
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at Finzean Hall, Finzean on Friday 2nd June 2006 at 1.30pm

PRESENT

Eric Baird
Stuart Black
Duncan Bryden
Nonie Coultard
Basil Dunlop
Douglas Glass
Lucy Grant
David Green
Marcus Humphrey
Bruce Luffman

Eleanor Mackintosh
Anne MacLean
Alastair MacLennan
Sandy Park
Gregor Rimell
David Selfridge
Andrew Thin
Susan Walker
Ross Watson
Bob Wilson

In Attendance:

Jane Hope
Will Boyd-Wallis
Pete Crane
Andrew Harper

Fiona Newcombe
Andy Rinning
Francoise van Buuren

Apologies:

Angus Gordon
William McKenna
Andrew Rafferty

Sheena Slimon
Richard Stroud

Welcome and Introduction

1. The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting, the first at Finzean.

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

2. The minutes of the special meeting held on the 19th May to discuss housing were not presented; it was reported they would come forward for approval at the next board

meeting on the 30th June. The minutes of the previous “normal” meeting held on the 5th of May were approved with minor changes at paragraph 5(k) and 5(l).

Matters Arising

3. None.

CNPA Arrangements for Responding to Forestry Consultations (Paper 1)

4. Will Boyd-Wallis introduced the paper which sought the Board’s agreement for the attached draft update of the Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Framework to be made available for a twelve week period of public consultation; and agreement to proposed arrangements for the CNPA’s role in responding to forestry consultations. The paper followed on from the previous Board discussion in April 2005, at which the Board had agreed to update the Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Framework in order for it to be used as a strategic forest plan across the Park. It had also been agreed that once the updated Framework was in place, the CNPA would have a role in commenting as a statutory consultee, on forestry schemes.
5. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) The framework document was commended as very comprehensive (subject to some detailed comments which are recorded elsewhere). However, it was considered highly technical and hence not appropriate for a full general public consultation. It was noted that the original framework document dating from 1999 had been put together through extensive public consultation; however the intention with the current document was not to engage in resource intensive and time consuming workshops and discussions, but to make the document available so that people could comment if they wished to. It was acknowledged that a wide ranging consultation would contribute to the current perception of consultation fatigue and overload, and would be difficult for communities to respond to meaningfully.
 - b) It could be argued that the Forestry Framework should be providing a strategic framework, and therefore should not be put in place in advance of the National Park Plan. However, it was observed that the strategic objectives already set out in the draft National Park Plan were based on the original forest framework; it would be quite possible to ensure that comments coming in on that element of the National Park Plan were reflected in the Forestry Framework.
 - c) The Forestry Framework concentrated on trees; there was an argument for broader input emphasising the integrated nature of natural systems which involved forestry. In the same vein, there were implications of changes in forestry practice and tree cover which would have implications for other habitat types, for example, an extending tree line could mean a decrease in heather moorland. These sorts of interactions, although covered to some extent in the Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Framework, would be better considered at the National Park Plan level.
 - d) If the role of the Forest and Woodland Framework was to guide decisions made by the Forestry Commission and other agencies, then there was a logic in the

Forest Framework sitting beneath the National Park Plan as the more strategic document.

