
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie on Friday 4th November 2005 at 1.30pm

PRESENT

Eric Baird	Eleanor Mackintosh
Stuart Black	William McKenna
Duncan Bryden	Anne MacLean
Sally Dowden	Alastair MacLennan
Basil Dunlop	Sandy Park
Douglas Glass	Gregor Rimell
Angus Gordon	Susan Walker
Lucy Grant	Joyce Simpson
David Green	Sheena Slimon
Marcus Humphrey	Andrew Thin
Bruce Luffman	

In Attendance

Debbie Strang	Andrew Harper
Andrew Tait	Jane Hope
Francoise van Buuren	Murray Ferguson
David Cameron	Andy Rinning
Nick Halfhide	Fiona Newcombe

Apologies

Andrew Rafferty
Richard Stroud
David Selfridge
Bob Wilson

Welcome and Apologies

1. The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies as above.

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

2. The minutes of the meeting of 7th October 2005 were approved with no amendments.

Matters Arising

3. Matters arising were:
 - a) Paragraph 10: Fiona Newcombe had amended the draft priority statement for Land Management Contracts as discussed at the previous meetings, had circulated this to the Board, and forwarded to the Scottish Executive. Discussions would follow with the Scottish Executive. The further paper on Integrated Land Management would be brought to the next Board meeting.

Future ownership and management of the Cairngorms Estate (Paper 1)

4. Nick Halfhide introduced the paper which sought members' agreement to the CNPA policy on owning land, and to express a view on the future ownership and management of the Cairngorm Estate in response to a review by Bidwells on behalf of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). Bidwells were approaching a number of organisations before advising HIE. For the CNPA this raised three questions of principle:
 - a) The future role of the CNPA in owning land;
 - b) How the decision on ownership of the Cairngorm Estate should be made, and who should be involved;
 - c) The role of the CNPA in the future management of the Estate.
5. The issue was emotive and potentially controversial. In response to the Board Paper (made public in advance of the meeting) the local MSP had expressed a view on organisations which may and may not be appropriate for ownership of the Estate, and also emphasised the need for proper involvement of the Local Community. The paper proposed that the most important role for the CNPA was to ensure appropriate management of the Estate in the future, rather than necessarily be drawn into the issue of ownership. It was widely known that the Forestry Commission (FCS) had expressed interest in taking on ownership in the Estate; the paper suggested that this was both a sensible and viable option.
6. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) Board member Willie McKenna explained that while he had previously been a Board member of Cairngorm Mountain Trust, he had now resigned and felt able to take part in the discussion.
 - b) The local Community Association had been approached by Bidwells. However the community felt that they had not been given sufficient information about the issues and the consequences of ownership to be able to express an informed view. But it was noted that if there were to be community ownership of the Estate this would have to be Badenoch and Strathspey wide.
 - c) Nethy Bridge Community Council had discussed the matter and concluded that any transfer of ownership should be to another public body, and it was felt that FCS was a good and viable option. It was also noted that one of the original reasons for public ownership of the Estate had been to protect jobs in the area.
 - d) It was not clear whether or not the local communities were interested in ownership of the Estate, but if they were, lack of information did not prevent them from simply writing and expressing an interest, so as to protect their rights. If the

Forestry Commission were to own the land, the CNPA should suggest that they formed some sort of partnership with the community.

