

NFLS EVALUATION PANEL MEETING 26TH NOVEMBER, 2007
FISHER'S HOTEL, PITLOCHRY

Present at meeting: Priscilla Gordon Duff (Chair)
Christopher Badenoch
Diana Gilbert
Jon Hollingdale
Donald McPhillimy
George McRobbie
Bill Ritchie
Dominic Driver (FCS)
Malcolm Wield (FCS)
Betsy Walling (FCS)

Apologies: Ian Johnson

1. Panel Session – the panel agreed to have an informal chat over lunch.

2. Minutes & Action Points

- 2.1 Issues Paper – this to be discussed under agenda item 4.
- 2.2 Chris Badenoch's Draft Paper – Chris issued this and asked for comments to be with him by mid-December. The question of land excluded from NFLS was raised. This requires clarification as it impinges on the geographical spread of applications. **DD to clarify**

3. Update on Cases

- 3.1 Malcolm Wield issued current version of spreadsheet and took the panel through each application.
- 3.2 Aigas – the Panel discussed this as not being a competent application as it is from a community of interest, rather than community body. The Panel agreed that this difference was not an issue for them to debate but wished to flag it up to the FCS Policy Group via Dominic Driver.
- 3.3 Badluarach & Durnamuck – Malcolm said the timeline of this application was not being adhered to due to illness. The applicants had asked for an extension of time and this had been granted. The Panel supported the position taken but advised caution in case of precedents being set. The process is to be recorded on file.
- 3.4 Burghead – There was some discussion on how to ensure this land would remain for the benefit of the football club. Malcolm considered that there could be conditions attached to cover the eventuality of land being resold.
- 3.5 Ford – Malcolm reported that there is a complaint in place against this application. The Panel felt there was no need to revisit and thanked Malcolm for his report.
- 3.6 The Panel raised the question of whether with regard to Sponsored Sale of Surplus Land FCS should take the highest bid or support a lower bid that embraces some community aspirations. Malcolm said the preference is to sell without encumbrance to realise highest price, although in theory sales can be conditional. Dominic Driver agreed that FCS would look to maximise receipts but he would look into policy. The Panel felt that the process needed to be

more open and transparent . Priscilla asked if Helen Stubbs, Area Land Agent., could come to the next meeting and speak about the process.

4. Dominic Driver Presentation

4.1 Dominic Driver, FCS Social Policy Adviser had been asked along to reply to issues raised over several meetings. This is covered in the attached Appendix 1.

Members raised several points in discussion following the presentation:

- Concern was expressed about private owners having no accountability for community development once parts of the National Forest Estate had been sold. Under the Scottish Rural Development Programme, Rural Development Contracts should prioritise the funding available for woodland to schemes which embrace community involvement.
- It was considered desirable that the Panel should regularly report to all Forestry Fora
- The 6 month timeframe for applications following notification of being surplus on the FCS website was not clear
- A community engagement training initiative should be considered for land agents
- Housing based on need in relation to woodland crofts should be considered carefully
- Clear evidence for the retention of woodland in crofting following sale would be sought
- It was understood that the selection for Panel members is limited to the Forestry Fora. It was considered essential to obtain the most appropriate expertise and FCS should consider recruiting more widely.
- Further thought on follow up care after NFLS acquisitions was needed, particularly to ensure the intentions of the application were being supported. Continued collaboration should be a feature of the practice set by FD Strategic Plans and be integral to the administration of the SRDP by Woodland Officers.
- Funding Provision: Panel would like to see recognition that a small proportion of disposal area could be taken on by a community. They would like to see this discussed with emphasis on the wider public benefit served by having a community development taking place. It was thought that 'lotting' schemes could be considered by FCS.
- The application process should be easier for applicant in the context of co-ordination with funders, land agents and FDMs.
- Portfolio Analysis - discussion on the role of the Regional Fora and the lack of stakeholder discussion over the classification of the National Forest Estate. This function would possibly have been more apparent under the former Environmental Panel system that the Fora replaced.
- Clarification of FCS roles :- The Panel felt the structure of FCS was not clear to communities, the two roles of seller and manager of schemes gave the impression that there is no definition between the two.
- The Panel felt that earlier informal notification to communities would be helpful.

5. Future Meeting

- 5.1 The suggested date for the next meeting is Thursday 13th March, 2008. Helen Stubbs and two local Fora members are to be invited. The meeting is to be in the Lowlands area, venue to be confirmed.

6. AOB

- 6.1 The Panel discussed the application by the Morvern Community Development Company with regard to the lack of funding from the BIG Lottery Fund and how the change in BIG lottery policy generally impacted on the Panel. Priscilla is to write to Bob MacIntosh regarding the funding issue. Malcolm Wield is to write to Morvern Community Development Company to let them know that the progress of the application has been discussed and that the Panel was monitoring the situation.
- 6.2 George McRobbie intimated that this was his last meeting as he was resigning from the Panel. Priscilla thanked him on behalf of the Panel.