

ECONOMY, ENERGY AND TOURISM COMMITTEE

Wednesday 7 May 2008

Session 3

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ECONOMY, ENERGY AND TOURISM COMMITTEE

9th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con)
*Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
*Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
*Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
*Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
*David Whittom (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP)
George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab)
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)
Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Dr Margaret Bochel (Aberdeen City Council)
Andrew Holmes
Steve Inch (Glasgow City Council)
Peter Lederer (VisitScotland)
John McNairney (Scottish Government Directorate for the Built Environment)
Philip Riddle (VisitScotland)
Mick Stewart (Scottish Society of Directors of Planning)
Gordon Watson (Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Katy Orr

ASSISTANT CLERK

Gail Grant

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee

Wednesday 7 May 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 09:34*]

Tourism Inquiry

The Convener (Tavish Scott): Welcome to the ninth meeting in 2008 of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee. We have a fairly full agenda, on which item 1 is the continuation of our inquiry into tourism. We are examining the target of a 50 per cent growth in revenue by 2015.

With us we have Peter Lederer and Philip Riddle, the chairman and chief executive respectively of VisitScotland. Later this morning, we will talk to a second panel of witnesses about the planning and development aspects of the industry.

In the course of our inquiry, we have been able to get quite an appreciable take on various aspects of the industry. However, we would be happy to hear a few opening words from our witnesses, by way of introduction.

Peter Lederer (VisitScotland): I will be brief, as I am conscious of time.

The 50 per cent target—which has been, quite rightly, the committee's focus—is an ambition that was based on good thinking. You cannot project into the future, but you can think about the future and try to work out the possibilities. I am a passionate believer in ambition, and think that, if you do not have ambition and do not really want something to happen, it will not happen. Although the statistics say that we are not on the right trajectory to meet the target at the moment—I should point out that there are questions about the statistics—many individual businesses are on that trajectory. I should say that, if I said to my owners that my ambition was to achieve growth of 50 per cent by 2015, I would be fired by tonight. However, if the target is broken down into components—which is what the levers were designed to allow us to do—it can be seen that it will not take that much to do.

I am keen on the growth ambition. I am also keen that the industry own the ambition and really want to meet the target—it cannot be a governmental or public sector target; it must be an industry target that Government gets behind and helps people to achieve by using resources that it can bring to bear on problems.

I am beginning my seventh year in this post; an MP told me recently that that sounded like a long sentence. I am proud of the way in which the industry has come together over recent years, because this is the first time in my 25 years in this country that I have seen that happen. I am equally proud of the way in which public sector organisations, particularly VisitScotland, have moved, especially when I think about where we were in 2001 compared with where we are now. For example, the committee is now—thankfully—talking about not structures and all those good things, but growth and ambition. That is excellent.

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): The issue of Scottish tourists in Scotland concerns me slightly. According to recent figures, the market is worth between £830 million and £900 million a year, which is probably about 20 per cent of the total tourism figure. One point stood out, however. In 2005, 21.7 million tourism nights were spent by Scottish tourists in Scotland, but in 2006—the most recent year for which I could get figures—that figure was down to 18.8 million, which means that there was a drop of 3 million tourism nights in the course of a year. We are promoting ourselves successfully abroad, but how can we re-engage with Scottish tourists?

Philip Riddle (VisitScotland): Marketing Scotland to Scots is a high priority, although I admit that, hitherto, the industry—not just VisitScotland—has not regarded it as such.

We must think about the changing nature of tourism. We all know that the short break is growing, which means that the average number of nights spent somewhere by any tourist is likely to reduce. However, it should not mean that the overall value should go down, because we would expect more short breaks to be taken. That is what we are concentrating on, for all tourists and for Scots in particular.

Through our new integrated structure, we will be able to use our network of tourist information centres more effectively to market Scotland to Scots. We have not done that before. To date, the primary function of the 106 TICs has been to give information to people who are visiting from outside Scotland—the fact that they are called tourist information centres puts up a little bit of a barrier to Scots, in fact. However, we have realised that there is great potential for using that network to reach out to Scottish visitors.

Our latest spring campaign is called a perfect day. I hope that you have all watched the advert that goes with the campaign. We want to get Scots to visit their local TIC to get an idea about the perfect day for Scots in Scotland. The chances are that the perfect day that we would want that TIC to talk about would be outside its area. That is a big leap, because TICs are primarily built around the

idea of giving out information about their local area. However, we want our people to be trained and ready to advise someone who asks, "I fancy a break somewhere else in Scotland. Tell me about my perfect day." That is one small example of how we can re-energise the effort of presenting Scotland to the Scots.

On the measurement side, there is a slight issue. We do not measure day visits as part of the tourism economy, but an awful lot of what we do on the idea of Scotland for the Scots is day-visit based. There is nothing wrong with that, and it is extremely good for a great many businesses. We are trying to introduce a way of measuring the value of day visits around Scotland—we are considering a pilot survey on that. The day-visit market is essential for visitor attractions, catering establishments and activity centres. Although we sometimes bemoan our transport system, Scotland is actually a reasonably easy place to get around and people can often have a perfect day in Scotland without staying somewhere overnight.

Gavin Brown: I am encouraged by your comments about TICs, and about day visits.

If someone goes away overnight, they are defined as a tourist—according to the United Nations definition, anyway—but how can we get people in Scotland to think of themselves as tourists in that way, and to understand that they should go to their local TIC to find out about breaks in Scotland? I do not think that people would do that instinctively.

Philip Riddle: The idea needs to be supported with a wider marketing campaign. To be honest, we are not in a position to do that today. We do not want to talk too much about structures, as Peter Lederer said, but as you know we have recently undergone a restructuring and that integration of the network is not yet complete. One of the things that have not been done yet is having all our TIC staff trained about the whole of Scotland. We have superb staff in our network, who would put anyone to shame on "Mastermind" with a specialist subject of things to do in their local area. However, we need to get people better trained to talk about places outwith their local area.

We have marketed Scotland to Scots for several years, so such marketing is not new. However, you are right to say that we need to concentrate on that area a bit more.

Currently, there is a nervousness about the world's economic climate in general and an anxiety about exchange rates, although the exchange rate for the euro is very good. One of the things that will arise from that nervousness is that people will consider staying closer to home for their holidays. This is a good time to capitalise on

that and think about marketing campaigns that focus on the idea of Scotland for the Scots. Not only VisitScotland but the industry should think about that.

Lewis Macdonald (Aberdeen Central) (Lab):

Recently, a number of members of the committee visited Iceland and saw some of the good things that are happening there. Clearly, the scale of the operation is different, but Iceland has a travellers day, on which Icelanders are encouraged to be tourists in their own country. Across the country a co-ordinated approach is taken, which involves people being given free admission to attractions and so on. That sounds interesting from a city point of view, but could it also be done countrywide? Scotland has different local holidays and local ways of organising things. Would that allow for a national day that encouraged people to be visitors in Scotland?

09:45

Philip Riddle: Absolutely. We might think of having several national days. We do not have to have a single national day for the whole country. Recently, Historic Scotland held its free open day at its attractions. That has been a successful initiative and it is a good example for us. I would welcome more initiatives of that kind, especially if they allowed people to see behind the scenes of tourism and not just front of house. It would help us if people appreciated what lies behind tourism attractions and facilities.

I do not want to use too much jargon, but there is an important concept called inside-out branding, under which, if one is selling a brand out the way, the people behind it, who deliver the product, understand it and live the brand as well. There is sometimes a gap in Scotland. There is a danger that our marketing of Scotland and the powerful image that we portray do not always connect with what we deliver on the ground. Inside-out branding is one way in which to reinforce the importance of making that connection. It could include tourism open days and treating Scots not just as tourists but as owners of the tourism industry. We should try to get them behind the scenes so that they can see how the whole thing works.

Brian Adam (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Can you change your marketing? You said, rightly, that there has been a change in the exchange rate between the euro and the pound. That must give us opportunities. How are you taking advantage of those? Are you marketing Scotland heavily in Europe, or in the euro zone?

Philip Riddle: We never make drastic shifts, but we will make adjustments, especially on a tactical basis. There are different layers—the brand, strategy, and tactical marketing. We see a long-

term future in the United States market, which will be our biggest overseas market well into the future, even compared with Europe, China and India. It is important never to be seen to desert a market. As I am sure everyone knows, marketing is not a one-off thing. We do not go in, spend a lot of money, make a big splash, and come out again. Marketing is an investment that is made over time.

There is no question of our cutting everything in North America for the next six months and shifting it all to Europe. However, tactically, the answer is yes. We will adjust things and—if I may use a rather unwieldy term—upweight our investment along direct access routes from Europe.

We are considering what more we can do in Scotland itself, probably not for the summer, but as we go into the autumn. We will follow closely the psychological effect of the credit crunch. We believe that one effect might be a slightly greater propensity for people to go on holiday a bit closer to home. If that is true, we can certainly do tactical things to grab a bit more of that business for Scotland.

The Convener: Mr Lederer, do you want to comment on that, and to answer the previous question as well?

Peter Lederer: As I travel round the country, I ask people a specific question. If I am in Aberdeen, I ask, “When was the last time you were in Dumfries and Galloway?” or, “When was the last time you were in the Borders?” It is amazing how often I hear, “It was 25 years ago,” or, “I’ve never been there.”

There is a huge opportunity to engage the media and others in the idea of Scots discovering their own country. Many people have not been to many parts of Scotland, or if they have been, it was in their childhood. If we can get Scots to travel and discover their own country, that would be a big plus.

Marilyn Livingstone (Kirkcaldy) (Lab): The year of homecoming will be a huge opportunity, but during our inquiry we have heard criticism that there is a lack of investment. How do you respond to that criticism?

Philip Riddle: Investment is a very big topic. One of the keys to future growth of tourism is definitely investment and having a national investment plan, which should centre on capital investment in the industry. You might also be referring to marketing investment, to which I will return, if I may.

There is good capital investment in this country, but it is not linked to a national plan and that is one of the main issues. We often cite the Irish and I will do so again. Between 1989 and 1999, it is estimated that €4.3 billion was invested in tourism

projects in Ireland. The funds came from the state, European Union money and the private sector. That is an awful lot of investment. Even now the Irish have a development plan—it is a seven-year plan for €800 million. Within the plan, there is €335 million for marketing, €317 million for capital investment and product development and €148 million for training.

We need to be much more receptive and proactive about getting investment. We talked about that when we presented informally on the subject to the committee. We have to be proactive and get people in Scotland to have a presumption in favour of development. We need people who want to bid for investments rather than beg for them and who are enthusiastic. We need internal consistency—we need people in Scotland to be in favour of certain developments before we even go to the market so we are on the front foot and can attract more investment. Such investment is investment in itself, but it is crucial that it is also part of a national plan. We would like to develop those areas.

Marketing investment in Scotland has fallen behind that in some countries, but it is better than in others. The industry as a whole and VisitScotland do very well with what we have. We currently have a budget of around £72 million, of which we spend £45 million on marketing in a broad sense, which includes our information network.

The Convener: Marilyn Livingstone asked specifically about the homecoming.

Philip Riddle: I beg your pardon—I am going off the subject. There will be direct investment of £5 million in homecoming over the next two years through EventScotland—that is £2.5 million a year. It will support primarily themed, rolling and signature events programmes. The figure is quite modest for the kind of ambition that we have.

Additionally, integrated with our normal marketing programme we will invest in an international marketing programme—we are already investing in such a programme on top of that. We will also invest in local marketing. Those are the three main strands to homecoming. We must have local marketing to ensure that Scots are alert to the whole idea of homecoming so that they enjoy and engage in it. Internationally, we need to make people aware of homecoming so that they come to Scotland. We also need to deliver on the ground the homecoming programme that will make it really worth while to be in Scotland in 2009.

All three of those elements are in place. The budget is pretty modest, but our aim is to lever as much other money and support as possible. We are doing well in that area because homecoming

has an appeal to major industries such as the whisky industry and it has a central pillar in golf, so we can engage a lot of people around golf, culture and heritage. Homecoming will succeed only if we manage to engage wider investment. We will not do an awful lot with £5 million.

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): My question is on the same issue, but it also focuses on changing travel patterns from abroad and the need to package for the rise of the two-to-three-day traveller. We got that impression when we went to Keflavik airport in Iceland, which has the same dimensions as Glasgow airport.

