

---

# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

---

## **MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at 14 The Square, Grantown-on-Spey on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2005 at 2.00pm**

### **PRESENT**

Eric Baird  
Stuart Black  
Duncan Bryden  
Sally Dowden  
Basil Dunlop  
Angus Gordon  
Lucy Grant  
Marcus Humphrey  
Bruce Luffman

Eleanor Mackintosh  
Anne MacLean  
William McKenna  
Sandy Park  
Andrew Rafferty  
Joyce Simpson  
Sheena Slimon  
Richard Stroud  
Bob Wilson

### **In Attendance:**

Murray Ferguson  
Nick Halfhide  
Andrew Harper  
Jane Hope  
Don McKee  
Fiona Newcombe  
Andy Rinning

### **Apologies:**

Douglas Glass  
David Green  
Alastair MacLennan  
Gregor Rimell  
David Selfridge  
Andrew Thin  
Sue Walker

## **Welcome and Introduction**

1. The Deputy Convenor welcomed everyone to the Board meeting which was being held at the CNPA offices in Grantown-on-Spey rather than at the advertised venue in Carr Bridge. The change of venue had been necessary as a result of the severe weather conditions which had closed in the previous evening, and prevented Members and staff from the East side of the Park from travelling to Carr Bridge. The Planning meeting in the morning had therefore been rearranged and held over an audio link, with some Members present in the Ballater Office and others taking part in the Grantown Office. He apologised to everyone for the last minute change of venue, but noted that from time to time adverse weather conditions would make the successful completion of Board meetings and planning meetings extremely difficult, and in the circumstances, the use of the audio link in the morning had proved successful, and he thanked everyone for their forbearance.
2. The Deputy Convenor went on to note that the usual pre-Board open evening for the local community which should have been held the previous evening in Carr Bridge, had been cancelled as a mark of respect for the funeral taking place in Carr Bridge that day. He apologised to those members of the public and to Board Members who had not received the message about the cancellation, and who had turned up for the open evening meeting.

## **Minutes of Last Meeting – approval**

3. The minutes of the previous meeting (11<sup>th</sup> March 2005) were approved with one minor amendment, namely that Basil Dunlop had been mistakenly recorded as being present at the meeting.