- e) The importance of exotic species as a source of timber production was noted, and the consequences for the local economy that flowed from having a sawmill to process such timber.
- f) A mix of planting as well as natural regeneration would be sensible to enhance biodiversity.
- g) Any consultation should be done as simply as possible, and should avoid simply presenting a complex document to anybody and everybody. Any consultation needed to engage with the private sector, and not just public agencies.
- h) As comments had noted, this was a complex area, and forestry was a long-term issue. Even in the medium term there were a number of uncertainties such as the Scottish Rural Development Programme, changes to the Forestry Grant Scheme, and the Scottish Forestry Strategy which was currently out to consultation. It was important to pause and think how the Forest and Woodland Framework fitted with the National Park Plan, and the National Forestry Strategy.
- i) The Forest and Woodland Framework would benefit from restructuring. As currently drafted, it was difficult to get a clear view of what the document was saying. The paper would benefit from a better layout, and making closer and more obvious connections to the National Park Plan. Further, it was a bit light on certain issues such as tourism, sustainable design, etc. There was a good argument for having a summary version of the Framework.
- j) Even relatively small planting and felling schemes were important, and local knowledge was needed to judge the consequences and effects of these. The local dimension was undoubtedly important in consultation. The Framework was not seen as setting priorities for spending money within the context of the Rural Development Regulation – those priorities would be established separately.
- k) A simpler and summarised version of the Framework was needed if communities wished to engage. The interest of the public in the Forest and Woodland Framework was likely to focus on opportunities for recreation. If the document was simplified, and divided up so that it focused on different areas within the National Park that provided these opportunities, it might prove more interesting. The document did provide an opportunity to engage the public in understanding the role of forestry, why woodlands were important and how they were managed etc. Many people appeared to not understand the management practices undertaken even within their local community woodlands.
- l) Forestry would legitimately be seen as one of the special qualities of the Cairngorms area. There would therefore be an expectation that the CNPA would play some part in ensuring appropriate management. It was important that people living and visiting the Park could see how the CNPA and indeed all public sector bodies were taking that responsibility forward. A summary document based on the Forest and Woodland Framework would provide an opportunity to do that.
- m) The logical conclusion to many of the points raised was that the Forest and Woodland Framework should be available for comment for a twelve week period during which interested parties could contribute. Further thought should be

given to exactly who those interested parties were, and how to draw this to their attention. In addition, a short summary should be drawn up on the back of this document, but focusing on some more general and less technical messages about the importance of woodlands and forest in the National Park and raising people's understanding and awareness of this and how forestry was managed. In any event, the updated Forest and Woodland Framework would not be finalised until the National Park Plan had also been finalised.

- n) There was some discussion about the proposed future role of the CNPA in responding to statutory forestry consultations. Paragraph 19 was logical, but the point was made that if applications related to designated sites then it was important to make clear that if the CNPA was not responding this was because SNH was doing so. It would be important to avoid a situation in which it appeared that neither organisation was responding.
- o) In respect of paragraph 20, in the interests of Joined up Government it would be sensible to liaise with other agencies prior to making responses.
- p) The CNPA needed to be able to decide which applications were significant and therefore worthy of comment.
- q) While the Forestry Commission were logically the experts and guardians on the technical aspects of forestry, there were wider issues to do with quality of life etc. and these issues were the preserve of the local communities who should have the opportunity to comment accordingly on particular applications.
- r) The crucial question was whether or not over the longer term, grant applications were helping to deliver the National Park Plan. In other words it would be the collective impact rather than individual applications which would be of interest to the CNPA. This was the sort of consultation response the CNPA needed to focus its attention on.
- s) The revised Forest and Woodland Framework took account of the existing indicative forestry strategies in the four local authority areas, and in many respects was similar to these. The original framework had been commissioned by SNH, the Cairngorms Partnership, and the Forestry Commission, and these organisations were party to the document.
- t) In responding as a statutory consultee to forestry applications, the CNPA would need to take a flexible role in practice. Sites might not be all in or all out of the Natura sites, for example. Similarly, the CNPA should reserve the right to comment only on those applications of significance (by analogy to the CNPA's planning function). It was certainly not envisaged that the CNPA would get heavily involved in every application and every scheme. Further, it was envisaged that the number of applications would be quite small. Taking on the role of consultee should be seen as an opportunity to grasp for the CNPA. It would be an opportunity for the CNPA to take an overview and ensure consistency of applications with the Forest and Woodland Framework.

6. The Board approved the recommendations of the Paper but with modification as follows:

- a) The draft update of the Cairngorms Forest and Woodland Framework should be open for comment, but a full public consultation is not warranted; staff**

- should give further thought to how to raise awareness of the draft document amongst genuinely interested parties;
- b) Opportunities should be found to engage people and raise awareness of the importance of forestry in the Cairngorms National Park, and raise awareness of forestry management.
 - c) The Board agreed the proposed arrangements for responding to forestry consultations but emphasised the need for the CNPA's contribution to be a strategic one and to avoid replicating the job of the FCS.