When somebody comes off a plane at Keflavik, they are not hustled on to a bus—they have time to reflect, get oriented and find out about the opportunities to have two or three well-spent days in the region. We do not advertise enough in that way. I was talking to German tourism operators, who said the same thing. If somebody is going to a country for two days, they must be able to plan their itinerary from the word go and travel with the simplest ticketing imaginable. The Icelanders have a Reykjavik ticket, which gets people into all the museums, on the buses and to the fabulous outdoor heated swimming pools that operate throughout the year. We got the impression that we need something similar. We need airports that are built to a far higher standard than Edinburgh or Glasgow airports are, although that would need a big investment.

Philip Riddle: That touches on capital investment, but I will not return to that point, because I have said something on it.

We realise that the short-break market and products for it are the future for Scotland. Although longer-term holidays will continue and are most welcome, the future for Scotland is undoubtedly the short break or experience break. We have designed marketing campaigns around short breaks, particularly around the idea that Scotland is a country where people can have a combined urban and rural short break—it is difficult to think of another such country in Europe and probably in the world. In two or three days, people can experience the best of the city and climb the hills. We are aware of that and we are packaging with that in mind.

At the risk of repeating myself, I will refer to the perfect day campaign, as that is a recent example. The campaign is not just about a perfect day on Barra, although that is fantastic, but about a perfect day in Scotland. We will follow up by shaping the experience of a perfect day—it could be in Edinburgh, around Loch Lomond or in Aberdeen—and giving people an impression of what that would look like. Christopher Harvie is absolutely right that people who are on short-break tours want to fill every minute. Some people

want to fill the minutes with relaxation, but they must have lots of choice. We emphasise cross-selling on that.

Christopher Harvie: Those points apply to the Scottish traveller, too. If the choices are all on tap, it is easy for them.

The Convener: I apologise to Marilyn Livingstone for cutting her off. She had a question on the year of homecoming, so we will return to that.

Marilyn Livingstone: Philip Riddle said that the budget for the year of homecoming is modest. The year of homecoming is important, so should the committee make the case for a larger budget? I am trying to tease out whether the criticisms are correct. That is an important question.

The Convener: What would VisitScotland do if there was more money than the modest budget that we heard about earlier?

Philip Riddle: We had about 180 applications for funding for local events, but we were able to accommodate fewer than a third of them. There were many good events, so that was a slight pity. We would have liked to have helped more events. We would not fund whole events—it would be joint funding. That was a bit of a gap that it would have been nice to fill.

If we could access more money directly, it would be spent primarily on marketing, and probably on marketing in Scotland, as that tends to sit at the bottom of the pile. We are doing quite a lot of marketing internationally, but we have not done much within Scotland. I guess that we are relying on word of mouth and, as Peter Lederer said, engaging the media and using other channels. That will be effective, but we could undoubtedly use more money. The issue is not just about money to VisitScotland; it is about engaging more resource more widely.

Marilyn Livingstone: On the projects that you supported, do they have a wide geographical spread throughout Scotland?

Philip Riddle: Yes—they are absolutely fantastic. There are different types of events, too. We are conscious that the year of homecoming must embrace sport through to culture, ancestry and food and drink. The response has been great.

10:00

The Convener: How much money would have been needed to fund the 180 projects?

Philip Riddle: I could not honestly tell you. I would have to double-check the number, but that was the order of magnitude. There were 180 applications and we accepted fewer than one third. I suppose that you could extrapolate. The

awards were of up to £50,000, so if every application was for the full award, that gives you some idea of the total.

Dave Thompson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): One of the events that did not get funding was the Inverness highland games, which had asked for the fairly modest sum of £20,000 for marketing. Some world events are being held in Inverness and it would have been good to do extra marketing.

If I remember correctly, 58 events across Scotland were funded.

Philip Riddle: My memory is not bad, then.

Dave Thompson: Is there any way of retrieving the situation? Can we pump things up a wee bit? My feeling is that the homecoming is not really on the radar. People in Scotland do not seem to be all that aware of what will be happening. There is a danger that it might be a bit of a damp squib if we do not manage to rack things up a wee bit.

Philip Riddle: We are conscious that we need to rack it up but, to be fair, we have not yet launched the programme. There have been high levels of awareness of the idea in certain areas, but not across Scotland. That awareness is difficult to maintain and build upon if there is no programme. People are anxious to say, "We have heard about homecoming Scotland, but what is it?"

We have some key elements, such as the gathering in Edinburgh in July, which will be fantastic. We will launch a fuller programme at the end of this month, which will give a basis for increasing awareness—we have to do that.

You asked about events that have not been accepted for funding. An important part of the message that we have been giving out is that those events should go ahead. We do not know how the money will come, but it is not about acceptance and rejection. We believe that if the events that passed the criteria for consideration can happen, they should happen, although I would not apply that to all 180 of them. We are still giving moral encouragement and saying that the events should happen; they should not be seen as having been rejected. The situation could be retrieved through the mobilisation of resources, and if the applicants cannot get resources from us, they might be able to get them from elsewhere. There were some very good applications and it was difficult to sift through them and prioritise.

Gavin Brown: I am looking for a ballpark figure. Of the 180 applications, approximately how many good-quality ones were you not able to fund?

Philip Riddle: I think that the 180 applicants had already passed certain criteria before they were considered. Almost all the events had

potential. I do not honestly know; I estimate 120 of the total, but I would have to come back to you if you want me to be more precise.

The Convener: I suggest that you write to us to furnish us with those details. If possible, could you also pick up on Gavin Brown's first question about the disparity in numbers? Why is that happening, and what is being done to reflect the change in value and bed nights?

We will move seamlessly on. Brian Adam has a question on genealogy.

Brian Adam: I have just come back from Ireland, where I heard presentations from your counterparts, who are focusing on history, and military history. What scope is there for co-operation with them on genealogy? We have the records and a substantial part of Ireland's population, particularly in the north, is Ulster or Presbyterian Scots. What opportunities would there be as part of the homecoming or north-south agreements for such co-operation?

Philip Riddle: Undoubtedly, there is scope for that. In a broader sense, the most potential that we have realised in the short term is with golf. For markets further afield, a joint golf trip from the United States to Scotland and Ireland is possible. In fact, I have known people to travel in rigid inflatable boats from Ballycastle to Scotland and back again just to play golf and have the Scottish and Irish experience in a couple of days. Such activity has proved to be fruitful.

We have talked about genealogy. Indeed, during our recent trip to America, the role of the Ulster Scots in the country was discussed frequently. However, although the area has potential, we have not done that much about it for the year of homecoming because of the other priorities that we have had to attend to. We have discussed with ferry operators the possibility of putting on special deals for people who want to move back and forth between Scotland and Ireland. Of course, that two-way traffic is a major element of trade in the south-west of Scotland, and we have co-operated in that respect.

That said, we have to strike the right balance. We and the Irish might talk to each other and get on well but, at the end of the day, we still compete in many markets.

Brian Adam: It might be argued that, if people's records—and history—are here, we might be the greater beneficiaries of such co-operation. Your Irish counterpart has confirmed that not a lot of thought has been given to the idea, but he was certainly interested in it.

David Whitton (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): Mr Lederer has not spoken for a while, so I will address my question to him.

Mr Riddle said that the number of short breaks is increasing—and that it is expected to increase more—and we have also heard about the economic difficulties that everyone is facing. You have talked about tourism within Scotland, but can you bring me up to speed on the latest figures for tourists from other parts of the United Kingdom coming to Scotland? I believe that the figures dipped for a while. What is your board's policy for dealing with that?

Philip Lederer: Given that it accounts for 90 per cent of our business, the UK market always has been and always will be our prime focus. We should never forget that England provides the bulk of our business. The board is kept constantly aware of how that important relationship is progressing and of how we are attacking that market.

With the increase in air routes, things have changed dynamically over the past few years. The move has benefited Scotland, but the benefits have been felt equally in Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, and now that people have better access to some very well-priced routes, our big markets of the north-east and north-west of England have pulled away slightly. As a result, we need to be more aggressive and creative in how we attack that market.

Philip Riddle: Interestingly, although UK visitor numbers in 2007 were slightly down, the value had increased. That is very important and, indeed, heartening. It is perhaps too early to read too much into such figures, but I would like to think that getting more value is a sign that our market position is moving up. It would be fantastic if we could help it to increase.

David Whitton: Of course, it could also indicate that prices are going up.

Philip Riddle: That is a possibility. However, price rises in Scotland tend to be less than those in England, which means that, for those coming to Scotland, the differential is better still.

David Whitton: Mr Lederer said that people in the north-east and north-west of England have access to cheaper destinations. I am not saying that we should turn Scotland into a cheap destination, but we need to ensure that it represents value for money. People in the industry have told the committee about how they cross-sell with each other. However, it struck me that, instead of discussing how they could help each other out and telling each other what was happening in their area—which brings us back to the point about people in TICs knowing what is happening on their patch—they were simply charging each other high commission rates.

You have already talked about the huge market for the year of homecoming; after all, many,

Scots live in England. However, your description of the budget for the event as modest is, well, modest; I would describe it as derisory, given what the year of homecoming is supposed to represent. Are you as chief executive and the rest of the board telling the Government, "Look, if we don't get more money, this is going to be a huge flop"?

Philip Riddle: We have more or less covered that issue. We are trying to mobilise more resources and have made everyone aware that we could usefully do with some more money in this area. We are certainly not saying—and certainly do not believe—that it will be a huge flop with the current budget. It could be made a lot better if we could mobilise not just public money but resources from a wider net. After all, the success of an event such as homecoming requires national engagement, which often means that people should not expect everything to be subsidised and that they should have to put their hands in their pockets. Although we have been pretty clear that we could do better with more, the events programme, which is now coming together, is going to be exceptionally good and our existing marketing, with the added layer of homecoming, will be effective. Undoubtedly, however, we can make it better.

Philip Lederer: The board and I certainly hope that the year of homecoming, which is not just a one-year event, will change thinking and that, when people see how it works, they will want to keep it going. By those means, we can engage a lot of people and bring them to Scotland.

You were absolutely right to highlight value for money in one of your earlier remarks. However, we have to be careful that we do not end up talking about prices. I should perhaps declare an interest in that respect. In my other life, my role is to ensure that everyone leaves my business saying, "I spent more than I was going to, but it was worth every penny." If all my guests leave with that thought, I have cracked it. With so many exciting things to see and do in Scotland, we need to get people to come here and to leave thinking, "It cost me more than I thought it would, but—phew—it was a fantastic trip and I want to do it again."

Lewis Macdonald: With regard to maximising marketing benefits, on our very interesting trip to Iceland, we were talked through the elements that were felt to be critical to the very dramatic increase in tourist numbers there over the past 10 years. I was struck in particular by the engagement between the tourism organisations and airlines and by the very close relationship between the activity of airlines and that of Iceland's marketing organisation. For example, a marketing campaign on the London underground

proved to be the single biggest contributor to the growth in trips to Iceland.

In response to an earlier question on where you made investment and whether you have shifted marketing in a tactical way, you highlighted the example of direct access routes. Can you expand on that? During our inquiry, there has been discussion about the fact that the route development fund was closed to new projects earlier this year and has not yet been replaced. If Government took a different view and decided to replace that fund, would VisitScotland be in a position to take such a move forward in its marketing and would it fit tactically with your current position?

Philip Riddle: The answer to practically all your questions is yes. We have benefited significantly from the route development fund. The phenomenal growth of low-cost airlines has had significant effects on tourism. However, in the UK, its biggest effect has been to encourage people to leave the country. In Scotland, we managed to battle against that and achieve net gains primarily through the route development fund, which helped more than 100 new routes, 86 of which were international.

This brings us back to our previous discussion on short breaks. People who come to Scotland on short breaks want direct access; they want to get here quickly and start their holiday. Obviously, such matters are less significant to people who come from the other side of the world to stay for two weeks. However, it is vital that there is access into the heart of Scotland from as many points as possible. We would like to see a replacement, if that is at all possible. We understand why there was a change over the route development fund. There are no easy answers, but we would like there to be some kind of replacement because it has been very effective.

10:15

Lewis Macdonald: I presume that VisitScotland as the marketing organisation and the airlines that provide the services already have a coherent marketing strategy for existing direct routes.