## **Matters Arising**

4. None

## **CNPA Strategic Role in Forestry Consultations (Paper 1)**

5. Fiona Newcombe introduced the paper seeking Board approval for a proposal to develop a Strategic Forestry Plan for the Cairngorms National Park. Once that proposal was in place, the CNPA would then take on the role of commenting on forestry schemes proposed through the Forestry Commission Scotland Grants and Licences and Planning Processes. She emphasised that the Cairngorms Forestry and Woodland Framework (CFWF) which was completed in 1999, was an extremely good document which was still being used by many partners who were implementing current forestry policy within the Park. Nevertheless, the document was becoming out of date in a number of areas, and now was the appropriate time to revise it. She acknowledged that the process of revision and updating would require close cooperation and working between all the interested partners, and this would not just mean public agencies, but also land managers. Finally, she suggested that if the Board would find it useful, an informal briefing for the Board on the wider aspects of forestry could be arranged for an appropriate Friday afternoon.
6. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) A minor amendment was needed to the text under the recommendations on the first page of the paper. Recommendations (c) should refer to the issues raised in paragraphs 17 to 21 (and not 16 to 20 as written).
- b) It was important for the CNPA, in taking over in due course the function of the statutory consultee on forestry proposals, not to become bogged down in a huge number of applications. Current experience in Aberdeenshire Council was that the number of applications received could be very large indeed, with some of these applications being for proposals as small as half a hectare. The CNPA may therefore wish to consider a cut off point for applications in terms of size.
- c) The planting or felling of trees potentially had a much bigger impact on the National Park than some of the relatively minor planning applications for conservatories, sun porches etc. The setting of a cut off point for consultations therefore had to bear this in mind and could not afford to be set too high so that a large number of applications were in effect not considered.
- d) The importance of including private sector woodland owners in the consultation was emphasised. Certainly on the eastern side of the Park there were good examples of accord between private and public sector on woodland issues.
- e) The use of wood for energy production was important and needed to be factored in to the development of a new Strategic Forest Plan for the Park. Biomass heating was one of the cheapest forms of producing electricity and highly relevant in respect of the CNPA's aims regarding affordable housing.
- f) In relation to paragraph 29, and the financial implication of this proposal, it was pointed out that archaeological work associated with forestry consultations can require a considerable amount of time. It was agreed that this needed to be factored in to the CNPA's assessment of the financial implications of the proposals.
- g) The CFWF had been an excellent document. One particular improvement was suggested, however, in that the multi-coloured map associated with the CFWF was very difficult to read, and might be better tackled in the revised Strategy through a series of overlay transparencies. Presentation of information was very important in such documents.
- h) The proposal at paragraph 12(c) was welcomed. The Forestry Commission (FCS) had a very good record of consulting with local communities on plans which affected them. It would be important in the new Strategy to emphasis the need for that good consultation to continue.
- i) The extraction of timber from felling sites was generally done on agreed routes, and could have a big impact on local communities. The new Strategy should take account of this. Related to this, the point was made that Local Authorities received a funding allowance for upgrading roads for such purposes. An important role for the CNPA in relation to the development of the new Strategy, would be to lobby the Scottish Executive to maintain this allowance for roads affected in this way.
- j) The issue of wood for biomass needed to be carefully considered in the new Strategy document. Large biomass units could have a detrimental effect on smaller industrial units (eg pulp mills) as shown by a recent MBSE study. The impact of biomass units on other industries, road, and communities all needed to be carefully considered in the new Strategy.
- k) An informal briefing, and possible visit to forestry sites was welcomed.

7. **The Board agreed the recommendations of the paper as follows:**
- a) **That a new Strategic Forest Plan for the Park area be developed based on an update of the Cairngorms Forestry and Woodland Framework, fitting within the context of the National Park Plan and the Integrated Land Management Strategy Framework.**
  - b) **The CNPA to comment on forestry schemes once this plan was in place.**
  - c) **That a further paper would be brought to the Board outlining specific arrangements for responding to consultations.**
8. **Action:**
- a) **That an informal briefing on forestry, and associated visit be arranged for those Board Members expressing an interest (Fiona Newcombe to take forward).**
  - b) **A further paper to be brought to the Board in due course outlining specific arrangements for the CNPA dealing with forestry consultations (Fiona Newcombe to take forward).**

## **Park Plan Update - Vision and Strategic Objectives (Paper 2)**

9. Nick Halfhide and Hamish Trench introduced the paper which sought a discussion on the emerging vision and objectives of the National Park Plan and updated Members on the progress with developing the Park Plan. It also outlined the processes ahead leading to the completion of the draft Plan. They pointed out that the draft Vision and Objectives were not final and would continue to evolve in conjunction with the drafting of the Park Plan. However, it was important to keep the Board abreast of how things were developing, and also in keeping with our policy on openness and transparency, to put in the public domain the latest information about how the Park Plan was developing. The Board's attention was drawn to the specific discussion points set out at paragraphs 14, 21, and 31 of the paper.
10. In discussion the following points were made:
- a) The reference in paragraph 34(d) to the 28<sup>th</sup> of October for an informal Board seminar, should be the 21<sup>st</sup> of October.
  - b) While one could not disagree with the draft Vision and Strategic Objectives set out in the paper, these could refer to any National Park and were missing any sense of what was special about the Cairngorms. To some extent this might be inevitable with high-level strategic visions and objectives, and it may be that the specificity to the Cairngorms would flow from the way in which material was presented. Nevertheless, there was a feeling that somehow everything in the Cairngorms National Park Plan should be recognisable as Cairngorms from top to bottom. There needed to be, as it were, more local colour to the document, including the vision and objectives.
  - c) The draft Strategic Objectives needed to reflect the role of the National Park as being an exemplar.
  - d) The Vision as drafted had no reference to youth, and missed the opportunity to stress the value placed within the National Park on the contribution from young people.
  - e) The information needed to make the vision and objectives relate specifically to the Cairngorms had already been produced earlier through the development of the Cairngorms Branding Wheel in conjunction with VisitScotland and members of

the tourism industry and agencies. The outcome from that work had already been incorporated into the development of the Cairngorms Brand, already approved by the Board, and provided a very useful basis for a Vision and Strategic Objectives which were clearly related to the Cairngorms and what was special about the area.

