
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at the Panmure Arms Hotel, Edzell on Friday 9th September 2005 at 1.30pm

PRESENT:

Eric Baird
Stuart Black
Duncan Bryden
Sally Dowden
Douglas Glass
Lucy Grant
Marcus Humphrey
Bruce Luffman
Eleanor Mackintosh

Alastair MacLennan
William McKenna
Gregor Rimell
David Selfridge
Sheena Slimon
Richard Stroud
Andrew Thin
Susan Walker
Bob Wilson

In Attendance:

David Cameron
Pete Crane
Murray Ferguson
Nick Halfhide

Andrew Harper
Jane Hope
Andy Rinning
Debbie Strang

Apologies:

Basil Dunlop
Angus Gordon
David Green
Anne MacLean

Sandy Park
Andrew Rafferty
Joyce Simpson

Welcome and Introduction

1. The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

2. The minutes of the previous meeting (12th August 2005) were approved with no changes.

Matters Arising

3. a) Paragraph 4 (a): a briefing note to all Members about the Cairngorm Brand was still to be circulated to Members
- b) Paragraph 10 (a): a note from the Tourism Team about raising awareness and understanding of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism and its implications for businesses was also due to be circulated to Board Members; this would be done together with the above note.
- c) Paragraph 13 (a): in hand.
- d) Paragraph 17 (a): in hand.
- e) Paragraph 19. The Convenor reported that he had spoken to the relevant officials in the Scottish Executive about the letter from Ross Finnie. He had made the point that Members were concerned that part of the letter was not accurate and could be construed as unfairly critical of the Board's handling of the matter. This point had been accepted by the Scottish Executive Officials, and since the point was now on the record, the Convenor suggested there was no further action to be taken.

Point of Entry Marker Project (Paper 1)

4. Peter Crane and Murray Ferguson introduced the paper which sought approval for expenditure on the installation of entry point markers and associated landscaping and interpretation at 21 sites around the boundary of the Park. The paper was the fourth to be considered by the Board on this subject, which was complex and had been project managed by a small team of staff drawn from across the organisation. The development work undertaken to get the project to this decision point was set out in the paper at paragraphs 7-10. The main elements were:
 - Detailed design work on the signs;
 - Engineering testing of the proposed signs;
 - A landscape architect report, including concept designs and costs for the landscaping of lay-bys and car parks;
 - Production of PVC trial markers and testing at each site to confirm location and size of markers.
5. Details of the proposed expenditure were set out in tables 1, 2, and 3 of the paper. Phase 1 of the implementation comprised installation of 21 entry point markers and the upgrading of 1 lay-by and 1 car park. Phase 2 would comprise the installation of 4 entry point markers at trunk road sites with options to upgrade lay-bys depending on the resources available. In summary, the installation of the 21 markers would cost the CNPA £328,000 (after contributions from other partners), which would be split to £120,000 in 2005/06, and £208,000 in 2006/07. The Board was asked to approve that expenditure.
6. Phase 2 of the project involved the 4 trunk road sites at Drumochter, Kinlochlaggan, Slochd and the Mains of Dalvey. Because trunk roads are managed by the Scottish Executive, the CNPA was working closely in partnership with the Executive on these four sites. The Scottish Executive as the managing authority had overall responsibility for the upgrade of lay-bys on trunk roads and discussions were continuing as to how the cost of installing the entry point markers and the associated upgrading of lay-bys should be shared between the two organisations. Final and firm costs were therefore not yet available, but table 3 summarised the highest and the lowest likely costs, depending on whether or not the CNPA paid for the upgrade of the lay-bys. Installation of four entry point markers at the trunk road sites with no upgrade of lay-bys was estimated to cost

£237,000. Installation of the four entry point markers together with the upgrade to the lay-bys and associated interpretation was estimated to cost between £400,000 and £500,000 pounds. The Board was asked to approve in principle this phase 2 of the project involving the four entry point markers at trunk road sites. The point was made that authorisation could not be given for phase 1 without that implying commitment to the principle of phase 2.