Philip Riddle: Very much so. We have close relationships with the airlines. It would be nice if we had a national airline, but that is a big investment. Iceland has benefited from having a national airline, Dubai benefits from having Emirates and Dublin benefits from having Ryanair. It is definitely an advantage to have an airline that uses one's country as a hub, but the relationships can be very good without going that far. We have extremely good relationships with Ryanair, easyJet, Continental Airlines and Emirates, with which we do joint marketing. In particular, we take

joint tactical approaches: we go in at the brand level and create awareness of Scotland as a great place to come to, and the airline tags on, "And you can get there for £50 return tomorrow." That combination works effectively.

I digress slightly, but we have also been working well with the train companies. Rail is probably more important than air for tapping into the unrealised potential of the English market. We have had good discussions with National Express since it took over the east coast route. We can do work there, because four and a half hours by train is not an awful lot more than the time that someone spends flying to Scotland. That is not fully appreciated in the south-east of England.

Lewis Macdonald: When rail travellers get to Scotland, an issue that arises is how our ticketing and timetables are organised and how easy it is for them to tour Scotland, rather than just make a return journey from one city to another. Is that part of your discussion with the rail industry about ticketing and integration?

Philip Riddle: It is, in trying to link things up. Did I mention a national tourism plan? We would like to take a more macro view so that we can tie in infrastructure developments with improved access to the country and improved distribution of visitors around the country.

Lewis Macdonald: On the same theme of joint marketing, I would like to ask about golf tourism. As you know, we have some big projects in the north-east. One or two have progressed to the point where they will definitely happen and, of course, there is another even larger one on which we await developments with interest. In respect of such developments—Gleneagles is, in some respects, in the same market—what is the outlook for joint marketing of, for example, golf tourism to attract visitors from new markets in eastern and central Europe? Does VisitScotland have a lead role or do you look to the resort owners and developers to take the lead?

Peter Lederer: It is both. To put the situation in context, the industry outspends any money that VisitScotland spends by a significant margin. Business is responsible for marketing its own product and is also responsible for exploring the opportunities to join up. Connoisseur Scotland, for example, joins up 20 businesses around Scotland to work together and cross-sell. The more that happens, the better.

The role of Government and organisations such as VisitScotland is to come in behind that and say, "If you are working together in that way, how can we lever that to get even greater penetration and how can we provide the research and information that will lead you into new markets, such as eastern Europe, India or Russia?" The Russian

market has gone from nothing to being a good business. It is still small, but it is growing dramatically; people there are desperate to learn not only how to play golf but about all sorts of things. There is a huge opportunity for businesses to work closer together, to cross-sell better, to help each other and to realise that they are not in competition. The bigger the Scottish cake is, the more everybody shares. If the industry can work together and cross-sell more, and if the public sector becomes better joined up in coming in ahead with research and behind with additional marketing or by leveraging marketing spend to get more impact, that is a proven model that works.

Christopher Harvie: I will start with the position of transportation groups. I wish that I could be as optimistic as the witnesses are about the railways. Until the end of this year, we will have appalling delays on the west coast main line that will be concentrated during leisure travel time, at weekends. One can often spend up to seven hours on what ought to be a four-and-a-half-hour journey, which is not encouraging.

My first question is about the year of homecoming and the integration of the short-stay traveller. Next year, if someone arrives at Prestwick airport, they will be directly into the Burns 250th anniversary, and there cannot be many great literary figures with an in-house airport. However, if someone goes from Prestwick airport into Ayr, wham ne'er a toon surpasses at the moment for derelict buildings in the centre of the town, they will find four empty shops on one side of New Bridge Street and another six along the high street. In co-ordination with local authorities and the Government, you could get that transformed for the purposes of the year of homecoming and Burns 250 so that people will be attracted directly there. We need to concentrate short-term investment to provide a good forum for the region.

I want to return to contractors. Is it not necessary to get them to project themselves much more at the point of entry? At the airport, people should be able to get a ticket that will do them for their two days in the region, that can be used interchangeably on trains and buses and that has timetable information built in. Many people are dependent on public transport, so it is a deterrent if that information is not available.

Peter Lederer: We are always trying to bang it home that our focus is on the customer's point of view. For years, one of my criticisms of Scotland has been not about costs, but that it is difficult and complicated to buy. We are not alone in that—many countries have the same issue, but many others get it right. We need to join things up. We must think about a customer in London who wants to go to Scotland. We need to consider what the

information is like and how easy it is to buy tickets and get around. The easier we make it for the customer, the more likely we are to win that customer and separate them from more of their money. The more complicated and difficult it is, the more sales opportunities we lose.

Our push has always been to represent the customer in the public sector. To return to Christopher Harvie's first point, investment is needed, although that is not our remit. However, from a customer's point of view, he is absolutely right that if somebody arrives with an interest in Burns, the product is not always right. We need to consider what can be done to get the product right and VisitScotland can then take it to market.

David Whitton: I have a follow-up question. We have heard a lot of evidence during the inquiry about the growth of direct marketing organisations, with the one in Glasgow being held up as the great example of how they work wonderfully well. I want to tease out your views on that. There are such organisations for Loch Ness and Glasgow, with plans for others. Are they in competition with you? Do you want to control them and, if so, how do you do that? Alternatively, do you have an advisory role?

Philip Riddle: The Glasgow City Marketing Bureau is first and foremost a convention bureau. Tourism marketing for Glasgow is done by VisitScotland, except for business tourism marketing. Glasgow is an exceptional case because of the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre and Glasgow City Council's involvement with it. The bureau is successful and we work hand in hand. There is a good partnership model in Glasgow that works well. Looking further afield, I think that David Whitton is talking about destination marketing organisations which, in general, we are not in favour of. However, we are in favour of destination management organisations and there is a significant difference.

David Whitton: I am glad that you mentioned that, because the term "DMO" gets thrown around a lot. The question is whether the M stands for management or marketing.

Philip Riddle: We are very much in favour of management. A booklet on destination management organisations, in their purest form and as we understand them, was launched by the minister in November. Along with the enterprise companies, we articulated clearly in that handbook what we thought destination management organisations should do.

Destination management organisations are about product development—this relates to Christopher Harvie's question. Product development is about ensuring that there is consistent quality and welcome in a destination

and that there is lots of choice about what to do and where to stay. We need more joined-up product development throughout Scotland. That should not be about destination management alone; it should involve any industry-led organisation that pulls the product together. So we could be talking about activity management organisations that are themed around an activity rather than a destination.

In the main, destination marketing organisations do not work. One of the reasons is that such organisations are often where groups drift after they have failed on the destination management side because it is extremely difficult to get all the local parties together to organise destination management. The drift towards destination marketing then happens because everybody agrees that they can do a brochure.

David Whitton: I am sorry to interrupt, but why is destination management difficult?

Philip Riddle: Because it requires businesses to sit around, be very critical of each other and say, "Look, you're the one who's letting the side down: we need more development there." Then somebody else says, "Well, I don't want more development there because it might compete with me." Destination management needs the group to make hard business decisions and I do not underestimate the difficulty. However, people have to see the communal benefit. There are signs that that is starting to come through more, for example on Arran. There are also developments at Loch Ness and at Aviemore, where people are trying to look at destination management more holistically.

It is a failure when efforts just drift to marketing because marketing is a common denominator. Such marketing is usually based on supply and not demand; it is based on what people want to sell rather than on what others want to buy. It is quite natural for things to drift that way because it is a supplier group that is doing the marketing. Often, what is done is not linked to national or local campaigns. A lot of local marketing goes on and we are very good at it, although that fact is often not realised, largely because we do not market to tourism businesses and local authorities in Scotland; our marketing is out the way. We acknowledge that that perception exists and I know that there has been comment about it to the committee. The basis of marketing has to be that people integrate with whatever else is going on in marketing and it has to come from the consumer point of view.

As I said, we have strong views about how destination management should focus on product development. Organisations that stick to solid product development and then link to us through, for example, the growth fund on the marketing side, could be very effective. However, we have

yet to see any such developments that work really well.

David Whitton: So you would try to persuade anybody who wanted to set up a destination marketing organisation not to bother because it would be competition for you.

Philip Riddle: We would not see it as competition; we just see it as potentially not cost effective unless they get the product right first. If they get the product right, fine, and if they are convinced that it is absolutely joined up and that they have the quality and the welcome, they should go ahead by all means. However, we can fulfil that role jointly. As I said, we have a fund that supports destination marketing so we are not against it, but we want to do that work jointly with locals when we believe that there is a good product to sell.

The Convener: But Mr Riddle, why does one walk past the TIC in Fort William and not see anything about the

"Outdoor Capital of the UK"

displayed on its windows when that is demonstrably one of the success stories of local and—I would argue—national marketing? Is that not the case?

Philip Riddle: I believe that it is. What you describe is part of the promotion to get people to Fort William; such marketing is not necessarily an integral part of the promotion once people are in Fort William. When people are there, they want to know what lies behind the marketing. They go into the TIC and say, "Okay, we hear that you are the outdoor capital of Europe"—I like to try to be aspirational about it—

10:30

The Convener: Yes, but do you know how difficult it is to find leaflets in that TIC about what is going on outdoors? They are tucked right round the back. All that I found when I walked in there last week was T-shirts advertising Scotland. Believe me, it was not a good experience. That is my perception of going to a part of Scotland that I thought was doing an awful lot. VisitScotland is heavily involved in that, for which I applaud the organisation, but there appears to be a disconnect between what happens nationally and what happens locally.

Fort William is a strong brand. It attracts international events such as the world cup that will be held there in June, but when people walk past the TIC—I am sorry—there is no mention of the "outdoor capital of Europe". Thousands of people go to the outdoor capital of Europe, yet one cannot find any leaflets. Apparently, 40 per cent of tourism operators in that part of Scotland are not

members of the VisitScotland system. There seems to be a big disconnect between, on the one hand, what the private sector wants to do to drive forward the marketing of the Fort William and Lochaber area as the outdoor capital of the UK and, on the other, VisitScotland. Does the connection exist? Am I being unfair?

Philip Riddle: I am sure that you are not. I can only say that we will follow up the point on Fort William. If there is not sufficient information in Fort William about the choice of outdoor activities in the area, that is a failing. I do not think that that is a marketing issue in so far as, as you said, we capitalise on the branding of Fort William as the outdoor capital. We use that branding specifically and we were instrumental in creating a lot of what lies behind it. For example, we brought the mountain bike championships to the area over many years, and we built up the area.

You are right—the branding should be followed up. That is why we need tight integration. We should have the operation that ensures that that happens.

We should follow the customer journey. We have talked to the committee about that before. Our marketing should start with the look and move on to the book, the travel, the stay, the follow-up and the talk-about. You are right—we should be able to deliver that emotional journey consistently. We should be there, saying to the customer, “Here’s why you should come to Scotland”, then, “You should come to this particular area for those activities.” When they arrive, we should say, “Here’s more detail on the activities and information on where you’ll find them.” Our ability to do that depends on our ability to involve the industry.

There is no membership of VisitScotland any more. People do not have to be members but, because of restrictions with space and resources, we usually charge for leafleting. We have to have a relationship with the industry whereby it is prepared to pay for some of the promotion that accompanies the information service.

The Convener: If VisitScotland’s view is that it does not want destination marketing organisations to spring up, there is a huge onus on it to be fair—and to be seen to be fair—to absolutely everyone, and to spend accordingly in particular geographical areas. Some people told us in evidence that they do not think that VisitScotland spends money to get people to visit their locality. Whether that is fair or unfair, that is their view. What happens when things break down—when those criticisms are made and people are not satisfied? If VisitScotland does not want destination marketing organisations to spring up in particular localities, does that not mean that VisitScotland.com has to be perfect?

Philip Riddle: We are not saying that we do not want DMOs or that we regard them as competition. We are just saying that, generally, they have not been cost effective. However, that is not true of the marketing of individual businesses.

We should not be seen as the sole marketing agency for Scottish tourism. We have a fairly healthy budget. We spend about £45 million a year on marketing, which puts us alongside B&Q’s advertising in the UK. We are not a massive, perfect—

The Convener: That is kind of my point.

Philip Riddle: There is a limit to what we can do. Our role is to use our funding and marketing to leverage other marketing. The danger with destination marketing organisations is that, if they are not integrated and do not follow the same themes, they lose leverage. I am not saying that they are bad or wrong or that we should do away with them, but they lose leverage. We need to bring things together.

