
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at The Albert Hall, Ballater on Friday 2nd March 2007 at 10.30am

PRESENT

Eric Baird
Duncan Bryden
Nonie Coulthard
Basil Dunlop
Lucy Grant
David Green
Marcus Humphrey
Bruce Luffman

Eleanor Mackintosh
Alastair MacLennan
William McKenna
Andrew Rafferty
Gregor Rimell
David Selfridge
Susan Walker
Ross Watson

In Attendance:

Pete Crane
Murray Ferguson
Bob Grant

Jane Hope
Quentin McLaren

Apologies:

Stuart Black
Douglas Glass
Angus Gordon
Bob Kinnaird
Anne MacLean

Sandy Park
Richard Stroud
Sheena Slimon
Bob Wilson

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

1. Given that this meeting was in addition to the usual schedule of Board Meetings (following interruption through bad weather) it was agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting on the 23rd February would be approved at the next formal Board meeting on the 20th April.

Declarations of Interest

2. Willie McKenna and Eric Baird both declared an interest in Paper 1 given their current employment as rangers, and declared their intention to withdraw from the discussion on this item. Marcus Humphrey noted in respect of Paper 2 that he was a director of UDAT but this did not preclude him from taking part in the discussion on the paper.

Developing a Coordinated Approach to Ranger Services in the National Park (Paper 1)

3. Pete Crane and Murray Ferguson introduced the paper which summarised the work undertaken to date on the development of a coordinated approach to ranger services within the National Park, and sought approval to initiate a number of changes. Most of the changes could not be made immediately but required a further period of discussion with partners and then consideration of further detailed recommendations by the Board in due course. A number of points were made in the introduction. The current ranger services had evolved before the designation of the Cairngorms National Park, and had not been designed to meet its needs. The National Park Plan was currently with the Minister for approval, and rangers offered huge potential as a tool for delivering this plan. But in order to get consistency across the National Park, there were some issues to be addressed; too many competing priorities for rangers, and too few links between rangers themselves and the National Park. Current arrangements for example were not well adapted to dealing with access issues. The intention was to continue to build on the existing partnership working but for this to be successful there needed to be greater clarity about what was expected of rangers on behalf of the Park as a whole. The proposals in the paper were essentially budget neutral, and were driven by questions about how public resources were best deployed. The purpose of the current paper was to seek the Board's approval to take discussions on these questions further.
4. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) There was general support from Members for recommendation (c) that the Grant Aid function for ranger services should be transferred from SNH to the CNPA in the interest of efficient working. However, the point was strongly made that there was also a cost associated with the function of managing the deployment of that Grant Aid, and it was important not to lose sight of that cost as well. Any discussion about the transfer of the Grant in Aid function needed to take account of the cost of administration.
 - b) The point was made that in looking for a more coordinated approach to the existing ranger services in the delivery of the National Park Plan, there was no implied criticism of the current rangers whose high quality work was recognised and appreciated by the Park Authority.
 - c) Recommendation (e) was for the establishment of a new liaison group for ranger services and other operational staff dealing with management of the central Cairngorms Massif. There was some suggestion that this might be rather onerous, and indeed it might be premature to be seeking the establishment of such a group when there were already many other groups being established to oversee the delivery of the National Park Plan. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that this grouping was something rather different; it was not intended as a standing group and neither was it intended to meet very frequently. It had been requested by the

rangers themselves to ensure adequate liaison over the management of the central Cairngorms Massif which was a particularly important area of land but in several different ownerships.

