
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: Programme of Board Meetings 2009

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Purpose

To seek members agreement to the schedule of Board meetings, Finance, Audit and Planning Committee meetings for the calendar year 2009.

Recommendations

That Members agree:

- a) *Dates:* the proposed dates for Board meetings and Planning, Finance and Audit Committee meetings;
- b) *Venues:* that monthly consideration of planning determinations by the Planning Committee alternate between Ballater and Grantown, with all other meetings (formal Board meetings and informal Board discussion sessions) rotate round the Park, using venues known to be accessible under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act;

And further, that Members:

- a) *Discussions:* offer suggestions for use of the discussion sessions (i.e. topics for discussion, subjects for briefing, or possible site visits);
- b) *Open Evenings:* agree to continue to hold "open evenings" prior to Board meetings but continue to review how best to make these fit for purpose.

Executive Summary

A programme of board meetings is proposed which follows the decision made in June 2006 to re-organise the monthly cycle of formal Board business. Members are asked to agree and note the proposed schedule of dates, and to offer suggestions (now or in the future) for topics for discussion/briefing, or visits.

PROGRAMME OF BOARD MEETINGS 2009 – FOR DECISION

Background

1. At the 30 June 2006 meeting, the Board agreed a new approach to formal Board business (essentially Planning Committees and Board Meetings) as follows:
 - a) planning call-in decisions every 2 weeks;
 - b) Planning determinations every month;
 - c) Board meetings every 2 months;
 - d) Every 2 months an opportunity for an informal session, either discussion, briefing or visit.

Issues/Discussion

Venues

2. I suggest we keep to the principle adopted at the inception of the CNPA of holding meetings around the Park. Experience has allowed us to identify suitable venues that meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act ensuring that access is suitable to meet the needs of the public. There remains the difficulty of trying to ensure that each planning case is heard/decided at a meeting close to the site in question, in the interests of minimising the travel for applicants and objectors.
3. Taking those factors into account, the attached schedule proposes that, similar to last year, the planning determination meetings alternate between Ballater and the Grantown area - this will ensure that at the very least, that cases will be considered at meetings on the appropriate "side of the Park" and at venues with good facilities.
4. We will continue to identify and assess any new venues that may be suitable for our use and build these into the schedule where appropriate. The Grant Arms Hotel in Grantown is under new ownership and has a suitable room for use and has been incorporated into the programme for 2009.

Board Meetings/Working Group Sessions

5. The Board agreed on 16 May that on formal Board meeting days, business is likely to be sufficiently light that it can be accommodated before lunch and that afternoons will be used for informal working groups. The purpose of the informal working groups is:
 - a) To keep Board members briefed on and in touch with what the organisation is "doing".
 - b) To engage Members in what staff do – offering their expertise and experience by making input on dealing with big/difficult issues, and future work streams.

- c) It is NOT to take decisions on behalf of the Board – there is no authority formally delegated to the working groups.

The benefits we are seeking through these arrangements are:

- d) Members better able to act as ambassadors, because more aware of what organisation doing.
- e) Staff get a broader perspective on our work, and have regular mechanism for bouncing ideas off Members, and tapping into their experience and expertise, working with them, rather than having to defend an idea once it has been set in concrete.
- f) Fosters a genuine partnership between staff and Members.

Discussion Sessions

- 6. Every two months there will be an informal discussion session (following the usual call-in session, which will last about an hour). So far this has proved useful and has allowed members valuable discussion on a range of issues. Formal Board meetings are generally focused on decisions based on papers which set out all the relevant factors that bear on the decision, but in reality, many issues are complex, and the opportunity for discussion and briefing on background and related issues all helps towards a fuller understanding and better decision in the long run. So these day-long (11.30-3.30) informal sessions are a good opportunity to: go into some issues in more detail; to reflect on some of the more strategic issues which loom in the future, but on which there is no requirement for a decision yet; engage in some “blue sky” thinking to generate ideas; engage with other people/organisations and possibly visit sites and projects in the Park (more likely in the summer).
- 7. A number of discussion topics have already been proposed and these include Young People and Education; Economy of the National Park; Species Introduction and Removal; Micro Energy Opportunities; Waste Management; and Planning Design Guide and Previously Approved Building Design. Some of these are already factored into the 2008/09 programme.
- 8. **It would helpful if Members could offer suggestions on other possible subjects for discussion, briefing, or visit.**

Open Evenings

- 9. As a way of maximising opportunities for local communities to engage with the CNPA Board, and vice versa, and alongside the policy of holding Board meetings at different venues around the Park, we have

continued to hold an “open evening” immediately prior to each Board meeting. These are normally advertised in the local press, as well as within the local community and we write to specific invitees.

10. It seems inherently right that the Board Members and our Public Body partners should make themselves available, on an informal basis, for local communities to engage with directly. Clearly this already happens in many other ways already, through the activities of local members, and attendance at community councils. It is still not clear whether the Open Evenings continue to add something useful to this. Over the last year attendance has been low and we need to consider whether it is a good use of resources to continue to ask up to 10 public sector partners to turn up. In an attempt to address this we have latterly been trying a slightly different approach by identifying community engagement projects that gives us an opportunity to focus on specific issues within a locality and only inviting those public sector partners with a direct interest in the project. The first of these was held at Braemar Castle and was very successful, the next will be held at the Wolftrax Centre at Laggan.
11. Members' views on the continuation and format of open evenings are invited, noting that Jaci Douglas has been asked to take a lead on this matter.
12. **Members are asked to offer views on the present and future format of “open evenings”.**

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