We have seen signs of success in that integration. Before the Scottish Tourist Board and the area tourist boards were integrated, we had under or around £8 million of commercial income from businesses. That included membership fees, but we decided to do away with them and give them back to the industry so that it could spend them as it wanted. We deliberately cut our income, but we now have more than £9 million of commercial income from businesses, so we have increased it. To me, that is a sign of effective engagement because people are putting their money where they want to be.

That is how we want to progress; we want businesses to come in with us, but not through membership or force. We do not want to be the only show in town; we want collective effort and to do the things that will bring that effort together.

Lewis Macdonald: You talked about the distinction between destination marketing and destination management and how good destination management would develop the product and give you something to market. We talked earlier about joint marketing with airlines and resorts. Is there a means by which you can support businesses in a similar area and/or activity—for example, angling, sea angling, mountain biking or golf—to create good destination management or can only the businesses initiate such joint working to develop a product, the marketing of which you can support later? Perhaps the outdoor activities in Lochaber are a good example. Can VisitScotland lead the process or does it simply have to follow enterprising companies in sectors that are doing that?

Peter Lederer: This goes back to the convener's point. There are not many successful examples of geographic marketing, because the customer is thinking not of geography but of products—sea kayaking, golf or whatever. We have worked much harder in recent years on how we can help to develop the product that we can then take to market. We do a lot of work on that and mountain biking is a good example.

That is absolutely key, because we need growing products and new markets such as mountain biking and sea kayaking that we can really develop. Mountain biking has gone from almost nothing to our being right up there as one of the top three destinations in the world. A lot of people come to look at that and say, "Wow! That is how to develop it." That is the model.

I will make another point about joined-upness. If we go back into the situation in which everybody spends little bits of marketing money, we will lose all the impact again. The benefit of VisitScotland's work to draw things together and make them more focused rather than dissipated all over the place is that we have much more clout in the marketplace and much more recognition from the customer. It would be dangerous to go back. However, we would certainly like more money in the growth fund, from which businesses can get funding to develop what they are doing. That would be a good way to go.

Dave Thompson: You said earlier that you do not really want to talk about structures. However, will you tell me how you have focused attention on the 2015 targets through your reorganisation?

Philip Riddle: The targets have been a key feature for the restructuring. First and foremost, there has been a realignment towards customers. We have built our structure around four customer groups, first and foremost of which is the visitor. Visitor engagement and the customer journey should give us an organisation that picks up things like the point that the convener mentioned about Fort William so that we can follow a customer all the way through. That gives us the ability to attract people to Scotland and help them to decide where to go in the country and to spend more money when they are here. We look for the 50 per cent growth to come from growth in visitor numbers of only roughly 25 per cent. A lot of the other growth will come through trying to get people to spend more, so the customer journey, through which we keep in touch with people and always try to encourage them to spend more, is important.

The other three customer groups are business engagement, which links businesses to our visitor engagement; a strategic partnership engagement, which brings in industry bodies, authorities and Government; and our internal corporate services. The customer focus will help significantly.

We are also concentrating on what is now called outcome reporting and outcome budgeting, which focus on the added economic value that we bring. We already have pretty good measurement systems in place. I referred to the generation of commercial income, which is a good measure of how we are doing; we measure the return on investment from marketing. We are looking closely at extending that to measure much more specifically additional economic benefit, which will show more exactly where we are generating economic value. Measurability is important.

The organisation is also engaged in research, which, alongside marketing, is our other great skill. In marketing and research we stand with our heads held high. Our research is increasingly focused on the key market segments in which we believe there is growth potential, specifically growth in revenue from customers' spend. We have identified 10 market segments in the UK market and are focusing much more closely on four of those than ever before. Our marketing has become more focused over the years. It started with a general approach, "Here is Scotland—come." Now, it appeals direct to certain segmented groups through publications and channels that they use.

Brian Adam: We have received evidence that data collection is too slow. If you are to respond to significantly changing market circumstances, your research must presumably be done quickly. Is any attempt being made to speed up data collection? Gavin Brown indicated that the most up-to-date figures were for 2006. We are now at the beginning of the 2008 season. Is that acceptable, or will you turn the research around more quickly?

Philip Riddle: I distinguish between types of research. The research that VisitScotland does is essentially market research: it is about visitor behaviour and attitudes, what people do, where they come from and what they want. We do such research ourselves; it is quick and it goes right into the marketers' hands. We use it in marketing and in other areas.

We buy into the research that is done on numbers. The international figures come through the international passenger survey, which is a £5 million UK study that covers all sorts of issues, such as immigration, and we pay £150,000 for access to that data. The UK tourism survey is a £1 million study and we pay about £240,000 for access to the data. It would be difficult and costly for us to change those UK studies. It would also cost a lot of money to do such studies independently and may not be the best way to spend money because, although the figures are important, especially when we are trying to measure 50 per cent growth, they are retrospective. We are interested not so much in

what has been happening as in what will happen—where people will come from and what they will want.

Our research, which does not measure how many people have come to an area but is about what people want to do and what they are likely to want to do in the future, is up to date, slick and very useful. We have been looking at the possibility of a national survey if we want better statistical information, but it would cost money and it is all offsets. A good national survey would not necessarily replace the other surveys and it would cost several hundred thousand pounds to put it in place to get statistics that are not that useful.

The Convener: Dave Thompson, I am terribly sorry, but I cannot let you in because we are out of time and must move on to the next panel.

Thank you very much, gentlemen. Several colleagues have not had a chance to ask all their questions, so we may well come back to you with some subsequent questions. I thank Peter Lederer and Philip Riddle for coming along this morning.

We will move right on to the second panel, because some of our witnesses are tight for time.

10:45

We are joined by a panel that will consider wider issues of planning and development as part of our inquiry into tourism. John McNairney is assistant chief planner in the Scottish Government directorate for the built environment—gosh, you have a longer title than you used to have, John. Steve Inch is executive director of development and regeneration services at Glasgow City Council. Andrew Holmes is the former director of city development at the City of Edinburgh Council. He has just retired, so he will be demob happy and able to give vent to his views on many aspects of planning—I encourage him to do so. Gordon Watson is director of planning at the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority. Mick Stewart is chair of the Scottish Society of Directors of Planning and is planning adviser to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—I presume that that means you are the shop steward, Mick. Dr Margaret Bochel is head of planning and infrastructure at Aberdeen City Council. I extend a warm welcome to you all and thank you for coming.

It is unfortunate that Mr Inch must leave at 11 o'clock to go to another meeting—I suspect that he will be delivering another hotel to Glasgow—so I invite colleagues to ask him about how Glasgow City Council addresses tourism planning matters.

Lewis Macdonald: We will be interested to hear more about a matter on which we have had quite a lot of evidence. Glasgow has said that the key to

its success is its ability to turn round planning applications quickly. How have you dealt with constraints on doing that? For example, I presume that a quick turnaround requires a high level of staffing. Given that Glasgow has a successful private economy as well as a successful public economy, how do you retain the professional planners that are needed to deliver the quick turnaround? Is there a secret to that?

Does the quick turnaround of applications have an opportunity cost? In other words, what are you not doing so that that can happen? How much is your ability to provide a quick turnaround a consequence of local political leadership and how much is it a consequence of commercial demand from potential developers?

Steve Inch (Glasgow City Council): I will try to answer all your questions succinctly. In Glasgow we developed our 12-point fast-track planning system. When a planning application comes into the office we take a view on whether the proposed development is a strategic project or a project of more local and limited relevance. Employment projects tend to be classed as strategic projects.

We have structured our office's development management system so that we have teams that specialise in dealing with bigger, more sophisticated and perhaps more complex projects. Such projects tend to be city centre based and mainly involve retail, commercial or tourism developments. The team works through the plan and engages with the developer as early as possible.

The convener's comment was interesting, because I met a hotel developer at 7.15 am, as a prelude to a planning application that will come into the office on Friday. If I say a bit about the process for dealing with that proposal, I might answer some of the member's questions. We are dealing with a developer who has a financial package in place and needs to be on site around the end of September. When a major development is proposed we tend to work back from the developer's critical timescale for getting the project under way. The development that I am talking about is a hotel project, but we would take the same approach to a major retail or office project. We engage in as much pre-application discussion as possible.

The purpose of this morning's meeting was to finalise what will be in the planning application. There have already been discussions about the proposal with the city's design adviser, with our heritage section, because a listed building is involved, and with transport officials, because of the project's implications for traffic. In effect, when the application comes in on Friday, all the critical planning considerations will have been taken into

account, which will make it easy to move into the formal application consideration process.

I could give many other examples of fast-tracking planning applications for tourism projects. The approach does not mean that we take poor decisions; we try to take many decisions before the application comes in, so that consideration in the later part of the process will be easier.

We also prioritise the filling of service critical posts. Development management and building control are two of the three areas in which we treat posts as service critical, so within the council they are prioritised for filling and there are expedited processes. For example, the council normally advertises all its vacancies on the first Friday of every month; however, service-critical posts are advertised as they come up so that we can get applications into the system more quickly.

We are dealing with the same problems as most of the planners at this end of the table. Recruitment and retention are difficult, particularly of experienced staff. In Glasgow, however, we offer work on challenging projects—it is a very busy office—and that encourages staff to come and work in the city and perhaps stay in the city. They will work on projects that have a major impact on the economic and social prospects of the city.

Elsewhere in the fast-track system we are trying to cut down the number of planning conditions. When I took up the job, we reviewed the conditions that we used and it was my view that we imposed far too many. It is a bit of a safety valve. I would like to see the number of conditions taken down a bit, as that would make their enforcement far easier at the end of the process.

We are also working with Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to ensure that, when we fast-track an application that has to be referred to them, they will similarly fast-track it through their systems. We want to make the steps in the process as short as possible.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. If you look at our development management performance last year, you will see that we were quite low down the league table. We are now quite high up the league table of Scottish local authorities in terms of non-household applications. We have some way to go yet, but we are starting to get big applications moving far quicker. That is being appreciated by the development industry. Development is expensive, and any delays create financial pressures. The developers that we deal with appreciate it if we can get applications through the system more quickly than they expect.

Lewis Macdonald: That is very concise. Your point about going up the league table suggests

that you are describing recent developments or, at least, that the feeding through of their impact has been recent. Was a critical decision made a year or two ago that has allowed you to move up the league table as you have just described?

Steve Inch: The driver for that has come over the past 18 months or so. It is the view of the council leader, Councillor Purcell, that we need to modernise the planning system. We are looking at what is happening as a result of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006. We have picked up on the things that are likely to come into the local authority regime and we are trying to adopt them. As far as possible, we are trying to predict what will come and to adopt good practice before it becomes mandatory.

The changes have been politically driven by the desire to see development in the city and to move forward in implementing the joint economic strategy and the tourism action plan for the city. Those all rely very much on ensuring that we have development that will aid the growth of the economy and encourage implementation of the tourism action plan for Glasgow.

Brian Adam: Mr Inch, we have received a significant amount of evidence on issues around planning. You say that changes have taken place in the past 18 months. What is the turnaround time for planning applications for hotels after the change and what was it before? To what extent is the co-operation that you are getting from national bodies that have to feed into the planning process giving you an advantage over your competitors—in particular, internal competitors in Scotland?

Steve Inch: When we fast-track hotel planning applications through the system, the process takes probably half the time that it would have taken a couple of years back. Recent examples are the proposed Argyle international hotel next to the Radisson hotel on Argyle Street. The developer was under particular pressures because he had a potential operator signed up, but there was a timescale for that option being exercised. We turned that application round in about eight weeks.

Brian Adam: Will you give me some numbers?

Steve Inch: That application was turned round in about eight weeks. We then had to refer the project to the Scottish Government, because the council had an interest in the site, and to Historic Scotland, because it involved two listed buildings.

The Convener: Was that eight weeks from the developer's first inquiry to approval?

Steve Inch: No. The time was eight weeks from lodging the planning application to the final decision. The project was complicated, because it involved listed buildings, land acquisition and issues of transportation on to the main street.

We are working towards dealing with the planning application that is to come in on Friday in eight weeks, to allow the developer to move ahead.

The Radisson hotel project, which is much older, was completed in seven weeks, so fast tracking is not particularly new, although we are doing far more of it. When we had to fast track in the past, we did so.