- e) Paragraph 12 referred to advantages in the public sector owning and managing land. It was suggested that the dichotomy between private and public sector ownership was a false one. Similarly, it was suggested that the reference in Paragraph 14 to the distinction between ownership on the one hand and management on the other was similarly a false one. The recent land reform legislation enshrined the principle of community ownership, and suggested the need for wider community engagement in the ownership/management of the Cairngorm Estate.
- f) Public ownership for the Cairngorm Estate was indeed appropriate, provided this involved the community. There were particular advantages of a national body owning such land, given their access to resources. The FCS had a good track record in Glenmore. Some sort of joint agreement with the local community to ensure local involvement would be important.
- g) It was important that Glenmore and the Cairngorm Mountain Estate were managed as a unified ecological, landscape and recreational unit. The arguments at paragraphs 20 and 21 were right, but should be taken further to reflect the need for a clearly defined and sustainable set of standards which would guide the management of the land. It was important that the CNPA put down a marker that high standards would be expected from the management of the estate.
- h) Although the paper appeared to focus on ownership by FCS, this was not intended to be exclusive. It was simply that FCS had expressed a willingness and desire to take on the ownership of this land; in reality the exercise being conducted by Bidwells would reflect the views of a range of potentially interested organisations.
- i) It made good sense for FCS to take on the ownership of the Cairngorm Estate given that they owned and managed the adjacent parcel of land. They had clearly demonstrated the necessary expertise in land management.
- j) There would undoubtedly be some liability issues concerning the funicular if the Cairngorm Estate changed hands. While this was not an issue directly for the CNPA in discussing this paper, it was noted that the issue would need to be addressed by the government.
- k) The idea of ownership by a government agency but with community involvement to the extent that they wished it, was a sensible arrangement. Paragraph 17 set out three fundamental principles which should be clear recommendations to Bidwells. In addition the recommendation at paragraph 21 should be expanded to recognise that future arrangements of management of the estate should include mechanisms to deliver the collective aims of the National Park.
- l) There might be merit in Cairngorm Mountain Limited taking over ownership of the Estate on which they operated. It was noted that this was a matter for Cairngorm Mountain and for Bidwells to reflect any such views in their advice to HIE.
- m) There was some discussion about the method of disposal of the Estate, and whether this might be an open market sale. The point was made that even if the CNPA felt that estate ownership should go to the FCS, there would be no influence over this if the disposal was done on the open market.
- n) In respect of the first recommendation of the paper, it was suggested that the CNPA should not rule out ownership of land in perpetuity.

- o) It was noted that seeking to ensure continued delivery of public benefits on the estate in line with the four aims of the National Park did not rule out private ownership. Indeed, it was not important whether ownership was private, public or community provided the outcome ensured those public benefits.
- p) The CNPA should be very wary of being drawn into land ownership, which necessarily entailed huge expenses.
- q) The reasons for FCS expressing interest in owning the land were queried. It was suggested that the organisation was moving away from simply an interest in timber production, and had widened out over recent years into recreation provision. The point was made that even in respect of forestry, there was an interest for FCS as the natural tree line had begun to progress up the hill. Further, there was a logic in the FCS taking over the land which represented an extension of their neighbouring estate and would allow a more integrated and collective approach to management.
- r) It was noted that if the land was not sold on the open market, it could simply be transferred from one government body to another, presuming that this had ministerial approval. It was noted that there was a precedent for exchange of property between FCS and HIE in other areas.

7. The convenor summed up the five strands of discussion as follows:

- a) The current exercise had not provided enough scope for detailed conclusions to be drawn, but this probably reflected the nature of the exercise which at this stage was simply of a scoping nature. However, it was noted that the local communities had been confused and future consultations would need to take account of this.
- b) The estate was a public asset delivering a wide range of public benefits, and any future arrangements needed to secure these.
- c) Regardless of ownership, future management must be in partnership with the local communities to the extent that they wished to be involved. There was some question as to who “communities” referred to, and it was noted that this must be taken in its wider extent to include communities of interest. Future arrangements for management should include interested parties, and these would include the CNPA.
- d) The Cairngorm estate and the Glenmore area formed an integrated entity in ecological and recreational terms, certainly to the visitor. There was therefore support for FCS owning all of this, which would help that integration.
- e) There was little enthusiasm around the board table for an open market sale. Ownership by a government body was probably the best way of guaranteeing continued delivery of public benefits, and the four aims of the National Park, as well as ensuring involvement of the interested communities. Keeping the estate in public ownership was felt therefore, on balance, to be right.