7. These entry point markers were important in creating the right first impressions for visitors coming into the National Park. The costs needed to be seen in the perspective of the benefits which were long term. By way of illustration, it was suggested that in any one year if only 5% of visitors stayed one extra day in the Park then they would be spending an additional £1.3 million in the area, the total cost of the project.
8. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) Any meetings with BEAR who managed the trunk roads on behalf of the Scottish Executive, might usefully involve local Board Members, and staff should make contact with local BEAR contacts.
 - b) There were mixed views on the use of Gaelic on the signs. One Member reported having members of the public asking why Gaelic was shown on the signs at all. Another Member had received views suggesting that the Gaelic print was too small. Pete Crane reminded Members that the decision had been made to include Gaelic on the signs in recognition of the importance of Gaelic to the cultural heritage of the Cairngorms area. Including it with lettering which could be read by fast moving traffic would have required signs three times the size of those currently proposed.
 - c) Scottish Enterprise Grampian were currently working with the Glenshee Ski Centre on the A93 to make the centre more viable, and this included work on better interpretation facilities. Nothing had yet been decided but the CNPA would undoubtedly want to be involved as part of its wider work on interpretation across the Park.
 - d) The provision of interpretation and information would be phased, with phase 1 including information that was Park wide as set out in annex 4 to the paper. The second phase would involve work with local communities on provision of local information. These were not alternatives, and both types of information would eventually be provided at sites.
 - e) Dalvey was a potential difficult site as it was unclear whether Scottish Executive would upgrade the current piece of waste ground into a lay-by compatible with the standards required for trunk roads. The matter was under consideration by the Scottish Executive, and the CNPA would work with them on the installation of the entry point marker, whether or not there was also a lay-by.
 - f) Given the complexities of the project, and the need to explain clearly the various components of the project and what these cost, it was suggested it would be useful for Board Members to have a brief summary of these figures. In short the total project was costing £1.3 million which was split more or less half and half between the cost for the signs, and the cost for upgrading the lay-bys. It was also noted that the total cost of the signs had come down compared with what had been originally been envisaged.
 - g) Regarding Option B at paragraph 25, it was noted that the Scottish Executive roads department had been very positive in their response, especially now they had seen the detailed plans. However, discussions were not yet concluded, and there was no

timetable for the work on upgrading lay-bys at this stage, but it clearly made no sense to not upgrade the lay-bys if one was installing the entry point signs. So option A was seen as very much the worst case scenario.

- h) The statistic at paragraph 34 needed to be treated with some care. It was not measurable but was an indication of how costs of the project compared in relative terms to visitor expenditure across the Park. It was not in itself a justification for the project, and the aim was simply to set the costs in context. The long term objective with the entry point markers was in effect to change people's behaviour as a result of them realising that they were in a very special place. This equally was very difficult to measure.
- i) Figures for the Park Authority's contribution to the cost of the project had changed during the life of the project. To some extent this reflected the uncertainty over the funding coming from partners as this had evolved. The board had been kept up to date in the various Board papers as the situation developed. Partners had generally seen it as very much the CNPA's job to lead and to fund the majority of the costs of this project.
- j) Further to paragraph 31, the extent of maintenance costs and the responsibility for these was queried. Grass cutting would be the main element of maintenance, and even this would be rendered less crucial by the fact that the signs were going to be on a cobbled base providing some distance between the base of the sign and the nearest grass. All signs would be located on land that was already maintained as part of a road maintenance contract.
- k) The work of all the officials involved in this project was commended by the Board.