Another major project—the St Enoch's shopping centre project—was fast tracked through the system in eight weeks. It was extremely complicated because of its size and because of transportation and public realm aspects. That timescale was driven largely by the retailers' requirement to be up and running for shopping in the period leading up to Christmas 2009.

We take a view on when a developer needs a project to operate, work back from that and factor in the timescale for planning applications on that basis.

Brian Adam: Do you proactively consider the availability of land and provide a planning brief so that organisations such as Scottish Development International can encourage appropriate inward investment, particularly in the tourism sector?

Steve Inch: We are working closely with SDI on hotel development, which it has prioritised, as you probably know. On land assembly and land availability, we have finalised a directory of sites in and around the city centre that we think are appropriate for hotel development. We have worked with the Glasgow City Marketing Bureau to commission research into the most appropriate star rating for sites. All the sites that we own and which are suitable for hotel development are under discussion or are somewhere in planning discussions with a potential operator or developer.

Brian Adam: We have been given evidence that Glasgow is attracting hotel developments away from other parts of Scotland because of its fast-track system. Do developers tell you that that is why they go to Glasgow rather than other parts of Scotland? Do you have specific evidence of projects that have gone to Glasgow rather than somewhere else as a consequence of the planning changes that you have made?

Steve Inch: I can certainly provide information—I might have to do so privately rather than in a public forum—about a hotel developer who is coming to Glasgow because he felt that he had undue problems in trying to progress a development in Edinburgh.

The Convener: That is fair enough.

David Whitton: My question is at a slight tangent. Does speeding up the process enable

you to turn down unsuitable applications more quickly?

Steve Inch: We prefer not to turn down planning applications. Most people who have a project receive planning consent at some point. The challenge in the office is to turn a bad proposal into a good one. If effort is put into pre-application discussions, lots of problems with design, materials, orientation and layout can be sorted out, so that when an application is lodged, all the major problems have been sorted out.

David Whitton: You say that it takes eight weeks from lodging a planning application to acceptance by the planning applications committee. How much time does the pre-planning application stage take?

Steve Inch: I will give an example. We probably had four or five weeks of intense discussion with the developer and the developer's architect before the proposal for the hotel on Argyle Street was submitted. That project was complicated, because it involved two listed buildings and land acquisition. The council had to decide whether it would make a compulsory purchase—which it agreed to do—to allow the site assembly to happen. The project also involved complex traffic calculations.

We can have such discussions in less time than five weeks. We first met four weeks ago the hotel chain that wants to operate in the city and which I met this morning. At the first meeting, the chain gave us a basic idea of the project and produced sketch drawings that it thought were controversial but which we thought were fitting for the site, which surprised the company. It went away to work up a detailed planning application from sketch designs within four weeks. With a bit of luck, a planning application will be submitted on Friday.

11:00

The Convener: Good. I thank Mr Inch very much and thank the other witnesses for bearing with us. We wanted to have Mr Inch's comments on the record before he leaves.

Lewis Macdonald, do you want to continue the discussion with our other witnesses?

Lewis Macdonald: Certainly.

What we have heard from Steve Inch is in line with what Scott Taylor and other witnesses previously told us about Glasgow having given itself a competitive advantage in hotel development because of its ability to turn around applications quickly.

I would be interested to hear the views of Andrew Holmes and Maggie Bochel on the

position in Scotland's other cities and on how Glasgow's apparent competitive advantage looks from the point of view of Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Scott Taylor referred to an Aberdeen developer's development of a hotel in Bothwell Street, for example. That hotel was located there because it was seen as likely that an application to locate a hotel there would be approved more quickly. Steve Inch referred to a similar case involving a hotelier choosing between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Do people in the other cities—which, I presume, are in competition for developments—share such perceptions?

Andrew Holmes: I do not know what the current quarterly statistics are, but for most of last year, Edinburgh's planning performance was better across the piece than that of Glasgow. Those statistics are carefully considered, as you would imagine. That said, any application that is submitted in either city involves a range of factors.

Like Glasgow, Edinburgh has issues relating to recruiting and retaining planning staff. It would be fair to say that, for most of the time during which I was in post, the City of Edinburgh Council's planning department operated with an extremely thin complement of staff because of budgetary and other constraints, which are common across the piece. However, the workload per planner in the City of Edinburgh Council is higher than that in all other Scottish urban authorities. That is partly due to the City of Edinburgh Council being the first major planning authority in Scotland to invest heavily in information technology. It was the first to facilitate online applications—there was an online planning portal and so on. Such things have allowed the productivity of planners to be top of the league in Scotland. We looked at things in slightly different ways.

Edinburgh's planning performance accounts for part of its success, but its current underlying competitive advantage in attracting hotel developments is due to the strength of the market. Returns on hotel rooms in Edinburgh are second only to returns on hotel rooms in central London. Edinburgh has an underlying competitive advantage because of the market and the economy.

Major city centre planning applications come with baggage from a wide range of factors. The issues that we encountered were not mainly to do with the ability to get three-star and four-star hotel developments. Two major conversions are under way on Waterloo Place at the moment. Despite the buildings involved being listed buildings, no particular planning issues were raised, and proposals have sailed through. Consents have been given for places near the top of Leith Walk, and there is a lot of interest in the west side of the city.

Brian Adam: Mr Inch gave us timescales. What timescales were involved in the developments that you mentioned?

Andrew Holmes: The timescales were certainly not eight weeks. The typical timescale is three to four months. For example, the Waterloo Place conversions involved referrals to Historic Scotland and seeking views from Architecture and Design Scotland. There are other factors at play. With any application of significance that involves a listed building, Historic Scotland's response time will automatically be more than eight weeks.

Brian Adam: That does not seem to have been the case in Glasgow. We were told about two listed buildings there and the timescale for the process was eight weeks. If that can happen in Glasgow in cases involving the co-operation of the national bodies, why is it not happening in Edinburgh?

Andrew Holmes: Over the years, my experience in City of Edinburgh Council was that the response times in cases that involved Historic Scotland—or, for that matter, referrals to the Scottish Government, because of a council interest or significant bodies of opposition—were not as good as we would have liked them to be. In Edinburgh, the majority of planning applications attract opposition, which complicates timescales. I am afraid that that has always come with the territory in Edinburgh.

Some of the amenity bodies in Edinburgh have views that are completely divorced from both the local and national economy, but they are very good at expressing their views and relatively influential in their way. In saying that, perhaps I have strayed beyond the realm of the subject, which is hotel development. The principal challenge for Edinburgh—although it is a Scottish issue—is finding the right sites and attracting the right developers for five-star and high-end hotel developments. Edinburgh attracts a large amount of interest from high-end developers; the issue for the city is less one of planning and more one of finding economically viable sites.

The Convener: I will bring in Margaret Bochel on this point, after which I will ask John McNairney to comment on Brian Adam's broader point about the other bodies. Perhaps he will give the matter some thought in the interim.

Dr Margaret Bochel (Aberdeen City Council): Obviously, Aberdeen City Council is very conscious of the importance of quality accommodation. Having such accommodation supports existing businesses, attracts larger-scale conferences to the city and allows the city to diversify into more mainstream tourism.

We do not have a fast-track system. In place of that, we have a minor applications unit that deals

with householder applications. That allows our professional, qualified planners to focus on larger-scale applications. We are approaching the issue from a different angle. Like other panel members, we, too, have issues with recruitment, particularly of qualified staff.

In the written evidence, I read that people have left Aberdeen because they struggled to get planning permission. I would be interested to discuss the matter with them. I have never been approached by anyone who said that they were struggling to get planning permission. I do not know who they are, but I would like to see whether there is anything I can do to help them.

Since the end of 2005, we have given planning permission to 11 fairly major hotel developments and a number of smaller developments. Outline permission has been given for another development and we have four pending applications, which we expect to deal with fairly soon.

We cannot claim an eight or nine-week turnaround for hotel applications; our average is probably four to five months. Some hotel applications have been slightly complicated and one that probably increased our average was part of a mixed-use development with an affordable housing element. A legal agreement needed to be drawn up to ensure that we tied down the affordable housing element. If the application had been simply for a hotel, we could have dealt with it more quickly. Issues with consultation on trunk roads have added slightly to timescales.

We do not have the kind of advantage that Glasgow in particular has through access to vacant and derelict land. As a city, Aberdeen is relatively constrained in that regard. Like Edinburgh, the issue is finding appropriate sites. We have worked closely with some developers to help them to do that. A good example of—

Brian Adam: Given that, over the past three years, you have identified 16 sites and granted permission for 11, that is not a strong argument. What can you, in Aberdeen, and Mr Holmes's successors in Edinburgh do to get your turnaround times down to eight weeks as opposed to your four to five months?

Dr Bochel: I am not sure when the clock starts ticking in Glasgow when measuring timescales.

The Convener: I think that it was said on the record—

Dr Bochel: The suggestion was that quite a lot of the negotiations are done before an application is processed. We accept an application on the day that it comes in. Things such as transport assessments may be done after the application has been lodged, which adds to timescales. My

impression is that Glasgow City Council deals with such matters before an application is submitted.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the process by which Glasgow City Council holds conversations with developers in advance of an application being put on to the table simply not happen in Aberdeen? From the major developments I am aware of in my constituency, my understanding is that prior discussions take place between planners and developers before an application lands on the table.

Dr Bochel: There are prior discussions, but the level of detail in the information that is submitted in applications varies. Under the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006, about which John McNairney will say more, there will be a requirement for processing agreements for some major developments. That will help to tie down timescales.

Lewis Macdonald: If, as Brian Adam suggests, other cities were to have an eight-week or nine-week turnaround time as an objective, would it require a political lead for Aberdeen to do the same? In other words, would you need to be given priority when the council was allocating its resources, or would the issue simply be how you managed your workload?

Dr Bochel: Over the past couple of years, the council has been supportive of planning in the city and has given us additional resources, in recognition of the fact that planning is fundamental to achieving the council's vision. However, that is not helping us to recruit the qualified, experienced staff we need to deal with more complex applications. If we were to prioritise such applications, it would inevitably take us longer to deal with others.

Lewis Macdonald: So you have no targets for turnaround times for applications for major developments, of the sort that we have heard about in Glasgow.

Dr Bochel: Our target is to deal with them as quickly as we can.

Andrew Holmes: Edinburgh has target times, which are the national Government target times for dealing with major applications. With all due respect, the only way of getting the turnaround time for a hotel application down to eight weeks or thereabouts would be to give it absolute priority over everything else. Edinburgh has a major applications team, but at any one time it deals with a wide range of major applications, most of which have a significant economic content.

I would be surprised if any major authority did not have extensive pre-application discussions with developers, but a complicating factor in recent proposals for high-end developments in the hotel

industry is that applications are not submitted in isolation. The classic case is the Sofitel development just up the road—that was part of the Caltongate proposal, which raises separate issues. The other major proposal that is being considered at the moment is for a five-star hotel in Morrison Street; that is also part of an extremely large mixed development. Extensive discussions are under way about the incorporation of two new hotels into the St James quarter redevelopment. Again, those proposals are linked to a much larger development. Many of the significant hotel developments that we have experienced in recent years are linked to major, often area-wide, redevelopments.

There may be other factors that drag out consideration of applications. Applicants and, to be fair, planning authorities usually prefer a single, linked application for all elements of a development. It would be nice for us to be able to say that we could turn around an application for a hotel on a brownfield site in eight weeks, which is reasonably feasible. However, anything less than the three or four-month timescales that I have cited would be completely unrealistic for hotel applications that are part of wider developments. In central Edinburgh, it is also fairly common for applications to raise significant architectural and listed building issues. Involving external consultees adds significantly to the timescale for turning applications around.

The Convener: I do not represent Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen, so I can ask my next question with no worries. As planners in Edinburgh and Aberdeen, do you think that Glasgow has an advantage in planning and tourism because some agencies—notably Scottish Enterprise—are located there and are inevitably focused on Glasgow? Scottish Enterprise operates in the city day in, day out.

Andrew Holmes: Glasgow does not have an advantage in tourism. It has organised its city promotion in an interesting way. I do not mean to be smug, but Edinburgh has always had a different and stronger brand. The majority of tourists who visit Scotland still use Edinburgh as a gateway city at some point. We have never felt that Scottish Enterprise has had a bias towards Glasgow in tourism. We might take a different view on other elements of the economy.