8. **The board agreed the recommendations of the paper as follows:**

- a) **Agreed that at this stage the CNPA should not seek to own land but should focus instead on influencing management by others;**
- b) **Agreed that there should be wide stakeholder involvement in deciding the future ownership and then in running the Cairngorm Estate;**
- c) **Welcomed the suggestion that FCS explore further the ownership of the Cairngorm Estate subject to them adopting an inclusive approach to its management and delivering a range of public benefits;**

- d) **Regardless of ownership of the estate, management must involve stakeholders and ensure a focus on securing the delivery of public benefits in line with the four aims of the National Park. This is more likely to be achieved through public ownership.**

9. **Action: [post meeting note – Chief Executive to follow up by writing to Bidwells with this response from the CNPA as approved by the Board.]**

Corporate Plan Report: Theme 3 (paper 2)

10. The paper was introduced by Andrew Harper, and informed the Board of work to date to achieve the third strategic aim of the Corporate Plan together with plans for future activity. The third theme of the corporate plan was: “to support and stimulate economic and social development within the park that sustains and is sustained by its special natural and cultural qualities”. The paper noted that work to date on this theme had concentrated on developing a strategic approach to the broad range of policy areas which fell within the scope of the theme. This had involved extensive work with partners and had helped to shape thinking that had gone into the National Park Plan. At the same time a balance had been struck in that the CNPA had delivered a number of tangible activities and projects that were generating positive benefits on the ground.

11. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) “Tourism in the Cairngorms” conference on the 26th October had been very well attended by over a hundred people. The conference report and evaluation was being prepared and would be circulated to members. An early action following the conference had been the announcement that there were to be two seminars on the green tourism business scheme with follow up on site advisory visits. To encourage take up of the scheme Visit Scotland had announced that they would be waiving the joining cost, and first years membership of the GTBS.
- b) Claire Ross had recently joined the Park Authority staff to head up work on education and inclusion.
- c) Saturday the 29th of October had seen the culmination of the school media project, with the showing of the films produced by the seven schools in the Park Area. A DVD was planned. Credit went to Shirley Tulloch who had completed this project while she was working at the Park Authority (she had now completed her spell at the Park Authority, with the return of Elspeth Grant for whom she was providing maternity cover).
- d) Under the section of the paper on housing, it was noted that the CNPA should be planning now for the implications of the Crofting Bill which would probably allow for the creation of new crofts, with implications for housing.
- e) There was some discussion about paragraph 12 and current activities on transport, in particular the cross park bus route. As set out at Paragraph 12, work was currently focusing on commissioning research to identify opportunities for improving public transport to and within the park. This would then feed into local and regional transport strategies developed by local authorities and the new regional transport partnerships. On this basis it would be 2007 before any cross park service was likely to emerge. The suggestion was made that a more practical and immediate approach might be to try and agree with the LECs and others the establishment of a cross Park route and simply trial the idea immediately. The

contrary argument to this was that such routes were extremely expensive to run, even on a trial basis, and it was important to take some time to work out the most appropriate routes, timetable etc, making sure links were made with existing cycle routes, walking routes, etc. Suggestion was made that some investigation of the previously existing Heather Hopper might provide some useful insights into why that service did not last.

- f) It was important not to lose sight of the need for more effective transport between communities within the Park. Some communities already had local companies running services, for example the Deeside Hopper which might be worthy of further investigation.
- g) Paragraph 3 recognised that the CNPA had relatively limited resources, and a wide remit, and that there were a number of bodies with a role in economic and social development. It was therefore essential that the CNPA focused its efforts on a manageable activity which helped to deliver the collective and coordinated delivery of all four of the Park aims, and added value to the work already being done by others.
- h) It was noted that for all the discussion about community involvement it was important to be able to measure the effectiveness of this, for example, assessing the extent to which the CNPA in particular, and the public sector in general, did or did not take account of what communities had said. A lot of further thinking was required on this issue.
- i) Paragraph 13 belied the amount of work that had been done, particularly with the ACCC. However the point was made that this work was still at a very early stage.

12. The Board noted the paper.

13. The Convenor summed up the three main streams of discussion as follows:

- a) The new crofting legislation had implications for the CNPA's housing policy as well as for planning and development control. It would potentially be a new tool and needed to be considered while the CNPA local plan was still under development.
- b) Work on youth and education had importance for the wider agenda for social inclusion.
- c) There was enthusiasm for trying to bring about some immediate improvements on transport within the Park, but equally it was recognised that this was expensive and needed to be thought through properly.

