert Maund/ Chairman

Meeting with Michael Russell MSP, Minister for the Environment.

On the 20 November last, we met with Mr Russell to put our ideas on the way forward on future national parks in Scotland. We had been invited to prepare a paper as a basis for discussion and make a presentation on the paper. The full paper is too big (47mb) for our website but we suggested that the process for moving forward could be as below.

1. *Create a steering group chaired by Rural Affairs Department or SNH and including key environmental groups to prepare consistent criteria to guide the designation of future national parks both land-based and coastal/marine.*
2. *Test the areas in the Ramsay Report along with Galloway, the Flow Country and other parts as appropriate, using those criteria.*
3. *Test the coastal/marine areas shown in Scotland's first coastal and marine national park: a consultation, against the chosen criteria.*
4. *Revisit SPP 6: Renewable Energy to make the guidance clear and unequivocal as applied to national and international protected areas.*
5. *Establish a programme for the introduction of future national parks and consult on it.*
6. *Clarify the concerns of vociferous opposition groups and address them, eg by taking the fishermen to New Zealand where experience of marine reserves with extensive no take zones over a period of 30 years has rejuvenated fish stocks in adjacent areas and greatly benefited inshore fisheries.*
7. *Invite SNH to take on the role of providing regular independent advice on the need for further national parks or additions to established parks.*

The nature of meetings at this level rarely gives one a clear picture as to the process government is following, the level at which decisions have been made or the firmness of the apparent decisions. One has to read between the lines to some extent and one could therefore prove to be hopelessly adrift. This why it is so important to keep giving soundly based professional advice however uncomfortable that might be to the recipient! Notwithstanding, and for what it's worth, the SCNP representatives present were left with the following impressions:

- The decision to put any coastal and marine national park on hold until a Marine Bill had been prepared was firm and probably taken at cabinet level. There was a quite 'bullish' view about how quickly a Marine Bill might come forward despite the need for it to coincide with a similar exercise in the Westminster Parliament;
- There was little recognition of the need to revisit SPP 6: Renewable Energy notwithstanding the strong evidence that it was making no impression on the wind energy industry's continuing threats to sensitive landscapes and habitats;
- The role of the community was of critical importance to Ministers in formulating any future proposals. Recognition of the vital contribution of strategic thinking to the process was not as evident;
- Priority was being given to the quinquennial review of the established parks and it was intended to make a start to the process earlier rather than later in 2008;
- The Minister was well aware of concerns about the responsiveness (or lack thereof) of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park to organizations and individuals wishing to comment or input to the Park's work.

We hope to follow up some of the issues we raised with the officials in the coming months.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP.

The Park is going through a testing period at present being managed by an Acting Chief Executive on a part-time basis. We understand that this situation is only until March so one can expect to see an advertisement for the job in the near future. This could be delayed if the budget is not settled quickly. If there is any move by government to reduce the budget in what has been described as a 'tight spending round', it could prejudice getting the right quality of person in what is a crucial position.

Coastal and Marine National Parks.

There is nothing further to report at present for the reasons set out in the report on meeting the Minister. We are at a loss to understand why government is not willing to be more proactive in getting the basic research and groundwork done in anticipation that new management arrangements will be needed to address the problems and opportunities of these important areas when a Marine Bill for Scotland is in place. However, we shall keep pressing.

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park.

A pre-inquiry meeting for the proposed public inquiry into the appeal against refusal of planning permission for the Kelburn Windfarm application was held on 28 November last. It has now been confirmed that the Inquiry will start on 3 June 2008 and 12 working days have been allowed for

in the programme.

Just before the pre-inquiry meeting, the developers announced that they wanted to change the scheme from 19 turbines to 14 due to the inability of the national grid to take the output from 19 turbines. A new environmental impact study is proposed which they claim will be ready towards the end of January and they want the whole thing treated as a modification of the existing application rather than a new application. Under the new Planning (Scotland) Act 2006 under **Variation of planning applications, 32A(3)** it is made clear that the government does not accept that variations should be allowed once an application has gone to appeal under section 47. The 2006 Act is not yet operational but it may well be when the inquiry starts in June 2008. In the meantime another application from a different developer for 5 turbines at Kaim Hill immediately adjoining Kelburn is expected in June. 14+5=...?

Cairngorms National Park.

We are currently awaiting an invitation to meet to discuss the response submitted to the consultation on the CNP Local Plan. Key amongst the issues to be discussed is that of local needs and affordable housing.

SCNP Fundraising for "the Project".

We had hoped to get out our appeal documents to funding bodies before the Christmas break but, as can happen, illness struck and our fundraiser was out of action for about three weeks sampling a wide range of antibiotics. However, he is now back in harness and we should be able to move forward again shortly.

A presentation was made in December last to our project partners, APRS, which was well received and it was clear from the discussions that we have many interests in common. We look forward to a productive relationship.

Executive Committee.

Since the Autumn Newsletter, the Executive has met on 13 November and 15 January. There was no meeting in December. A further meeting is scheduled for 12 February.

The AGM will be on 18 April 2008 at Stirling Smith Art Gallery where we hope to show you the presentation made to the Minister. The Minister has also accepted our invitation to speak (subject to the usual constraints) and Mr Andrew Forsyth, CEO of the Friends of the Lake District has also agreed to speak. Please put the date in your diaries. Formal notices will follow.

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