Dr Bochel: In Aberdeen, over the past few months we have started working closely with Scottish Enterprise Grampian on hotel and other tourism-related developments. For example, we are looking at putting together a brochure to identify city centre sites that might be suitable for hotel development, possibly with more focus on the top end of the market such as four and five-

star hotels. Therefore, I would not say that the agency has a particular bias towards Glasgow.

11:15

Andrew Holmes: I should add one exception to what I said. Although this has been getting better recently, we have not had any strong, regular working relationship with SDI on such issues. It was virtually an unknown quantity in Edinburgh.

The Convener: That is helpful to understand.

David Whitton: Dr Bochel said that Aberdeen City Council has started working with Scottish Enterprise only in the past four or five months. Glasgow City Council has been working with Scottish Enterprise for a lot longer than that. As a result of that collaboration, Glasgow is now seeing some success. Why did such collaboration not happen before in Aberdeen?

Dr Bochel: We have worked closely with the agency on various issues but hotel development has been a particular focus of that joint working only in the past six months. Through the Aberdeen city and shire economic forum—ACSEF—we have done quite a lot of work generally on how we might work more closely together to promote the city's economic development. A key theme for ACSEF has been how we can work better with the private sector in the planning process. One issue is how we ensure that private developers, including those in the tourism industry, are engaged in the development plan process up front. If developers know how that part of the system works, they can focus their developments more appropriately, for example on sites that are in the local plan. We have tried to engage the enterprise agency more closely throughout the process so that we can help each other to achieve the desired vision. It is not that we have not worked with the agency but that the focus has only recently shifted to tourism.

David Whitton: Various people have mentioned staffing issues, which I understand previously caused problems for my local authority—East Dunbartonshire Council—in dealing even with simple planning applications. Can Mr Stewart give us some idea of what the picture is across Scotland? We seem to have an awful dearth of experienced planners. A lack of skilled staff seems to be one of the major hindrances to processing planning applications.

Mick Stewart (Scottish Society of Directors of Planning): It is true to say that we have a shortage of experienced, skilled planners. Like many local government functions, planning is not—or was not until recently—an attractive university subject for school leavers to train in. However, people increasingly use the graduate entry route, whereby they can become a town planner by taking a postgraduate qualification in

planning after taking a degree in another subject. We have had some growth on the production side—in further and higher education—that will bring in more planners. In addition, planners have also tended to move out of local government into other fields or to retire. At one time—1975 was probably the heyday—many people were drawn into planning, but the numbers entering the profession then remained steady before starting to drop off over, probably, the past 10 years.

David Whitton: Do you have figures for how many planners short the planning departments of Aberdeen City Council, the City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council are on average?

Mick Stewart: Our society carries out a survey of planning vacancies in local government. The most recent survey was done about two years ago. I do not have the figures to hand, but they can be provided.

The workload or productivity of individual planners, which was flagged up by Andrew Holmes, varies from council to council and is very much related to the complexity of the applications that they deal with. The average loading on a planner is between 130 and 160 applications per year. In my authority, which is Stirling Council, we deal with about 200 applications per year. I am not sure what the figure is for City of Edinburgh Council.

Andrew Holmes: Our average was 210.

Mick Stewart: As Andrew Holmes said, the nature of that loading is affected by the complexity of the planning applications. Location can play an important part in that.

Everyone talked about the issues with Historic Scotland in urban areas and Gordon Watson might talk about the rural issues, including impacts on nature conservation, special areas of control and European protection. Such elements all have an impact on the time taken to process applications.

The Convener: Okay, but before we go on to talk about that, the committee is interested in hearing from John McNairney on two areas. The first is the numbers that Mick Stewart identified. You will have a Scotland-wide overview of shortages and what is being done about them. Secondly, Brian Adam made a point about other organisations, such as Historic Scotland and other agencies, whose response times could have an impact on timescales in Edinburgh, as Andrew Holmes said. How can those things be improved to further all our interests?

John McNairney (Scottish Government Directorate for the Built Environment): Many points have been raised so far. On overall

performance, the planning system generally approves more than 90 per cent of applications that come before it—even approximately 89 to 90 per cent of major applications are approved. That is a positive statistic.

The timescales for dealing with major applications are less positive. Our most recent statistics are from 2006-2007. The figures are not broken down into hotel or retail developments, but 45 per cent of major applications meet the performance target of being processed within four months. That figure has been dropping over the past three to four years, which is not good.

Part of the modernising agenda is to acknowledge that planning can play an important role in supporting increased sustainable economic growth by focusing on major developments. Steve Inch talked about early engagement with consultees, whether Historic Scotland or the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and about developers providing clear information with their applications. We would add engagement with the local community. All that work at the front end of the process pays off, giving a smoother planning process and helping planning authorities to process major applications more effectively.

It has also been said that some of the applications are controversial, and Andrew Holmes's point was well made. Major applications can be difficult to process; they are complex. People want to have their say on things that will affect their communities, so planning authorities have to reconcile sometimes difficult, competing interests, which is a tough job. However, front-loading the system can make the process much easier. In modernising the planning system, we want to ensure that we can move major applications through the system more effectively.

The evidence on resources is more anecdotal than hard fact. A number of authorities—Maggie Bochel's is one of them—have found it difficult to attract experienced staff when vacancies arise. My experience is that it is increasingly difficult for us in Government to attract graduate planners. It is much more common for someone to complete their degree and go straight into the private sector. When I graduated, that would have been unusual; graduates generally gravitated towards gaining their experience in the public sector. Attracting staff is quite tough.

Therefore, modernising is not just about changing the legislation and putting guidance in place. Many relevant culture changes are required to attract people to the profession, to resource the system adequately and to change behaviour so that people can buy into the ideas that Steve Inch flagged up about early engagement.

The Convener: That is helpful, but do you have a view on how long it takes Historic Scotland to turn round an application during its part of the process? Does central Government have a role there, given that Historic Scotland is an agency of central Government?

John McNairney: As part of modernisation, we want to ensure that all consultees play their part and do not unnecessarily delay the process. I do not have to hand the statistics on consultees' performance, but I can get those for you. My impression is that Historic Scotland is a high performer as it turns around in the region of 97 to 98 per cent of the material that comes before it within its target timescale. A recent parliamentary debate highlighted that fact. Historic Scotland is one of the agencies that are engaging actively in modernisation.

The Convener: It would be helpful if you could provide that information to the committee. If it is possible to break it down by agency and by region, members would be extremely interested in that. Thank you very much.

Lewis Macdonald: I want to ask about the information to which John McNairney has referred concerning the turnaround time for major developments. Witnesses from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen have told us that the process takes four or five months at the most. To hear that, on average in Scotland, only 45 per cent of applications for major developments are processed within four months is quite alarming. Are you able to provide a breakdown of the information on that by region or by local authority, so that we can see where the problems lie and which local authorities are pulling the average down to below 50 per cent?

The Convener: You do not need to give us that information today; you can get back to us on that.

Lewis Macdonald: No, I do not expect that information today.

Likewise, it would be helpful if you could provide information about the recruitment and retention issues that are faced in different areas. I am conscious of the fact that Aberdeen City Council has a particular problem with recruitment and retention. I assume that other authorities face the same problems to differing degrees, but it would be useful to see a breakdown of that information.

Further to what John McNairney said, I recall from when I dealt with such things, which is now about seven years ago, that the Government played quite an active role in promoting best practice in authorities and in supporting recruitment and retention initiatives. Is that still the case? If so, is it productive? Is the role of planning at the Scottish Government level still one of

supporting and enabling planning at the local authority level, and is it working?

John McNairney: Yes, we continue to support and enable.

The supply of planners is not necessarily an issue on which central Government leads. The Royal Town Planning Institute and the universities have a key role to play in that. The bottom line is that we need to attract more people into public service.

Brian Adam: I hope that we are trying to provide a level playing field so that people everywhere have the same access to services. To what extent does a level playing field exist? In Glasgow, the system seems to work much quicker than the targets that are set centrally, but are we comparing apples and pears? Is that part of a marketing myth from Glasgow City Council? Is it about perceptions? What evidence has anyone got of developers genuinely gravitating towards those areas that appear to have faster turnaround times? To what extent are national agencies following a uniform approach, or to what extent are they being persuaded to act more quickly locally?

Andrew Holmes: I will start with planning performance. John McNairney will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that the handling of major applications is one of Audit Scotland's key performance indicators. Committee members can quickly see the city of Glasgow's handling times for major planning applications.

Brian Adam: Is that a nice way of saying that it is a myth?

Andrew Holmes: I presume that the statistics will speak the truth, as usual.

Developers will gravitate to where they feel they will get the best return. Planning performance will be an element of that, and no local authority in its right mind would try to do anything other than co-operate with developers to encourage an improvement in planning authorities if poor planning performance were cited as a disincentive to investment. However, my experience in Edinburgh was that site availability was the principal issue. For example, one of the strongest market areas in hotel development is in very large, 300 or 400-bedroom, three or four-star hotels, but it is physically impossible to find a site for such a development in a market location in Edinburgh.

The high-end hotel developers have a wide range of factors in mind, and no developer has said that particular planning performance issues are causing them to look elsewhere. The basic issue for developers is finding and competing for suitable sites. The City of Edinburgh Council has tried to facilitate the process as far as possible, through the planning system, including by

disposing of elements of its own land off-market, as it did with the Sofitel hotel site at Caltongate or the site on George IV Bridge, where the development is nearing completion. However, planning is only a small element of a complex situation in urban areas.

11:30

Dr Bochel: I was going to make a similar point. The issue is complicated and involves more factors than just the speed at which we turn around planning applications. Site availability is an issue, and like Andrew Holmes we have worked with developers to identify appropriate sites and deal with planning applications as quickly as we can. For example, we worked closely with the developers of the Malmaison Aberdeen hotel project to deliver approval on what could have been quite a controversial application for a development in a conservation area. We can cite good examples of our positive approach to supporting development. As I said, no hotel developer has come to me and said that they are leaving Aberdeen because of the planning system.

Dave Thompson: I want to move the discussion on from city developments. Neil Wells, who gave evidence to the committee some time ago, told us that when he was pursuing a £9 million hotel development in Argyll, it took four years to get a vote of approval—and I think he said that it had taken a further year to get approval at national level. That is a delay not of four or five months but of four or five years in getting approval for a major development. The Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority might well have been involved with Mr Wells's proposal. Will Gordon Watson comment on the application and say how the national parks strike a balance between promoting development and conservation?

Gordon Watson (Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority): I think that you are referring to the Ardgarten case. The four-year period that you mentioned included a significant lead-in time, when the park authority encouraged Mr Wells to purchase the site, which was a remnant designed landscape in an iconic location at the foot of the Cobbler, on Loch Long. Given the site's nature, we thought that it would accommodate a hotel development very well.

There was a detailed pre-application process with Mr Wells over a length of time. The main issue was how a large building would be sited in the landscape and what the visual impact would be, as the authority signalled loud and clear to Mr Wells throughout the pre-application process. The difficulty was that when the planning application came in, the analysis that we needed was not there, which was unfortunate. Environmental

impact regulations provide for discretion not to invoke the environmental impact assessment procedure if an application addresses the environmentally sensitive issues; but in the Ardgarten case we had to invoke the EIA procedure. It took about a year for Mr Wells to come back with his environmental statement.

Dave Thompson: Was it a case of Mr Wells not having listened to what you told him in the pre-application discussions?

Gordon Watson: There was tension between Mr Wells's particular business model—he was developing a coaching hotel and needed a particular size of building—and the challenges of the site. We struggled to improve the application through the pre-application discussions.

It took a year for the EIA to come back to us, which of course was a matter in Mr Wells's control. The application was processed and there was a decision to approve. An issue in the post-application process has been that the applicant does not own the access and has had to enter into a legal agreement with a third party to secure access improvements. We have been awaiting the outcome of those discussions, as our rules require that we must do before consent can be given.

Dave Thompson: What is your average turnaround time for hotel developments and so on? Do you have any information on the Cairngorms national park?

Gordon Watson: There is a link between the pre-application experience and the efficient handling of a development. I can give you an example of a close contrast on Loch Lomondside, where we recently had planning applications from the De Vere Group, which is considering a £50 million reinvestment in Cameron house. We had an extensive pre-application process, given that a sensitive landscape and a listed building were involved. We have been dealing with the array of planning applications that are required to bring that reinvestment about, and they are being handled within a period of two to three months. The group had a strategy for how it was going to submit the planning applications, and we had a fruitful pre-application process.