- f) The Vision as presented was rather all-encompassing, and could be considered to be simply an expression of "motherhood and apple pie". There are aspects of the area that cannot be replicated in the rest of Scotland precisely because the Cairngorms area is unique. The difficulty with the Vision Statement was splitting out what was special for the Cairngorms, and what could reasonably be expected in quite a wide range of other areas of Scotland. In this respect it was probably more productive to focus on outcomes rather than a vision, and hence to look at all the outcomes that are specific and unique to the Cairngorms area and cannot and do apply in the rest of Scotland.
- g) The Strategic Objectives were all laudable, but ambitious to the point of being unrealistic, and certainly not deliverable by the CNPA. On the other hand, it was recognised that this was not the vision and objectives for the CNPA, but for the whole Park and all the partners within it. Further, it was not a feasibility study.
- h) The Vision and Strategic Objectives might be more meaningful if they could be made more specific, so that they could relate to particular communities. What was wanted and needed for one community might not be applicable to another, for example. How much room was there for individual distinctiveness within the National Park Plan? Arguably this was delivered through the Local Plan, Community Plan, etc. rather than the National Park Plan itself.
- i) There needed to be more specific references to particular types of recreation within the National Park: the current references were rather indistinct, and there was no reference to recreation in the contents list.
- j) It was important to recognise who the Park Plan was aimed at. We should be looking for shorter, tighter visions and a set of values about what everyone held dear about the Cairngorms area. This set of values should make the area quickly identifiable and recognisable as referring to the Cairngorms.
- k) The way in which the National Park Plan is eventually presented will be crucial. There were potentially lots of options on this, and the vision and objectives would not necessarily appear as presented in the paper. The crucial question was: does the paper as presented provide the necessary material to enable a creative writer, cartoonist, and others to paint a picture of the Cairngorms.
- l) Paragraph 31(a) proposed a small communications group to oversee the production of the Plan. Board Members were invited to offer their names to Nick Halfhide if they were interested, but in the meantime Eleanor MacKintosh and Duncan Bryden were tentatively suggested in the first instance. However, membership was open to others if they were interested.
- m) Discussions with stakeholders were planned over the coming nine months. The point was made that public agencies planned their budgets a long way ahead, and agencies would need to be building into their thinking now any consequences of the National Park Plan to be published in the next two years.

*[Duncan Bryden left the meeting]*

## **Corporate Plan Report: Theme 4 (Paper 3)**

11. Nick Halfhide and Don McKee introduced this paper which was for information. It informed the Board of work to date to achieve the fourth strategic aim of the Corporate Plan namely: "to ensure our commitment to future generations we will look beyond the horizon and put in place plans to guide and coordinate the long-term integrated management of the Park".
12. In discussion the following points were made:
  - a) There was not reference in the paper to arrangements for monitoring and review of plans, both the Local Plan and the National Park Plan. The assumption was being made that the Scottish Executive would soon be placing a duty on planning authorities to continuously review policies and replace these as they got out of date. The point was made that while this may be the case, it was not necessarily clear to the outside world, and needed to be stated explicitly. There would be a section in the Local Plan specifically on the question of monitoring and evaluation.
  - b) Further clarification was sought on paragraph 14. This was referring to guidance.