- d) There was some discussion over the option outlined at paragraph 3(c) of the paper, namely that the CNPA should move to directly employ and manage rangers that are currently employed by local authorities. Although there were some arguments in favour of this, a majority of Members felt that this was not the right solution. The real challenge was how best to ensure that existing rangers were deployed consistently and effectively towards the shared objectives set out in the National Park Plan. This did not necessarily mean the CNPA had to directly employ the individual rangers. Indeed this would run counter to the general philosophy of working with and through existing public bodies to deliver the National Park Plan; it could also introduce complications of differing terms and conditions of employment; and it would require an additional resource within the CNPA to manage those individuals. There was also a particular risk that this would lead to the perception of a two tier approach to rangering within the National Park; those employed by the private sector, and those employed by the Park Authority. The real issue was how to best deploy local authority rangers in the interests of the National Park, and it would be helpful to explore whether it was possible to bring together the fractions of posts within each local authority that were involved in this work so that these were brigaded into one or two discrete posts which could then be focused specifically on work in the National Park area. It would also be helpful if there was some flexibility so that these individuals could be deployed across more than just their local authority area.
- e) The point was made that there was a distinct difference between those rangers working on specific sites, such as individual estates, and those covering wider local authority areas. Those attached to and employed by specific estates were able to build up a close knowledge of those particular sites and were able to deal very effectively with problems cropping up on those sites, with these often being predictable year on year. By contrast, those covering wider local authority areas had to cover bigger areas, multiple land managers, and much less predictable issues. So there was an argument for a hybrid approach in which these two types of ranger service were managed in different ways; the estate specific ranger services being managed at arms length through the employers; and the current local authority ranger services being managed as a single grouping by the Park Authority.
- f) Reassurance was provided, that the various activities set out at paragraph 7 of the paper to coordinate rangers services would continue regardless of the outcome of the proposed discussions.
- g) The point was made that the rangers at Mar Lodge Estate were currently outwith the arrangements, and were covered by a separate management agreement between SNH and NTS. It was noted that that agreement was under active review by SNH, and it would be helpful if a marker could be flagged up in the next consideration by the SNH Board that it would be helpful to bring the NTS ranger services within the wider arrangements across the Park as a whole.
- h) Paragraph 23 (c) summed up the position well, in saying “to date the priority and profile given to the National Park by ranger services is still relatively low and this shows little sign of changing unless significant structural changes to the

arrangements are made". Whatever changes were put in place, the main driver had to be to get operational influence; the issue of who employed rangers was less important.

- i) An important role for the Park Authority in getting a consistent approach to ranger services across the Park would be to look at how the range of existing legislation could be used creatively to focus the activity of rangers even where they were not employed by the CNPA. Powers relating to litter, dog management, etc. were all relevant to rangers and deploying their time in the interests of the National Park.
 - j) Paragraph 23 (e) made the point that as the Access Authority, the CNPA did not have an effective mechanism to use ranger services to promote outdoor access and other work beyond those sites managed by site based rangers. This was an important shortcoming of the current arrangements. Further, if this meant that there were only 2.5 rangers to cover the rest of the Park (i.e. the non site-specific areas which had their own ranger services) this was unlikely to be sufficient for the CNPA's purposes. So while negotiation needed to proceed with the local authorities in respect of how best to deploy rangers which could be dedicated to the whole park, it seemed quite likely that more resources would be needed over and above this to properly deliver the access function.
 - k) It was noted that on page 18 paragraph 9 did not list Braedownie in the Angus Glens. This was because the ranger base was not currently open to the public, and proposals were in hand for a new facility which would in due course be open to the public. The CNPA were currently discussion with Angus Council how to support this new ranger base.
5. In summing up the discussion the Convener noted the following:
- a) Members did not generally support the idea of the CNPA employing rangers;
 - b) There was general agreement to recommendation (c) that the Grant Aid function for ranger services should be transferred from SNH to the CNPA, however, this transfer should include the resources needed to oversee the deployment and management of that Grant Aid function and associated administrative costs;
 - c) The recommendation at (e) for the establishment of a new liaison group should make clear that this was not akin to the delivery teams and advisory forums that were currently being set up for the delivery of the National Park Plan;
 - d) There should be a fourth element added to the recommendation (d), namely that discussions with the local authorities should be looking to try and brigade resources working within the Park into a small number of individuals focused specifically on the National Park. (It was noted that the Speyside Way Ranger Service already works across three local authority areas);
 - e) There was a general view from the Board that discussions should be held with SNH to look at bringing the ranger function at Mar Lodge into the same set of arrangements for the rest of the National Park.
6. **The Board approved the recommendations of the paper as follows:**
- a) **Approved the vision for ranger services in the National Park and the role they play in implementation of the National Park Plan;**
 - b) **Approved in principle that staff work with Forestry Commission Scotland towards the agreement of a concordat and associated work programmes for the delivery of ranger services in alignment with the ranger service vision and roles;**