I contrast that with the development up the road at the Carrick, for which we recently won a planning award. There was no pre-application process at all for that—the application just came in. It took us about a year to get to a consent, as we tried to turn what was not a good submission into a good consent. Although that was not dealt with efficiently, a number of the directors of the De Vere Group have said that the planning process added value to their business, because of the quality of the product that they ended up with following that process.

The Deputy Convener (Brian Adam): Could you perhaps provide some of that detail to the committee in writing? We would find it useful to look at the turnaround times involved.

Gordon Watson: Sure.

Dave Thompson: That would be very helpful.

Gordon Watson: I turn to the second part of Mr Thompson's original question, which was about how we promote development in the national park. We are very much engaged with our Scottish Enterprise colleagues regarding how national parks can contribute to the framework for change targets. We have been considering the national park as a destination and as a series of sub-destinations. Through our local plan process, we have been asking ourselves what product the market would want if it was given the opportunity. That can be tested through consultation. We are asking questions in our early consultation about, for example, whether there is scope for another resort development in the national park, at Callander; how we might improve forest tourism in Cowal; and how to improve water recreation on Loch Lomondside—both the facilities and the existing accommodation offer.

The planning system in our rural area, which has possibly been a bit reactive in previous years, should be actively promoting the right product in the right place, so that such products can fit with the local environment in the various sub-areas of the national park. We want to use our local plan to turn a reactive process into an enabling one, and to signal to the market that certain types of product will work best in certain places. That should pave the way for more fruitful pre-application and planning application processes.

Dave Thompson: Are you having problems getting planners to work with you or for you?

Gordon Watson: When we advertise vacancies, we are not inundated with large volumes of applications. However, we have been lucky—we have been able to recruit, mostly. We have had to use agency planners when we have had difficulties, to fill gaps and to keep things going. That is increasingly the case for some authorities as they try to keep up their efficiency. They will make temporary arrangements if there are continuity issues around recruitment. We are one of the lucky authorities in that regard, judging by other experiences that we have heard about.

Dave Thompson: I will throw in another wee point about the building warrant process. In some authorities, delays and problems have been caused by the building warrant and building control side of things, as opposed to the planning side. Do you have any comments on that?

Mick Stewart: I am responsible for building control, which is a bit like planning when it comes to trying to find and retain staff. I do not just mean building standards staff; there are also the environmental health officers, trading standards officers and a whole roll of regulatory officers throughout local government. There is a shortage of people coming forward to do those jobs. The other important issues are the quality, skill sets and experience of officers. Generally, they are hard to recruit and retain.

Another thing that has added to delays in building control is the complexity of new building standards. A new round of them is out for consultation just now. The fire aspects of building standards are very important. It will take a long time before we get many local architects, or the people who do drawings for the small end of the tourist trade, up to speed. A lot of people in the tourist trade, especially at the bottom end, will not go for a fully fledged architect; they will probably know a draftsman—somebody to do the drawings. The delays are caused by the length of time that it takes to get all those people up to speed with new building standards.

Marilyn Livingstone: My questions are based on my experience with my local authority, Fife Council.

I chair the cross-party group on construction, and one of our biggest worries is retention and recruitment of planners. I want to ask about a couple of specific issues that have been raised with me. We know that recruiting and retaining adequately qualified staff is a problem—every authority has highlighted the issue. I have seen in my authority that it is hard to replace people with 20 years' experience when they leave.

Has any thought been given to the future supply of planners? Is there any initiative to attract people into the industry? Is the public sector able to compete with the private sector on salaries, working conditions and career progression, which are the three important issues? If not, what are we doing about the problem? The tourism industry views delays in planning as a major economic inhibitor. If there is a lack of planners, what are our plans for addressing the situation?

John McNairney: We need to work with all our partners in the planning system—the RTPI, the universities, the planning authorities and the private sector—to ensure that we do all that we can to attract planners into the system. That is probably a long-term agenda. In the short term, we need to explore options such as sharing the use of specialist staff. For example, minerals planners are not available in every authority. Enforcement is another area in which authorities could do with assistance. We should also make more use of non-professional staff. We are trying to focus on

ensuring that planners concentrate on the areas in the system in which they can add value. We want to take some minor applications out of the planning system, to free up resources for dealing with more significant applications. We also need to work with schools.

E-planning is another area in which we are making progress. We hope that, over time, it will create some savings in local government, but that will not happen overnight. At the moment, we need to engage more effectively with everyone who is involved in planning and to do more to attract people into the profession. By providing graduates entering the marketplace with placements, we can ensure that they get a wide range of experience more quickly.

Marilyn Livingstone: Is the public sector able to compete with the private sector on salaries, working conditions and career structure? There has been considerable movement to the private sector.

John McNairney: There has. I am not the best person to talk about terms in local government, although I have spent most of my career there. The last time that I advertised for a graduate planner, I was not successful—I could not attract anyone to interview because planners had moved to the private sector. Remuneration is an issue, but I cannot comment on it.

The Convener: Presumably, money is the reason why planners move to the private sector.

John McNairney: Yes.

Marilyn Livingstone: That is why I asked about the issue.

The Convener: Does the public sector not have to pay more?

Marilyn Livingstone: That is exactly the point that I am trying to make.

Andrew Holmes: As Mick Stewart said a minute or two ago, the problem is common across a wide range of technical professions, especially those associated with development in local government. In my experience, planning is rather better off than most technical professions in local government, certainly in this city, as it is able to recruit at the lower end. Increasingly, it loses its better staff at middle manager level. Typically, people go for 20 or 25 per cent more. I am afraid that public sector pay scales have difficulty coping with that, especially as we are all in the throes of the modernising pay exercise.

A significant challenge for public sector employers in the future is to determine the extent to which they will continue to provide services in-house, instead of increasingly buying in the private sector. In my experience, planning in the city of

Edinburgh is in a stronger position than its associated technical professions.

11:45

Christopher Harvie: I want to add a caveat to the discussion, which seems to assume a constantly increasing flow of applications and increasing buoyancy in the sector. I am an historian of tourism, to a certain extent. Travelling around, one sees a lot of evidence from the past of disaster—derelict hotels and hotel schemes that never worked, including the colossal golf hotel at Cruden Bay in the north of Scotland, which was knocked down in the 1950s. That should give some of us an opportunity for thought. Do we not need a more historical and sectoral analysis of what is developing and where, instead of saying that there is a standardised starred component that has to be accommodated? In the greatest tourist areas of Europe, such as Switzerland, there are varied stories; that input should be studied carefully before we go ahead. Such an approach would not necessarily inhibit developments. If we substituted the word “supermarket” for the word “hotel”, we would be in much more contested territory for localities and planners.

Gordon Watson: The national parks are experiencing a lot of investment, primarily in high-end resort-type developments—large-scale coaching developments and so on. Our tourism aspirations are focused on the quality and range of the accommodation and products that we offer. We have an ageing stock of traditional hotels that are underperforming and offer a poor experience. Our strategy is to encourage a focus on reinvestment in those hotels. There are one-off examples of niche developments—boutique-type hotels—in prime locations. Recently we handled a planning application to redevelop a hotel at Inverbeg. That is the first time that a smaller coaching hotel has been redeveloped to offer mid-range, affordable accommodation. We are anxious that in our area there should be a range of accommodation, not just top-end, fractional ownership, resort-type developments, to cater to different needs and different sizes of wallet.

Gavin Brown: I have a question specifically for Mr Holmes. If I heard you correctly, you suggested that one reason for the difference between Edinburgh and Glasgow is that people in Edinburgh object more regularly to planning applications. That sounds a bit lame to me. Is there any statistical evidence to back up your assertion?

Andrew Holmes: I did not suggest that people in Edinburgh objected more than people in Glasgow—I do not know what the figures for Glasgow are. However, it is a matter of record that the majority of applications in Edinburgh are

objected to. Other issues are the presence of a world heritage site and the fact that most of the areas of prime development interest are conservation areas. There is a particular set of factors that inevitably mean that any application within a mile of where we are sitting will raise issues that are not necessarily raised in other parts of Scotland. That affects the speed of the planning process.

Gavin Brown: There must be statistics somewhere to show whether objections are more common in Edinburgh than elsewhere. Do you think that that is correct?

Andrew Holmes: Anecdotally, that is my impression. There cannot be anywhere that gets more objections, on a bad day. I do not know whether statistics for objections are recorded nationally. The point that I was making about Edinburgh is that the key issue is not necessarily the speed of or the resources available to the planning system, or what its targets are. There is always a set of factors that means that major applications have rather more challenges—I once described them as obstacles—to address than there might be elsewhere. I think that most of the national Government agencies would take that view, otherwise we would not have the number of statutory designations that we have. There are 20,000 listed dwellings—listed buildings or structures—in Edinburgh. That number is not matched anywhere else in Scotland.

Gavin Brown: I have a point of clarification. I think that you said at the beginning of the session that the performance of Edinburgh's planning department was superior to that of Glasgow's planning department. What period were you referring to? Where can we get statistics on that? What you said cuts across the anecdotal evidence that the committee has heard.

Andrew Holmes: It does. From recollection, according to last year's figures—I am talking about Audit Scotland figures; they are among Audit Scotland's key performance indicators—Edinburgh's performance was marginally ahead of that of Glasgow. Ten or a dozen years ago, Edinburgh was firmly rooted at the bottom of the planning performance league table, but its performance now is rather better than the Scottish average.

Gavin Brown: I am interested in a statistic that Mr McNairney gave. He said that the target for processing major applications is four months, that around 45 per cent of applications are processed within that time, and that the figures are moving in the wrong direction. We have heard about the nationwide lack of planners. Let us delve into the matter. Apart from the lack of planners, are there particular reasons why 55 per cent of applications are not processed within four months? Why are

the figures moving in the wrong direction? Is that happening purely because of a lack of people, or are there other obstacles that we need to investigate?

John McNairney: I do not know what the exact reason is for that performance. A range of issues is involved. We have not discussed development plans in Scotland. An up-to-date and relevant development plan provides certainty for investors and communities. We must try to modernise the development plan system as a priority.

A number of applications are complex to deal with, of course. As I mentioned, some applications include environmental statements—there is a statutory four-month period for determining them. The planning system has to protect and enhance the built environment and the natural environment, so the process is not necessarily straightforward.

What we want to do is very much in the grain of what Steve Inch talked about. We want to project manage complex applications. The performance over the past year that he talked about is no doubt the result of the focus—which there has also been in Edinburgh—on major applications, on having a dedicated team to deal with them, on bringing in developers before they submit applications, and on front loading the whole system. There is a great deal that we can and will do to promote such an approach.

David Whitton: Mr Holmes has been given the chance to provide an explanation on behalf of the City of Edinburgh Council. In the interests of fairness, Dr Bochel should be given the chance to provide an explanation on behalf of Aberdeen City Council.

I am sure that you are aware, Dr Bochel, that we had an enlightening evidence session in Aberdeen City Council's council chamber. At that meeting, we heard from Mr Horsburgh of the Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre, who said:

"Planning has been a problem, given some of the conditions that are being applied."—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 10 March 2008; c 512.]

He went on to talk about the Trump development, but we do not want to focus on that today. We also heard from Mr Charles Skene, whom I am sure you are also aware of. He said:

"the regular impression that is given by planning officers is that they are against economic development. That is the only way I can put it".

He went on to say:

"there is far too much negativity from certain planning officers in different parts of north-east Scotland.

Will you comment on those remarks?

Dr Bochel: On the AECC, we gave detailed planning permission for a 222-bed hotel in three months. There were issues to do with relocating a park-and-ride site and trunk road issues, but I do not think that three months was too long or unreasonable a timescale for dealing with the application.

The only recent application that I can recall Charles Skene having made in the city was for apartments, which we approved relatively quickly, so I can only assume that he was referring to Aberdeenshire Council. As I said, Aberdeen City Council is conscious of the need to support economic development, including tourism development, and is trying to ingrain in planners an attitude that is about facilitating the best-quality developments and working with developers to maximise the quality of what is approved, rather than refusing applications.

David Whitton: To be fair to you, Charles Skene said:

"Over the past 30 years, we have had developments in Elgin, Forres, Aberdeen and Banchory, and some of the planning difficulties that we have experienced have been diabolical."—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 10 March 2008; c 525-6.]

That is how he put it. He is quite a colourful character.