Programme of Board Meetings in 2006 (Paper 3)

14. The paper was introduced by Andy Rinning, setting out the proposed dates and venues for Board Meetings, planning committees and other meetings throughout 2006. The proposed programme continued the principle of holding board meetings at different venues around the National Park, with an open evening being held the previous evening for the Board to meet with local communities. The programme proposed holding Board meetings and Planning Committee meetings in a relatively restricted number of venues which were known to be accessible and generally suitable for public meetings. However, this did not preclude the open evenings being held in a much wider number of venues, enabling the Board to make itself accessible to some of the smaller communities.

15. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) The PA system needed to be improved, it did not always function very well. It was important that the public could hear the discussions around the Board table.
- b) For the meeting to be held at Birse on the 2nd June, Finzean Hall was suggested as a suitable venue.
- c) Arrangements previously used in the event of bad weather were confirmed. (In the event of bad weather preventing travel between Ballater and Grantown, a planning committee would be conducted via the audio link between the two CNPA offices and would be restricted to call in decisions only.)
- d) The opportunity for the Board to get out and about had proved useful and valuable in the past, and it was agreed that further thought should be given to how visits might be planned for the summer of 2006.

16. It was stressed that there was a planning committee meeting on the 30th December 2005 at Ballater. It was essential that a quorum of members was available for this meeting.

17. The Board approved the paper.

18. Action:

- a) **All Board members to notify the Ballater office of their availability for the planning committee on the 30th December 2005.**
- b) **Andy Rinning to investigate a programme of “out and about visits” for the Board in 2006**

Feedback on Europark Conference (oral report)

19. Debbie Strang, Bruce Luffman and Sally Dowden reported on the recent visit to the Europark 2005 conference in Apeldoorn, Netherlands. The visit had been primarily to collect the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism awarded to the CNPA by Europarc. However, the visit had also involved the Park Authority representatives (Debbie Strang, Pete Crane, Bruce Luffman, Sally Dowden). In the associated presentations, workshops and excursions. Importantly, there had also been the opportunity to exchange information on the way the Cairngorms National Park was being managed with our European counterparts. The conference brought together some 400 delegates from across Europe. The theme was connectivity from 3 different perspectives:

- a) Connecting Nature with Nature – looking at the changes in land use and the effect on the fragmentation on the habitats and the consequent loss of species, and how with better habitat connectivity there is a better chance of survival for species.
- b) Connecting nature practices and policies – and the recognition that those that manage protected areas and those that develop policies need to work more closely.
- c) Connecting people with nature – on this, the differences between Scottish National Parks and others was very noticeable. In Scotland, efforts to involve people in the management of the Cairngorms and our socio economic aim is embedded both in legislation and in the way we operate day to day. This was very clearly almost the complete opposite way of working to many European Parks, where the focus was very much on nature conservation and not on people.

[Sandy Park left the meeting]

20. Some observations were made about the Charter for Sustainable Tourism. There were now 30 Charter Parks and an ever increasing number of applicants. There was a growing feeling that the organisation Europarc could have difficulty in the future in keeping pace with the requests, assessment programme and network development. The first set of Parks who received the Charter were due for review next year and it would be extremely interesting for the CNPA to observe the feedback to those early recipients of the Charter. It was also noted that interacting with the growing number of UK protected areas obtaining the Charter was very valuable. An informal network in the UK could be very useful. It was also noted that the Cairngorms might consider bidding to hold a Charter Park conference, or something similar in future years.
21. The lack of connection between individuals working in the area of nature conservation, and the rest of society, was very noticeable in some of the Parks from other countries. It was also noted that protected areas in many other countries tended to be really quite small with the emphasis being on directly managing everything within those areas. There was very little recognition of the importance of social and economic aims. The emphasis appeared to be on subsidising and supporting conservation aims with little appreciation of need for a holistic approach to generating sustainability. The concept that the environment had economic value appeared to have no resonance. Finally the point was made that knowledge transfer particularly with the new accession countries would be important, and the CNPA may be able to contribute.

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22. A question was asked about how the opinion polling work done earlier in the year would be taken forward. It was noted that this was being looked at by the new Head of Communications, and further advice would be forthcoming. However it was noted that further opinion polling needed to be undertaken with great care, especially with the consultations coming up on the National Park Plan, The Local Plan, and the Core Path Network. The tendency to “consultation fatigue” had to be taken seriously.

Date of Next Meeting

23. Friday 2nd December, Albert Hall, Ballater.