- c) **Approved in principle the transfer of the grant-aid function for ranger services from SNH to the National Park Authority, subject to further consideration of detailed matters following discussion with partners and transfer of appropriate management expertise and resources;**
- d) **Approved further discussion with Aberdeenshire, Angus, Moray and Highland Councils to secure:**
- e) **More operational influence for the National Park Authority over ranger service outputs on day to day level than would be provided by the transfer of grant aid;**
- f) **An administratively simple and effective solution;**
- g) **A similar proportion of funding contribution from each partner as is currently provided; and**
- h) **Activities relating to the National Park being brigaded into a small number of posts focused specifically on work within the National Park.**
- i) **Approved the establishment of a new informal liaison group for ranger services and other relevant operational staff dealing with management of the central Cairngorms massif;**
- j) **Agreed to progress the development of a visual image and conditions for its use by ranger services, using the National Park brand, in order to conspicuously link their work to the National Park**

7. Action:

- a) **Further report to be brought to the Board at the end of 2007 with recommendations for a coordinated approach to ranger services in the National Park, taking forward the recommendations agreed in the current paper.**

Approval of Outdoor Access Strategy (Paper 2)

- 8. Bob Grant introduced the paper which summarised the development of an Outdoor Access Strategy 2007-2012 for the Cairngorms National Park and sought the Board's formal approval. It was noted that the process of developing the Strategy had been a long one, with the first paper coming to the Board in May 2004 as a proposal. However, the process had been valuable, and had engaged with many people, and as a result a comprehensive strategy had been put together to ensure a consistent and Park-wide approach to the delivery and management of Outdoor Access. The point was made that delivery of the various elements of the Outdoor Access Strategy were not for the CNPA alone and these would be taken forward in partnership with others as part of the delivery teams being set up to oversee the delivery of the National Park Plan. Of particular importance was the current work being done on establishing a trust for the Park to provide for outdoor access infrastructure, and a paper on this would be coming to the Board shortly.
- 9. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) There was some discussion about paragraph 19 of the paper, setting out Policy 7 in respect of organised outdoor access events. While there was logic to steering events away from sensitive sites, there was a history of people using the high tops and other sensitive sites for events and it was unrealistic to expect to police these. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code made clear that a land owner's permission was

required in certain circumstances. However, it was not always easy to decline requests especially when these were for charity events. The wording of Policy 7 recognised that these events were good for the local economy, and one could not change people's access rights; nevertheless without trying to argue for a blanket ban, the policy was designed to at least try to manage such events as far as possible away from the most sensitive sites. This would be a matter of negotiation and discussion rather than regulation. The policy also made clear that guide lines would need to be put together for outdoor access event organisers.

- b) It was suggested that the wording in brackets in policy 7(a) should be removed.
- c) It was noted that what is "sensitive" can depend on many factors and it was probably a mistake to name specific areas in the policy, as this implied that these were unsuitable under any circumstances whereas in reality circumstances could change. It also could lead to the implication that those sites not named could be sacrificed.
- d) The point was made that it was not necessarily organised events that were the problem, but casual use of protected sites.
- e) Paragraph 24 of the covering paper referred to raising awareness of the Outdoor Access Strategy and its content. It was suggested that the CNPA needed to be more inventive about getting the relevant messages widely publicised, possibly through linkages with other websites. Promotion needed to be not just with the obvious land managers and access groups, but also with tourism groups and others, using the Park Brand on promotional material.
- f) Policy 5: increasing understanding of rights and responsibilities. The wording of paragraph (c) ran the risk of highlighting conflict between anglers and canoeists, whereas this was much less of an issue now than had been previously. Wording was suggested "may find themselves in conflict" rather than "commonly find themselves in conflict". In respect of paragraph (e) for policy 5, it was suggested that promoting the Code should be done by a very broad range of people.
- g) Policy 6: managing outdoor access at sensitive sites. The reference at paragraph (c) to best practice standards being used at all sensitive sites should in reality be applied everywhere not just at sensitive sites.
- h) Policy 8: managing outdoor access at popular countryside sites. This policy was welcome, and in relation to paragraph (a) it was suggested this should also refer to discouraging camping at sensitive sites.
- i) Policy 9: car parking charges. This contained no mention of the need for wider parking bays for disabled access, and contained no mention of charging coaches. It was noted that car parking charges had associated management issues, for example, it was often the case at places such as Linn of Dee that cars parked just outside the car park to avoid paying the charge, which in turn created traffic management problems. Ways needed to be found of dealing with this sort of response.
- j) References to specific documents were probably best replaced by references to best practice, otherwise the strategy was liable to become out of date as documents themselves become out of date.
- k) Policy 7 referred to guiding events away from the most sensitive sites. The issue of organised outdoor access events actually went wider than this, and there was a need to try and ensure that two events happening on the same piece of ground were discouraged, particularly if this raised safety issues. It was noted that there