Dr Bochel: The only recent application that I recall was for apartments in Rosemount, which I think we dealt with relatively quickly.

Brian Adam: I will be helpful to Mr Whitton by saying that I spoke to Mr Skene recently and he said that the problem was not with Aberdeen City Council.

Mr McNairney, do you have objective evidence that Glasgow is performing better than anywhere else on major applications for hotel developments? We have heard quite a lot of evidence, but most of it has been anecdotal—very little has been objective, as far as I could see. Is Glasgow's performance a myth, a perception or a marketing tool?

John McNairney: It is difficult to compare authorities. I have agreed to give you the statistics that the directorate has, and there are Audit Scotland targets, which are monitored, as Andrew Holmes said.

Both authorities are serious about tackling major applications as effectively as they can be expected to do and are engaging positively with the modernisation of the planning system—I cannot really say much more than that. It is to authorities' credit that they have teams that are dedicated to dealing with major applications, that when applications come in the economic benefits that could be generated are highlighted, and that

authorities try to have regard to those benefits as they project manage applications through the system. Such an approach is not always easy, but authorities are doing their level best to follow it.

Brian Adam: Nobody would want the system to be uniform, because circumstances differ, as Mr Holmes quite properly said. However, I would have thought that you would at least be interested to know whether there is an attempt to market one part of Scotland at the expense of another, on the basis of criteria that are not necessarily hard and on which you can provide no evidence. The matter is of considerable interest to me.

John McNairney: All we can do in taking an overview of the system is to work with each planning authority to try to ensure that it delivers the best service locally that it can deliver. That is the approach that we commend.

The Convener: I do not think that we can take that broad theme much further.

Andrew Holmes mentioned Scottish Development International. We are interested in what SDI can do to help local authority planning departments on large and iconic potential tourism investments. Do the witnesses meet SDI regularly? When did you last meet the organisation? Do you discuss sites and the potential for development in your areas? How effective is SDI from the local authority planner's perspective?

Gordon Watson: Tomorrow we will meet SDI and a potential investor to consider a number of brownfield sites for tourism development in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park. The purpose of the meeting is very much to consider whether SDI can assist potential inward investors on issues to do with site contamination and feasibility.

In relation to potential investment in a resort development on the edge of Callander, we considered the support that SDI could provide for such developments. There has been more recent engagement during the past six months or year, when there has been flux in SDI and in Scottish Enterprise. There has been quite a lot of collaboration with Scottish Enterprise and the former local enterprise companies—there were three in the national park area. I do not have a handle on exactly what SDI can offer by way of support and assistance to potential developers but, as things stand, our engagement is positive.

The Convener: Will Mick Stewart comment on that from the Stirling Council perspective or, more broadly, from the Scottish Society of Directors of Planning's point of view?

Mick Stewart: I cannot comment on the SDI from the society's point of view. Stirling Council

has had dealings with SDI. It assisted in securing council approval of a mixed-use development that involved two hotels at the Craigforth motorway junction.

Dr Bochel: I met SDI representatives for the first time a couple of months ago as part of discussions with Scottish Enterprise Grampian on how to promote the city better. The negotiations and discussions have started.

Andrew Holmes: As two or three panel members have said, over the past six months or so, we have seen considerable improvement. Prior to that, I can think of occasions when SDI brought potential developers to Edinburgh and the local authority did not know.

The Convener: I thank the gentlemen and ladies of the panel for coming to committee this morning. Your evidence is helpful in our understanding of the issues. We are grateful to you for that. We may pursue other issues with you, or make requests for further information. Perhaps you will furnish us with the one or two bits of information that you have agreed to provide. That would be helpful.

Emergency Oil Stocks Regime

12:01

The Convener: Item 2 is consideration of the modernisation of the emergency oil stock regime. We have a paper from the clerks, which includes a series of recommendations on how to take forward the matter. Given Christopher Harvie's expertise, no doubt he has something to say. What are members' views?

Gavin Brown: My initial take on reading the European Commission consultation paper was that we should make a submission. However, I re-read the paper, which is full of specialist and technical detail, and was left with a series of questions. Is it better to retain the existing, fragmented legislation or move to one piece of legislation; change from EU to International Energy Agency practices, incorporate the "10% deduction"; employ "audits and country reviews" and

"transparency of oil stock data."

As a committee, we could spend a long time in getting up to speed on the issue and making a submission, but that might best be done by others. Having thought things through, that is my take on the matter.

On whether we should write to the Scottish Government to suggest that it make a submission, my answer is that we should definitely do that. Given the events of recent weeks, the Scottish Government and the UK Government have good experience of managing oil stocks. As I said, I am not convinced that the committee should make a submission.

The Convener: We have material for a full-blown inquiry, if we want to conduct one, although I cannot see where it could be fitted into our work programme.

Christopher Harvie: The present crisis has shown how our oil supply is now held almost on a just-in-time basis. In the past, oil was held in quite considerable quantities in various regional depots. Everything has now been reduced to a situation where oil goes from refinery to tanker and on to domestic and local filling station use. That is a relatively recent development, from the 1990s onwards. Perhaps we should return to using local facilities, some of which are still in place. That would ensure that we had greater local supplies. In the 1960s, supplies were delivered by rail to those depots. We had one in Aberystwyth, for example.

Nowadays, the big tanker comes direct to the customer from the refinery. That makes things difficult to deal with in crisis situations such as the

one that we have just had—situations that could become more frequent.

The Convener: I could not agree more.

Lewis Macdonald: Yes, it is an important area.

I agree with Gavin Brown's proposition that we should write to the Scottish Government on the matter. The proposal in the paper is that we should receive a copy of the submission. Perhaps we could request a discussion with the Government prior to that, or we could simply talk to the appropriate minister after the submission has been made. The point is perhaps more procedural.

I am not advocating that we hold a full-blown inquiry. As the convener said, there is potential for that but no space in our work programme. That said, we might want to engage with the Government on the matter and not simply wait until we receive a copy of its submission.

The Convener: Let me try to roll Lewis Macdonald's and Christopher Harvie's points into one. We can ask the Government to give us early sight of its developing thinking on the issue. We can then pursue that—perhaps not in a formal committee meeting but by other forms of communication—given that all of us will have views along the lines of Christopher Harvie's point about how the country withstood the recent shock. I agree with Christopher Harvie that the most recent incident will not be the last. We can ask to be involved in the process earlier and, if appropriate, take evidence from the minister through a formal discussion on the Government's submission. Is that acceptable?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Scottish Register of Tartans Bill (Witness Expenses)

12:05

The Convener: Item 3 is about witness expenses for our forthcoming consideration of the Scottish Register of Tartans Bill. The committee is invited to delegate responsibility to me for witness expenses. Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I see that no one is dissenting, unfortunately.

Scotland's Energy Future Inquiry

12:05

The Convener: Item 4 is consideration of the remit of our inquiry into Scotland's energy future. The clerks have circulated a paper containing a draft remit and terms of reference, which I am sure colleagues have had an opportunity to read.

On the remit, I suggest that there is not much difference, if any, among us that the number 1 energy issue in coming years is the need to reduce the country's CO₂ emissions, which is a national, international, European and worldwide perspective. It might therefore be better to define that as the remit's starting point, from which the hows and wheres will flow. Nowadays, I think that everyone in politics recognises that we are under that pressure. We could start with the need for targets—let us not mention a specific target, as there are different views on which target is the most appropriate—and with the acceptance of the need to reduce CO₂ emissions.

Lewis Macdonald: I entirely understand the convener's point, but does the remit as drafted pay sufficient attention to renewable energy? The remit refers to the Scottish Government's objective of reducing emissions, but it does not give sufficient standing to the objective of increasing renewable energy generation. That seems to be the weaker part of the remit, whereas the need to reduce carbon emissions is already firmly included.

My other comment relates to the remit's final sentence, which refers to economic benefits of clean technologies. Again, I could not possibly agree more with that, but I think that an inquiry into Scotland's energy future should consider the economic benefits from our energy industries rather than narrow the issue down to the benefits of clean technologies. One cannot be separated from the other.

Brian Adam: Perhaps another way of putting that point is that our inquiry needs to examine how we can have a secure sustainable energy supply. The sustainable aspect would include the need to reduce CO₂ emissions and the need to generate renewable energy. In the light of our previous discussion, security of supply is also terribly important. However, I do not object to highlighting the need to reduce CO₂ emissions. Perhaps we are just dealing in semantics.

Dave Thompson: There seems to be a slight contradiction in that the remit and call for evidence refer a couple of times to "within the devolved context", but the questions that are listed overleaf as being linked to the three key issues include:

"What is needed in the short and medium-term, particularly from the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish

and other governments, to deliver Scotland's energy future?"

Might we unduly restrict ourselves by using that terminology about the devolved context? Given that we will be looking at Scotland's energy needs and requirements, some fairly broad issues might flow from those.

The Convener: I imagine that the drafting of the first bullet point in the call for evidence simply reflects the Parliament's current responsibilities. One might have views—particularly this week—about how those might change.

Dave Thompson: Many other issues will impact on our discussions.

The Convener: My judgment is that the committee will not be slow to point out those things and consider them if it so wishes. However, I take your point.

Does Gavin Brown want to comment on the remit and terms of reference?

Gavin Brown: I confess that I do not have a great deal to add.

Christopher Harvie: One area that needs to be highlighted is the avoidance of domestic consumption of energy. In Germany, there is the concept of the Passivhaus—a house that does not expend energy and is super-insulated. The avoidance of energy use in housing and the need for far higher building standards—building standards are not a high priority in this country—ought to be part of our inquiry.

The Convener: Okay. Stephen Imrie rightly points out that the first bullet point under the heading "Linked to these three key issues are the following—" could encompass those areas. Nevertheless, I take your point.

Christopher Harvie: In Germany, people receive whacking great tax rebates for installing photovoltaic panels on their roofs. That idea is not very promising in Scotland, in a way, but we could provide that sort of tax aid for installation of insulation. That is an area in which we could make tremendous economies.

Lewis Macdonald: On the remit of the call for evidence, I agree with Dave Thompson that the phrase "In a devolved context" is in the wrong place. It should be in the preceding line, which would begin "As part of this inquiry, the Committee seeks evidence in a devolved context". The devolved bit—the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament—is part of the context, and the question about what type of future is needed should not be unduly constrained.

Also, the way the first bullet point is termed implies that efficiency is the key. Efficiency is important, but instead of looking at

“the more efficient use, production and distribution of energy”,

we would do better to consider what type of future is needed in Scotland in terms of the production, distribution and more efficient use of energy. Production and distribution of energy are important regardless of whether they are efficient, although obviously the more efficient they are, the better. We need to look at production and distribution across the board, not simply in terms of energy efficiency, which is another issue.

There is a third issue, which might also have underlain Dave Thompson’s concern. I do not think that it would be in anybody’s interest if a question about who should be responsible for the delivery of Scotland’s energy future became an argument about devolved and reserved responsibilities. Whether or not we support the idea, we all know that people have different responsibilities in those areas. The question, therefore, is about how those people should work together or how their responsibilities should relate to one another. We should not get into a debate about who should be in charge of what: that might not be very productive.

The Convener: Okay. Let us see whether we can tidy up what has been said. It strikes me that a lot of the issues are about tone and the best way in which to word things. If members leave that to Stephen Imrie and me, we will redraft the paper, circulate it and ensure that colleagues are content with it in the usual way. We will try to get it signed off this week.

Lewis Macdonald: I am happy to do that, but I have one more point to make, I am afraid. Looking at the list of linked issues, I did not think that how demand for energy can be reduced in Scotland would be my starting point. In my view, this is not an energy efficiency inquiry, although energy efficiency is part of it. I thought that the first question ought to be “Which energy sectors offer the best prospect of economic growth and reduced carbon emissions, and how should those be secured?” Our inquiry is into Scotland’s energy future, and reduction of demand is a part of that; however, stimulation of supply is also important. Right at the top of the list of challenges, I would put a question about what energy sectors we want to support and how.

The Convener: Okay. We will play around with that and see what we can come up with. We will circulate the redrafted paper.

David Whitton: Can I just ask a question? You are going to launch the paper at the all-energy conference.

The Convener: That is a grand way of putting it.

David Whitton: Is your speech going to be circulated in advance?

The Convener: It might be, once it has been written, but that is many months ahead.

Meeting closed at 12:14.

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