## **Operational Plan - Update to End of Quarter 4 (Paper 4)**

13. Jane Hope introduced the paper which reported on progress with delivery of the CNPA's first Operational Plan. She noted that of the six actions marked as "amber" at the end of quarter 3 five of these were now well in hand and no longer considered to be "amber". One of these remained an issue, namely the processing of planning applications within national benchmarks. This had been difficult, but with the recruitment of a new DC Officer the capacity of the Planning Team to deal with applications would be considerably increased. One additional area of concern had been the slower than expected delivery across the theme of "develop clear cohesive strategies for stewardship of the natural resources of the National Park". The Natural Resources Group was being restructured, and additional capacity brought in to deal with this issue. Each Head of Group was invited to briefly comment on the relevant part of the Operational Plan that fell to their group.

### ***Strategic Policy and Programme Management***

14. Nick Halfhide drew attention to four main achievements during the fourth quarter within his area:
  - a) With a new official in place dedicated to the National Park Plan, the last quarter had demonstrated a new energy and purpose to the work of developing the National Park Plan, and this had made good progress and remained on track;
  - b) A successful small grants scheme had been run during the year, and would provide the basis for a more developed scheme in the following year;
  - c) The Moorland Project had progressed well, and there would be a review of how to better integrate this into the work of the CNPA;
  - d) The Leader+ Project had continued successfully, and as reported at the last Board, additional money secured for the scheme.

## ***Natural Resources***

15. Fiona Newcombe reported the highlights from this group:
- a) A number of new projects within the LBAP Projects had been brought forward in the final quarter of the year, relating to Aspen, Water Voles, and Freshwater Pearl Mussels.
  - b) A funding package for the LBAP project was being developed, to ensure an integrated approach to delivery of projects.
  - c) The Land Based Business Training Project had been extremely successful, with a four-fold increase in training in the final quarter. A fuller paper would be brought to the Board shortly.
  - d) A successful series of consultation meetings had been run on the production of public benefits by land managers. It had been well attended. An update would be coming to the Board shortly.

## ***Economic and Social Development***

16. Andrew Harper reported the highlights from this group as follows:
- a) Transport. Work on producing an integrated public transport timetable for the Park was nearing completion. He pointed to the wish to have informal discussions with any interested Board Members before starting to engage with strategic transport authorities on the development of transport policies across the Park.
  - b) The report by the All Abilities Communication Network, and the report on the years activities by schools youth group, had been delayed but were now being rolled into one report which would focus on the broader issue of the "Park for All". This would be brought to the Board in May.
  - c) On housing, the Heriot Watt Study was progressing well. This would feed into the Local Plan, and an update of the Cairngorms Housing Action Plan.
  - d) Work on a possible Park Apprenticeship Scheme was progressing well. A workshop had been held with key agencies, and a steering group set up to further define the project. HIE saw this as a potentially high profile and good project. It was a substantial project, and would require considerable work and time. The Board would be updated at intervals.
  - e) On the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, the application to Europarc had been submitted, and a verification visit in May or June was awaited.

## ***Visitor Services and Recreation***

17. Murray Ferguson outlined four main areas of work during the past year:
- a) Outdoor Access. Work in this area had progressed very well, with the first meeting of the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum taking place on the 31<sup>st</sup> March. He noted it was a strong forum of 21 members. He recorded the considerable thanks due to Kristin Scott who had led this work, and noted that her last day in the CNPA would be the 28<sup>th</sup> April, before she returned to a deserved promotion with SNH.
  - b) Coordination of Ranger Services. A good working relationship with rangers and their employers had been developed over the past year, and this would continue to be built upon.

- c) The John Muir Award had progressed well. The project leader, Alan Smith, was now working with about 300 people, through 22 different centres within the Park. The Board would be receiving an update paper on this project shortly.
- d) Entry Point Signage. This had proved to be a more difficult and substantial project than originally envisaged. However the first signs at railway stations had been put up, with the interim signs on roads to go up very shortly. Work continued with the permanent granite entry point markers.

