
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at Braemar Village Hall, Braemar on Friday 6th October 2006 at 1.30pm

PRESENT

Eric Baird
Stuart Black
Duncan Bryden
Basil Dunlop
Angus Gordon
David Green
Bruce Luffman
Eleanor Mackintosh

Anne MacLean
Alastair MacLennan
William McKenna
Sandy Park
Andrew Rafferty
Gregor Rimell
Sheena Slimon
Susan Walker

In Attendance:

David Bale
David Cameron
Murray Ferguson
Bob Grant
Elsbeth Grant
Andrew Harper
Jane Hope

Don McKee
Gavin Miles
Fiona Munro
Fiona Newcombe
Claire Ross
Francoise van Buuren
Andy Rinning

Apologies:

Nonie Coulthard
Lucy Grant
Douglas Glass
Marcus Humphrey

David Selfridge
Richard Stroud
Ross Watson
Bob Wilson

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

1. The minutes of the last meeting held on the 8th September 2006 were approved with no changes.

Matters Arising

2. None.

Update on Developing a Park for All 2006 (Paper 1)

3. Claire Ross and Elspeth Grant introduced the paper which updated Board Members on progress with the CNPA's recent activities on Social Inclusion and summarised possible future activity. The paper also proposed that the Board agree to prioritise three specific groups for additional support in taking up opportunities that the National Park provided: young people, people living on low income, and people with disabilities. The paper followed on from the paper considered by the Board in 2004 "Developing a Park for All – Social Inclusion".
4. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) Paragraph 16 of the paper made clear that although the recommendation was that the CNPA should provide particular focus on three groups, namely young people (16 to 24 years), people with disabilities, and people living on low incomes, the CNPA would continue to engage with all groups as set out in Paragraph 15.
 - b) The proposal to create a "Cairngorms on a Shoe String" package for those living on a low income was welcomed. The proposal was to start the initiative in 2007, with the first element of the initiative concentrating on marketing and promoting the Park to those groups of people that are less likely to be aware of the Park and its possibilities; this would be followed by a second element which focused on establishing relationships with champions who would bring information back to the Park.
 - c) Reassurance was sought on the spread of activities – it was reported that a number of pilot projects would be starting soon and would cover various areas across the whole Park.
 - d) The table at Paragraph 28 set out proposed future activities for taking forward a "Park for All" approach over the next five years. One project in particular was highlighted as starting in the near future, namely the Volunteering and Conservation Project with partners which focused on developing volunteering projects for young people, 16 to 24 with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and finding providers for local placements. The idea was to provide opportunities to work with Ranger Services, giving around thirty hours a week of volunteering experience. Providers had expressed a willingness to take part in these pilots.
 - e) It was also noted that discussions were taking place with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority about looking at common issues which could lead to a wider social inclusion project involving both Parks.
 - f) The point was made that in the educational system it could often be the case that the brightest pupils also tended to be those who got the most opportunities for a range of activities. It would be important to engage with those who were approaching 16 years old and make sure that in working with schools all children had access to the opportunities being provided.

- g) There was recognition that transport was a major issue; in developing initiatives, account had to be taken on whether or not children would be able to travel to and take advantage of these initiatives – the opportunity and the ability to access that opportunity had to be looked at as a complete package. It was noted that one of the top issues raised by young people during the consultation on the National Park Plan was that of transport. There was a lot of interest in the pilot voucher scheme which had started in the Badenoch and Strathspey area and other initiatives were needed.
- h) The point was made that support for projects that were socially inclusive needed to be spread across the public sector, not just the CNPA. It was noted that the Deputy Minister, Rhona Brankin, had recently visited an outreach project near Glen Tanar, and SNH had been represented there, a mark of their support for these sorts of projects. In respect of the proposed work on volunteering it was suggested that this should not just focus on conservation but should also include active sustainable land management.
- i) The Youth Media Project had been very well received (table at Paragraph 5) and was an excellent way of working with young people and making them feel part of the National Park.

5. The Board agreed the recommendations of the paper as follows:

- a) The Board noted progress made on social inclusion issues and plans for future activity including developing a Pilot Outreach Project;**
- b) The Board agreed to prioritise three groups for additional support taking up opportunities that the National Park provides: young people, people living on low income, and people with disabilities.**

Programme of Board Meetings 2007 (Paper 2)

- 6. Jane Hope introduced the paper which set out a schedule for Board meetings and Planning Committee meetings in 2007. This followed the Board's agreement in June 2006 to a new format for dealing with formal Board business, in which Planning Committee determinations were held once a month, formal Board meetings held once every two months, and informal Board discussions held once every two months. The paper sought agreement to the proposed dates for Board meetings and Planning Committee meetings 2007, and agreement that the monthly consideration of planning determinations by the Planning Committee should alternate between Ballater and Grantown with all other meetings (formal Board meetings and informal Board discussion sessions) rotating around the Park using venues known to be accessible. Members' views were sought on topics for the informal discussion sessions, and arrangements for "open evenings" generally held prior to Board meetings for members and staff to engage informally with local communities.
- 7. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) After three years of the current format, now might be a good time to slightly change the open evenings to include a slide show and update on what was happening within the National Park. If the open evenings were less frequent, as a result of Board meetings being once every two months, the open evenings

could have more substance with more to report back. This was consistent with the completion of the National Park Plan, and the move by the CNPA into a delivery phase. Involving other partners to participate in this and contribute would be helpful – it would help to ensure fewer meetings and avoid clashes between meetings being held on the same evening by different organisations.

