

Boat of Garten Interpretation Plan

A Plan has been drawn up outlining some potential developments for building on the heritage of our area to bring a range of benefits to the Community. This is a short summary outlining the process and the conclusions of the plan. The full plan will be available shortly for those who wish to explore this work further.

Introduction

Boat of Garten Community Company wishes to maximise how the heritage assets of our area bring benefits to the community. We were advised that future developments would stand a better chance of success if they were set in the context of a planned approach.

To achieve this we agreed to take forward an interpretation plan for the area and gained a range of funding support to do this (see below). We commissioned Bill Taylor, an experienced heritage and interpretation adviser, to undertake this work and also Kenny Mathieson, a local resident, to act as community agent to ensure future continuity after the plan was completed.

So Why an Interpretation Plan?

Interpretation is an approach to communication that seeks to make a connection between the heritage of an area and those who come into contact with it. The Community Company wants to make people care; to make people act and to stimulate people to get involved. To do this a purposeful approach to communicating key messages has to be taken to capture people's attention and hold it. With a rational planning process an interpretive approach to communication can achieve much to stimulate thinking and consequent action by visitors and residents alike.

The plan examines the heritage assets of the area and seeks community views on the importance of these. It assesses the types of visitor who might be interested in these assets and how they sit in the wider context of the National Park. It then identifies the assets that have the greatest potential to engage the visitor and bring benefits to the community. These are summarised in 3 key messages that will form the focus for future heritage based developments. Using these messages a range of recommendations are made for how the community can best engage visitors and residents with the heritage of Boat of Garten.

The overall aim of the plan is: *'To interpret the features and stories of significance in Boat of Garten in a coherent, cohesive and co-ordinated way that will guide interpretation developments into the medium term.'*

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What are the Heritage Assets of Boat of Garten?

An essential part of the plan was to ask the community what they valued in their area and this was approached in a number of ways. A community workshop was held on 24th November attended by 23 people and they were asked to identify, on large maps, those features they considered important. 174 responses were received and the most popular features were: Walking opportunities (8 votes); Milton Loch, Community Hall, Tom Pitlac (7); Cycling opportunities, Golf (6), Station Buildings, Birds (5), Community Garden, Bird-watching, Squirrels, Fishing, Village Hall (4)

Additionally, a community questionnaire was circulated prior to the Christmas party and this received 39 responses with the following general areas of interest being the most popular (see full plan for details): Walks 129; Golf 128; Wildlife 124; Railway 108; Archaeology 45 and Others 31. The questionnaire also asked how happy the respondents were about the Osprey Village identity currently used. This revealed that 60% of those who commented were happy with this whilst 16% were not. The questionnaire also asked if there were too many, too few or just about the right number of visitors in Boat. Most said it was about right, but a sizeable minority thought there were too few, with only one saying there were too many.

The heritage assets identified are described fully in the plan, along with further features that may not have scored highly. The plan contains quite a detailed inventory of the heritage of the area and it is hoped that this will be a useful resource for other purposes in the future.

Key Issues Relating to our Heritage

A range of issues are identified that impact on how these heritage assets might bring benefit to the community. In summary these are:

- Access

Many features have physical problems relating to visitor access. Some archaeological features are not readily accessible and present safety concerns. Some access routes are blocked and present problems for wider access. Many of the buildings identified are now in private or commercial use and cannot be reasonably promoted. Safe parking off road is often an issue

- Visitor pressure

Those who have responded to the work of this plan have been supportive of the need for Boat of Garten to continue to attract visitors, as it has done since the 1860's. It is not the intention of this plan to significantly alter the visitor use of the area. Proposals will be ensuring the continuance of well established practice.

- Concern for maintenance of heritage

Older members of the community are concerned that features that used to be important parts of the local heritage are being lost as newer residents are not aware of them as they settle in the area.

There are several additional issues that are not specific to Boat and these have to be taken into account:

- Funding

This plan will be beneficial as it will provide a context in which potential funders can clearly see how the future projects fit into a more strategic context. Without this, new developments and the achievement of community aspirations will face a difficult time with increased pressure on public funding.

- Community Capacity

Boat has already demonstrated the ability to deliver projects in a complex funding and management environment. This plan provides a rational context in which individual projects can be taken forward in a way that will provide a joined-up approach to telling the story of Boat.

- Relating to neighbouring communities

This plan is designed to take account of existing and proposed developments in neighbouring communities and as such should not be seen as providing direct competition or duplication. The intention is that the plan complements what is in the wider Strathspey area and fits in with wider approaches to marketing and interpretation in the National Park.