### ***Planning and Development Control***

18. Don McKee reported on progress over the year in this area.
- a) The report on the first Local Plan consultation was complete and copies would be circulated to the Board shortly.
  - b) Work had started on developing a Strategic Environmental Assessment Procedure and this was now currently being applied to the Local Plan as it was being drafted. This was proving quite a resource intensive task.
  - c) Development Control. Timely completion of planning applications continued to be an area of challenge. The arrival of a new DC officer would increase the capacity of the Planning Team. In addition, it was planned to be more rigorous in dealing with applicants, for example in the setting of timescales for submission of information. It was also planned to put more planning determinations on the agenda of the CNPA Planning Committee, and the Committee itself would need to consider how it might process applications more quickly, and therefore take more determinations at each Committee meeting

### ***Corporate Services and Communications***

19. In the absence of the two relevant Heads of Group, Jane Hope pointed to the following highlights in this area:
- a) Organisational structure. The staffing complement, the pay and grading system, and the performance review system were largely in place.
  - b) A culture of outward facing had been substantially developed during the year. Website development continued; three editions of Park Life had been issued; and systems for dealing with FOI were also implemented.
  - c) A new Corporate Plan had been produced and approved by the Board.
  - d) A risk register had been established.
  - e) A training programme had been implemented across the whole organisation involving the Board, groups, individuals and the Management Team.
20. In discussion the following points were made:
- a) While it was acknowledged that the covering paper was limited in the number of achievements it could highlight, it was important to put on record two developments in the area of All Abilities. The All Abilities Network had asked for, and secured, a seat at the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum. That was a significant achievement. Secondly, work was progressing well on looking into how Park Life could be produced in forms such as Braille, large print, etc. making it fully accessible.
  - b) There was some discussion on the processing of planning applications that had been called in. There were two potential bottlenecks: one the capacity of the Planning Team to produce reports for consideration, and secondly the capacity of

the Planning Committee to deal with determinations at Committee meetings. While the limiting factor to date had been the capacity of the Planning Team, that could shortly change, and the bottleneck could become the capacity of the Planning Committee to consider determinations. It was likely that the agenda of Planning Committees over the coming months would become larger, with more determinations to be taken. The position would need to be carefully monitored, and if necessary additional time found for the Planning Committee.

## **Operational Plan 2005/6 (Paper 5)**

21. Jane Hope introduced the paper which was for information, and set out the coming years Operational Plan, delivering the goals agreed in the 2005/08 Corporate Plan. She particularly drew attention to paragraphs 5-8 of the paper, which described how a number of the goals in the Operational Plan would be delivered through the development of an integrated grant scheme. Further details on this would be brought back to the Finance Committee or Board as appropriate. She also explained that there would be two mechanisms during the year for keeping the Board informed of progress with delivery of the Operational Plan. First, the quarterly updates on the Operational Plan would continue, and while these provided a very detailed picture of work within the Park Authority, it provided a good discipline to provide such reports each quarter. Secondly, the twice-yearly reports on each theme of the Corporate Plan would continue in order to allow the Board to consider from a more strategic perspective how delivery of the Corporate Plan was progressing.

## **AOCB**

22. a) The point was made that litter on the A9 was becoming an eyesore. Litter collection was a matter for the Highland Council, and if a situation was really serious, one could phone the Council office and ask for a special clean up operation. However, if enhanced litter collection was considered to be important across the board, more funding would be needed.
- b) An update was sought on the matter of paper recycling. The Green Office Audit had now been completed on both the Grantown and the Ballater offices, and it remained the intention to use those reports to develop an office greening policy, and in the process address the question of how we might recycle paper produced in the course of CNPA business. It was also intended to use that thinking as a peg on which to press for improved recycling facilities across the National Park. It was pointed out that the Achnagonlin Industrial Estate did have a waste paper container, and it might be worth looking into how this could be used.
- c) A vote of thanks was given to all the staff in the Ballater and the Grantown offices for ensuring that the Planning Committee and the Board meeting were able to take place, despite the difficulties of the weather and unpredictable power cuts over the last 24 hours.

## **Date of Next Meeting**

23. Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> May at Kirriemuir. On the 5<sup>th</sup> May a visit to the Balnaboth Moor (part of the Moorland Project) was being arranged. The usual pre-Board open evening for the community would be held as usual at 7pm in the Airlie Arms Hotel.