- b) It was still felt important to provide the opportunity to hear people's views so even with a more formal presentation, it would be essential to have the surgery-style interaction in the second half of the open evening.
- c) The format of open evenings could not be looked at in isolation, and had to be considered as part of a much wider discussion, including the role of local members, and other forms of engagement with local communities.
- d) A briefing pack/presentation on key issues within the Park would be useful for Members as they participated in Community Council meetings and other meetings throughout the year.
- e) In line with making the open evenings more substantial and less frequent, a new approach to advertising the meetings was needed.

8. The Board agreed the recommendations of the paper as follows:

- a) **The Board agreed the proposed dates for Board meetings and Planning Committee meetings as set out in the paper;**
- b) **The Board agreed the venues as set out in the paper and in particular agreed the Planning determinations should alternate between Ballater and Grantown with all other meetings (formal Board meetings and informal Board discussion sessions) rotating around the Park using venues known to be accessible.**

9. Action:

- a) **The Board discussion session on the 26th January 2007 to address the issue of open evenings and other forms of engagement with local communities;**
- b) **Members to offer suggestions on topics for discussion sessions to the Chief Executive.**

Housing Policy Progress (Paper 3)

10. Gavin Miles and Fiona Munro introduced the paper which informed the Board of the progress in developing a detailed housing policy and supporting mechanisms that would be delivered through the National Park Plan and Local Plan. The paper outlined some of the possible scenarios for future population change and associated household change in the Park. Features of all projections were an older population and without policy changes, steady losses of younger adults and children combined with a trend to smaller households which gave rise to an overall increase in the numbers of households. Significant numbers of new homes would need to be built to accommodate the new households and mechanisms to ensure that those homes went to those who needed them would be required to avoid a continuing gap between supply and the ability of Park households to access the supply. The paper also summarised research and practice in other parts of Scotland, the UK and abroad. It outlined a selection of mechanisms considered to offer a range of practical ways in which the CNPA and housing partners, including developers, may be able to create a more sustainable balance within the

housing market of the Park area. The need for further dialogue with these partners to select and refine the most appropriate tools for the Park area was highlighted as critical to completion of the Local Plan.

11. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) There was currently little information about migrant populations in the Park, but this would be obtained before the Local Plan was finalised.
- b) The paper was commended as thorough and well researched; it indicated that thinking had moved on a long way since the first paper in May.
- c) A point raised at the recent ACCC meeting but not highlighted in the paper was the possibility of having a flexible percentage for affordable housing; the figures currently in use by the various local authorities did not have to be retained unchanged. It followed that it was important to know more about the actual needs for the individual communities and for the percentage of affordable housing to reflect this.
- d) There was some discussion about the estimate of the number of affordable houses needed each year. From reports, 114 affordable houses were needed per year which meant a little more than 1,000 over ten years. This took no account of the remainder of houses needed to be made affordable or of the wishes of occupants to move up the housing ladder. In reality closer to 200 affordable houses were required per year but new houses were currently only being built at the rate of 117 per year.
- e) People moving into communities often were resistant to the idea of new houses being built as this was seen to be spoiling the area they had moved into. This was a view expressed by many, while still acknowledging the need for new housing.
- f) The SRPBA had developed proposals for the private sector providing houses for rent. The grant funding would be similar to the Scottish Homes' Grant for Rent for private developers, however the grant conditions may be more like a Housing Association such as insistence on detailed procedures for management and maintenance of the properties. The attraction of the SRPBA's proposals was that individuals occupying such houses did not have to come off the housing list. However it may be suggested in the guidance that nominations from the Local Authority would be acceptable. These proposals were not detailed in the paper because they were still awaiting Ministerial approval.
- g) The principle of plots for self build was not specifically articulated in the paper, but was included in the mix of possibilities to be investigated with private developers. It was also included in table 1 at Paragraph 30 under the heading of Rural Home Ownership Grant – this grant had not been well used but had the potential, particularly where land owners are prepared to sell land at non-market prices, and could provide limited numbers of homes in the Park area.
- h) It was emphasised that solutions were being looked at on the basis of what might be suitable for particular communities rather than a one-size-fits-all across the whole Park. The CNPA in conjunction with the local authorities and community planning partnerships were looking at local needs – full use would be made of all the information already gathered, but it had become clear that further

information would be needed and this exercise would be tied in with the work being done by the Rural Housing Enabler.