[Duncan Bryden, Basil Dunlop left the meeting]

Entry Point Signage for Cairngorms National Park (Paper 2)

- 7. Pete Crane introduced the paper which was for information. He reported two developments since preparation of the paper. Further to paragraph 15, he was pleased to report progress with all land managers. Further to paragraph 19, the consultation with local stakeholders had been completed, and discussions with the landowner on the exact location of the marker were in hand. He also noted that there had been a delay in progress on phase 2 because of the transfer of the trunk roads responsibility to Transerve. Discussions were now progressing once more.
- 8. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) Paragraph 34 referred to the Highland Tourist Route which ran from Aberdeen to Inverness via Tomintoul. It was one of twelve designated routes in Scotland, and it was noted that signage was extremely important.
 - b) Paragraph 33 referred to Annex 2 – this appeared to be missing. It comprised photographs of the proposed signs. These would be re-circulated to members, and put in the public domain.

[David Green left the meeting]

Corporate Plan Report: Theme 3 (Paper 3)

- 9. Andrew Harper introduced the paper and drew Members attention to three important points:
 - a) On housing, there would be a workshop on the 14th June with the Cairngorms Housing Group. Board Members were encouraged to attend.
 - b) On transport, the pilot Heather Hopper would be running during the summer until the end of September. This was a joint initiative with Highland and Aberdeenshire Councils. An interesting and welcome development had been that on the back of this initiative, Stagecoach were putting in place a link service involving no public subsidy.
 - c) A pilot Inclusion Outreach Project was taking place in early June. In partnership with the "Big Issue Foundation" a visit lasting four days was being sponsored so that the Big Issue Walking Club could experience the Cairngorms National Park. This was an important trial for a potentially broader outreach programme in the future.

10. In discussion the following points were raised:

- a) At paragraph 7(b) there was reference to a survey undertaken by the SRPBA. The report was not yet finished, but would be made available in due course by the SRPBA who had ownership of the document.
- b) Paragraph 7(d) referred to a rural housing enabler to work with selected rural communities in rural Aberdeenshire. There was some discussion about areas such as Donside which were liable to be overlooked in such initiatives. The point was made that the services of the enabler were open to anyone in the area, and any areas that felt overlooked should proactively contact the post holder.
- c) The updated Cairngorms Explorer Timetable was welcomed. Wide distribution was urged.

AOCB

11. The Convenor referred to recent internal correspondence about how the communications budget was being deployed. There was a clear message emerging from Board Members, to the effect that in the first few years of the CNPA's existence, it was vital to focus on communications within the Park and build support at a local level. That had driven our communications effort over the first three years of the CNPA's life. However, everyone was aware that it was also important in the medium to long term to communicate at a national and an international level; but before turning our attention to that, it would be important to have something to say. After three years of operation, the Convenor noted that the time was probably right for another discussion by the Board on strategic communications, and this would be put in hand. However, in the short term there was a fixed budget and a range of tools for delivering the priority of communication at a local level. Francoise van Buuren explained the background to the decision made to limit the attendance at local shows this year. The support from local communities was recognised as vitally important. There had already been, and continued to be a lot of effort put in to local communications. For example, consultations on the Local Plan and the National Park Plan, Board meetings that rotated round the Park, pre-Board open evenings, three editions of Park Life delivered to every household, and most recently a new e-bulletin. In addition there were a number of working groups and forums which enabled third parties to take messages back to their communities. The CNPA supported the ACCC, and supported community newsletters.

12. Last year seven local events/shows had been attended. This had been expensive in terms of staff time and resources; and the numbers of visitors to the stand had been relatively small. So this year the Communications Team had decided that resources might be better deployed in other ways. This year, the decision was to not automatically go to shows, but to take a more targeted approach, and attend shows only if there was a particular need identified.

13. There were opportunities to use Board Members for these occasions, although it was noted that they too had limited time. There was an argument for not going to any shows. There were many additional ways of raising local awareness and understanding

of the CNPA and its work. Sponsoring other events was one way of doing this; making our publications available on other stands was also a possibility.

14. It was difficult to measure the goodwill that might be fostered by a presence at a local show; on the other hand, there could well be people who thought this was a waste of public money. Engagement with the local community remained important; the organisation already created many opportunities for people to get involved, but ultimately it was for individuals to decide. The CNPA needed to make careful judgements on how much effort to devote to creating those opportunities for involvement while recognising that there would always be a proportion of people who would not naturally wish to come forward and engage. It was noted that media coverage was extremely useful in raising awareness of these opportunities. Coverage in Badenoch and Strathspey was extensive but this was not the case on the Aberdeenshire side of the Park.

Date of Next Meeting

15. Friday 30th June 2006, Albert Hall, Ballater