9. The paper was approved as follows:

- a) **The Board noted the completion of the development work undertaken to date and the recommendations on location and design of granite markers and associated landscaping;**
- b) **The Board approved expenditure of £328,000 over two financial years (£120,000 in 05/06 and £208,000 in 06/07) to implement phase 1 of the project at 21 sites on the non-trunk roads;**
- c) **The Board approved phase 2 of the project in principle and noted that a further Board paper would be presented in due course with a recommendation to approve expenditure of between £237,000 and £500,000 (as set out at table 3).**

10. Action:

- a) **A short summary note to be provided to all Board Members showing the costs and breakdown of costs for the project and setting these in context so that Members had a clear basis for responding to question from the public. (VSR Team).**

Corporate Plan Theme 5 (Paper 2)

- 11. The paper was introduced by David Cameron and set out the work to date on the 5th Strategic Aim of the Corporate Plan, namely "to be an open, innovative and professional organisation that engages effectively with the public and behaves with integrity". The establishment of a Staff Consultative Forum, with the Board represented by Eric Baird and Anne MacLean, and implementation of a staff appraisal system were highlighted as two key achievements over the last six months.

12. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) It was noted that the Head of Communications post had been vacant since last March and in the meantime Karen Archer and Alison Fleming worked extremely hard to continue to deliver on the main streams of the work of the Communications Group. They were congratulated.
- b) Further to paragraph 11, and noting that further work on the opinion polling was awaiting the arrival of the new Head of Communications, it was agreed that it would be helpful for the draft report to be circulated to Board Members, but with the clear caveat that this was still a draft.
- c) The website remained an important and powerful tool for communication by the Cairngorms National Park Authority. Work had continued on developing the organisation's website and populating it with information. However, work on a coherent strategy for developing the site in conjunction with all the appropriate links to other sites would await the arrival of the new Head of Communications.
- d) Work had continued on producing a range of publications by the Park Authority, the use of the house style needed to be properly embedded in all publications, and further work was needed on further distribution mechanisms. This should also involve an analysis of current mechanisms, usage and uptake.
- e) In response to a query, it was reported that paragraph 33 was referring essentially to a stress at work audit which was currently one of the biggest concerns for the Health and Safety Executive.
- f) Further to paragraphs 30 and 31, it was reported that the Efficient Government Initiative comprised two streams. The first of these involved considering whether or not there were efficiencies to be gained by sharing back office functions such as finance, training, HR, etc with other public agencies. This was in hand as described at paragraph 30. As part of this, the Scottish Executive's "on the ground" initiative was requiring all public bodies to examine whether or not they could co-locate. This was not expected to impinge greatly on the CNPA, although if the organisation considered any major changes to its office accommodation, it would need to consider whether or not it could contemplate sharing accommodation with other public bodies. The second strand to the Efficient Government work was arguably even more important and longer term, and involved considering whether there were closer linkages at the strategic and policy making level. Examples might include a common approach to grant giving, or a common approach to consultation. These were elements that would be taken up in the National Park Plan.
- g) On leaflet distribution it was suggested that local members could be able to help with distributing to community councils and other local outlets such as post offices etc. It was noted in passing that the print run on the CNPA Grants leaflets needed to be expanded.
- h) In respect of paragraphs 34 and 35, it was confirmed that we would, where possible, be looking at the "second level impacts" of our expenditure by considering the Authority's purchasing processes.

AOCB

13. The briefing note to all Members on the use of the Cairngorms Brand, referred to at paragraph 4a of the previous meeting, was needed urgently.
14. Comments were made on a number of leaflets which had attracted particularly favourable comment from the public: the “What’s On in 2005” Guide, the Visitor Guide to the Cairngorms National Park, and the Sustainable Tourism Leaflet had all received very favourable comment.
15. Members recorded their appreciation of the huge amount of staff time which had been put into manning stands at shows throughout the Park area during the summer.
16. It was noted that at one of the early consultation meetings on the Local Plan, an issue had been raised about footpaths along trunk roads. Hopefully, the Scottish Executive had now undertaken to do a feasibility study on this.

Date of Next Meeting

17. Friday 23rd September, at the Ben Mhor Hotel, Grantown. This would be a special Board Meeting to consider a paper on the Speyside Way Extension.