The heritage assets were assessed for their suitability for interpretive use, taking account of the issues above. The most significant aspects that impact upon the plan are: Tom Pitlac is considered to present too many difficulties, with too limited a return, for it to feature as a key component of the future heritage development of the village; that many of the built heritage features are now private homes and have to be treated with appropriate sensitivity, and that the golf club, whilst very important to the community and to many visitors, does not lend itself to direct interpretive use.

The evaluation of the full range of assets concludes that the greatest potential for delivering the objectives of the plan are to build upon:

- Access to the landscape and wildlife of the area through the development of walking and cycling opportunities;
- the 'Osprey Village' connection, and
- The railway heritage of Boat of Garten

Who are the Audiences?

Essentially there is the resident population and the visitors. The local population numbers about 650 of whom 28% are retired, which is significantly higher than the Highland average of 21%. 25% of the houses in Boat are second/holiday homes which is one of the highest rates in the Highlands. Less than 14% of the population is of school age (Highland average 18%).

The plan identifies between 600-700 bed spaces for visitors (not including people staying with friends or relatives)

The most up to date figures on visitors come from the 2009 Visitor survey for the National Park. This shows that there is a good distribution across all age classes, but with slighter older proportion for longer stay visitors. There is a higher proportion of ABC1s than the Scottish average, and about half the visiting groups are couples. Short stay visitors are overwhelmingly UK based, while about 1/3rd of longer stay visitors are from overseas. Half the visitors stay for 5-7 nights and a 1/3rd for more than 8 days. Long stay visitors, who stay in self-catering, camping and caravanning, is well above the national average. Most visitors have been before, and the private car is the mode of transport for around 75% of visitors, but a relatively high proportion travel on coaches. Sightseeing and walking are by far the most popular activities, and for the longer stay visitor going to heritage sites and watching wildlife are above the national average. Aviemore is a key location as half of all visitors to the National Park will visit this town. Visitors generally are very satisfied with their experiences in the area.

Key visitor attractions are the RSPB Loch Garten Centre and the Strathspey Railway both of which attract 40,000 visitors. There are no detailed figures for how many of the railway passengers visit Boat of Garten other than by passing through on the train. The great majority of visitors to Loch Garten will pass through the village itself. It is to be expected that there will be many longer stay visitors who visit both sites during a holiday, but the specific products on offer do suggest that there will be a certain amount of separation between these groups. The only other specific visitor attraction in the community is Auchgourish Botanic Garden with less than 2,500 visitors.

Key Themes for the Future

By taking a thoughtful approach to the communication process we have a chance to convey key messages that can build a strong and lasting connection between the visitor, the community and the heritage of Boat. These messages are that Boat of Garten is:

- a place for top class walking and cycling in harmony with the outstanding heritage of the National Park.
- the Osprey Village - the natural gateway for experiencing the Loch Garten ospreys and Strathspey wildlife.
- a creation of the Age of Steam and still being enjoyed today

Developing interpretive material in the future should focus on delivering these messages to the visitor as they are designed to make the strongest connection that will benefit the community and meet the overall objectives of this plan.

Key Recommendations

The following key development proposals are the conclusions of the full planning process and offer clear opportunities to build on the heritage of the area for the audiences identified.

1. Follow the Osprey Trails

It is proposed that the 2 main visitor attractions (RSPB Loch Garten and the Strathspey Railway) should seek to work together and promote a day visit to Boat from Aviemore, encouraging the visitor to escape its more frenetic style. This will allow walking or cycling to the Osprey Centre and the use of a range of other walking and cycling trails around the village.

2. The Osprey Trails

The existing trails should be re-branded to reflect the wildlife interests of the area; creating the osprey; the red squirrel, pine marten, salmon and heron trails. A range of themed cycle routes should be identified and promoted as well. The walking trails would be self guided with a range of small focussed panels that convey key messages reflecting the themes above. It is proposed to create a specific leaflet (saleable) for the cycle routes. The aim is to hold people in the village and its surrounds bringing benefit to local businesses.

3. Orientation Feature

The main arrival point in the village at Station Square should be provided with an orientation feature that reflects the clear and original association of the village with the ospreys. This should provide information, orientation and interpretation that delivers the key messages above. This feature will be the main focus for those arriving by train but also for the many visitors staying in the village. This feature will be part of the overall enhancement of the Station Square area.

4. Osprey Fair

Many communities around the world celebrate important times in their natural calendar with fairs or festivals. It is proposed that the arrival of the ospreys in late March/early April should be the focus for a fair with a natural environment and bird watching theme. There are no other comparable events in the UK and the arrival of the osprey is already a well known media event. This can start small but has the potential to become a focal event in the village calendar and for the wider area.