was already a CRAGG events group covering the Rothiemurchus and Glenmore area which kept a schedule of events to ensure these sorts of clashes were minimised.

- l) The Cairngorms National Park was promoted as a “Park for All” and it followed that there was a limit to how much one could dictate the organisation of outdoor access events. It was suggested that the policy proposed in the Outdoor Access Strategy was right, and that in practice the management of events would be best done through negotiation and discussion, and the production of guidelines. The existence of such guidelines would make it easier for land managers to decline events on their land if they felt this was appropriate.
 - m) While guidance of this nature would be useful, more was needed in the sense that managing an event per se was only part of the package, and when such events took place one should be trying to make sure that participants came back for another stay.
 - n) Policy 3: emphasis needed to be placed on getting information out early (before people arrived at the trail head).
 - o) Policy 5: needed some recognition of other legislation that was relevant (health and safety etc.).
 - p) Policy 11 (e) this should not include a presumption against way marking into areas.
 - q) Policy 14 there should be a reference to mental wellbeing, not just physical health.
 - r) The Local Outdoor Access Forum had seen the Strategy three times and recommended that it be approved. It was important to now get the Strategy finalised and published. A number of the comments made could be taken on board; but it was noted that a number of them were already catered for in other areas of the Strategy. The Strategy was commended as being a very thorough and comprehensive piece of work.
10. The Convener summed up the discussion by suggesting that the comments made did not generally require substantive or significant changes to the document which was already largely approved by partners. Officers would check the extent to which comments made could and should be incorporated but overall there was general support and approval by the Board. One outstanding issue remained that of guidance on the management of events and the importance of incorporating the notion of spin-off benefits from such events being held. Review and monitoring of the Outdoor Access Strategy would be picked up through the delivery teams associated with the delivery of the National Park Plan. One significant change that the Board did agree to the text was the removal of the wording in brackets at policy 7 (a).

11. The Board approved the recommendations of the paper as follows:

- a) **Noted the work that had gone into the development of the Strategy, including the input from the Local Outdoor Access Forum and the feedback received from consultees; and**
- b) **Approved the Strategy**

A Landscape Partnership Project for the Park (Paper 3)

12. Quentin McLaren introduced the paper which described the use of the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Landscape Partnership Project as a means of delivering various priority actions

of the National Park Plan. The paper sought the Board's approval to proceed with a Stage 1 Application to the Heritage Lottery Fund by the 1st October 2007. The project could potentially be worth £4million (a bid of up to £2million, match funded) and was potentially a very exciting way of delivering the Park Plan with partners. If successful with a bid, the earliest a project could start would be March 2009.

13. The Board agreed the recommendation of the paper as follows:

- a) Agreed that the CNPA should submit a Stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Landscape Partnership Project by October 1st.**

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14. Election of local Members. It was suggested that there were one or two lessons that could be learned from the recent process of conducting the CNPA local elections. After the process was complete, it was suggested there should be a review process, with the opportunity to feed in some ideas for the next election to the Returning Officer.

15. PLI on Beaully Denny power line. This enquiry was taking place in Perth, and it was noted that voluntary groups could not find the resources to attend all the time, and would benefit from a transcript each day of proceedings on the website so they could follow proceedings. It was suggested that the CNPA should press the enquiry reporters for this [post meeting note: this had already been done, but the enquiry reporters had rejected the idea of a daily transcript. However, they had agreed to provide a daily update on the website of progress, and the timetable for the week ahead. The website also gave access to precognition statements.]

16. FWAG. It was noted that the FWAG officer in the Cairngorms was moving and there was to be a discussion in early March as to whether or not there would continue to be a FWAG officer in the National Park.

Date of Next Meeting

17. .20th April in the Richmond Memorial Hall, Tomintoul.