- i) It was well recognised that builders have to make a profit if they are to cross-subsidise affordable housing, and any proposals would reflect that.
- j) Home Stake – a shared equity mechanism to allow people to purchase a minimum of 51% of a home – would not on its own solve the current problem. Consequently, one would always be left with people on the housing list that would never be able to access social housing and yet not able to afford their own home either.
- k) Occupancy criteria had their place and while not in themselves the full answer to the problem, had a place in the tool kit if they could be used in a flexible way; they should be widened out beyond the land management sector to include, for example, the tourism sector. Paragraph 27 drew a distinction between residency criteria and occupancy criteria. The difference was a subtle one and needed to be made clear.
- l) Planning committees had a role in delivering solutions to the housing problem. They needed to look carefully at what they were approving, for example, they needed to be much more flexible in considering the building of more flats and terraced houses.
- m) Lumping holiday homes and second homes together was wrong given that holiday homes were a legitimate part of the local economy bring money in from outside, and providing the basis for local businesses.
- n) There was a lot of support within the Park for what the CNPA and its partners were trying to do to solve the housing problem – everyone involved needed to be brave enough to see it through.
- o) The desire to meet local housing needs was well understood, but as set out in the fifth bullet point of Paragraph 36, the current homelessness legislation (widely applauded as innovative) placed constraints on this. However, the possibility of developing Park-specific criteria in respect of non social housing was being investigated.
- p) The estimates of numbers of affordable houses needed were liable to underestimate the scale of the problem. It was quite clear that some people did not put their names on the housing list and this needed to be teased out in the survey about local community needs. It was important to recognise that estimates of future housing needs were just that and could never be precise. Rather than concentrate unduly on the variations in projections it was important that the CNPA and its partners decided in broad terms what direction it wished to go in and put policies in place accordingly. In tackling the housing issue it was important to be more creative – part of the challenge was to create places to live not just houses. The density of housing needed further thought as it might be possible to put more people into an area with houses that created a smaller ecological footprint and were also more affordable. It was noted at a recent meeting that builders would like to build smaller houses which would then be affordable but to qualify for subsidy from Communities Scotland houses had to be suitable for all abilities. This meant the minimum build size was 85 square metres rather than the 67 square metres that could make the houses a lot more affordable.

- q) If more terraced houses were built with a higher density of housing it would be important to ensure provision of more open green space for children to play in.
- r) Officials had been meeting with the SRPBA and with builders, but it would be important for Board Members to also meet these groups and to understand their point of view. It was essential that land was released by the private sector.
- s) Some of the constraints currently imposed on small developments of houses in rural areas, such as street lighting, pavements, roads were inappropriate for rural locations and needed to be challenged.
- t) An aspiration for the future would be that policy, technological and social changes meant that houses could be build with a smaller footprint and on land which currently it was not feasible to build on. However, this was an aspiration rather than a reality for the current Local Plan.
- u) It was suggested that the Board should make a visit to the Aviemore North development which included affordable housing administered by the Albyn Housing Partnership. The development incorporated good sustainable design, heat conservation measures, and biomass heating.

12. The Convener summarised the main threads emerging from the discussion as follows:

- a) The idea of a tool kit of measures for dealing with the housing problem rather than any single solutions;
- b) The idea of different solutions for different areas in the Park;
- c) The importance of including land owners and others who will help to deliver the solutions;
- d) The refinement of residency criteria to occupancy criteria;
- e) The need to be robust as well as sensitive in seeing through these proposals. In this respect the work in progress was noted and commended.

13. **Action:**

- a) **Proposals on housing policy to be brought to the Board in early 2007.**

Operational Plan Update Quarter 2 (Paper 4)

14. David Cameron introduced the paper which presented the Board with a review of progress on delivery of the 2006/07 Operational Plan over the first half of the year. Progress overall was good with only two work streams highlighted as amber. One was the Local Plan, given the earlier agreement to postpone the placing of the Local Plan on deposit until the middle of 2007. The timetable remained tight and the issues challenging, and hence was marked at amber. The second work stream marked as amber related to defining the public benefits which could be produced by land managers and supported through publicly funded and integrated schemes. The Scottish Executive was still deciding on how it wished to deliver the Scottish Rural Development Programme and a decision was delayed until November. As a result the work by the Park Authority and its Partners on identifying public benefits was similarly pending that decision. It was quite likely that funding for the RDR would be very limited and the CNPA was working with the Scottish Executive to see how investment in past environmental schemes in the area could be secured for the future.

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15. The Convener reported that he had recently met the new Convener of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority and had agreed to continue sharing information and recognised the potential of working together. It was clear that the two National Parks had their own identity, their own priorities, and their own ways of dealing with those, and there was no wish to impose common solutions on two very different Parks. Nevertheless, it was equally clear that there was some potential for working cooperatively – one of the obvious areas for this was the up coming spending review where it would be important that both National Park Authorities were sharing a common message about the importance of National Parks to Scotland.

Date of Next Meeting

16. Friday 3rd November 2006 at the Albert Hall, Ballater.