
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at The Village Hall, Newtonmore on Friday 11th March 2005 at 2.00pm

PRESENT

Eric Baird	William McKenna
Stuart Black	Sandy Park
Duncan Bryden	Gregor Rimell
Sally Dowden	David Selfridge (Items 1-7)
Douglas Glass	Joyce Simpson
Lucy Grant	Sheena Slimon
David Green (Items 1-4, 7)	Richard Stroud
Bruce Luffman (Items 1-7)	Andrew Thin
Eleanor Mackintosh	Susan Walker
Anne MacLean	Andrew Rafferty
Alastair MacLennan	

In Attendance:

Danny Alexander	Jane Hope
David Cameron	Don McKee
Pete Crane	Fiona Munro
Murray Ferguson	Fiona Newcombe
Nick Halfhide	Debbie Strang
Andrew Harper	
Patricia Hamilton	

Apologies:

Angus Gordon
Marcus Humphrey
Bob Wilson
Basil Dunlop

Welcome and Introduction

1. The Convenor welcomed all present to the first Board meeting at Newtonmore.

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

2. The minutes of the previous meeting (11th February 2005) were approved with one minor amendment: paragraph 16(b) this should read "the general approach to staffing levels at paragraph 16".

Matters Arising

3. The action points arising were as follows:
 - a) Paragraph 9(a): proposals for linking income from direct sales of branded products to environmental projects will be taken forward by the Brand Management Committee;
 - b) Paragraph 17(a): the draft Corporate Plan had been sent to the Scottish Executive for approval;
 - c) Paragraph 17(b): the Easy Read Guide to the Corporate Plan and Annual Report was in hand;
 - d) Paragraph 17(c): the Operational Plan for 2005/06 would be brought to the Board meeting in April.

The CNPA's Strategic Role in Housing Development (Paper 3)

4. (Note: this paper was brought forward from Agenda Item 7 to Agenda Item 5 with the agreement of the Board.) Andrew Harper and Don McKee introduced the paper which set out the CNPA's strategic role in housing development, and also proposed various strands of work for a more detailed consideration of policies for possible inclusion in the Cairngorms Local Plan. The paper set out 5 activity areas in which the CNPA had a role:
 - a) Co-ordinating partner activity and sharing best practice;
 - b) Setting the strategic framework via the Park Plan, Local Plan and Housing Strategy;
 - c) Building the evidence base;
 - d) Piloting new approaches in both policy and practice;
 - e) Development control.
5. More detail on these 5 activity areas was set out in the paper. The paper also set out four main streams of work for developing the policies relating to the provision of affordable housing. In broad terms these were as follows:
 - a) Setting aside a proportion of any new development for affordable housing recognising that a clear definition of the price that constitutes "affordable" would be required.
 - b) Creating a separate market for new development that was tied to meeting the needs of people who are resident or working in the Park;
 - c) Requiring planning permission for a change of use from a permanent house to a second or holiday home;
 - d) Restricting new houses to use as a principal residence.

6. In discussion the following points were made:
- a) At paragraph 16 a clear distinction was needed between second homes and holiday homes, the latter being an integral part of the local economy.
 - b) Paragraphs 13-17 of the paper tended to focus on houses for sale. It was essential to give similar consideration to the rented sector, and in particular the opportunities provided for affordable houses for rent through the private rented sector. Work was needed on creating a distinct market for affordable rental as well as one for affordable purchase.
 - c) Housing rents were set either by the Council or by Housing Associations, in which case rents were generally capped. The CNPA had no control over the maximum rental levels which were thus set.
 - d) The strategic role of the CNPA should include ensuring good quality design, not just low cost - good quality did not necessarily mean high cost. The CNPA's role in ensuring good quality design should encompass the concepts of sustainability, energy conservation, and use of local materials. It should also include consideration of issues such as housing density, and how houses blended in with the natural landscape.
 - e) The CNPA had a role in engendering innovation within the Park. There were already some good examples, and it would be important to embed good practice in house design throughout the National Park.
 - f) While there was a widely shared view that there were too many second homes within the Park, it would be important to develop robust criteria for making decisions on how many second homes were acceptable, and what level was considered as excessive. Issues such as infrastructure and availability of services might well be issues that were encompassed in such criteria.
 - g) Housing associations had been responsible for some good examples of high quality housing, often including good ideas on energy efficiency, which was particularly important for tenants on relatively low incomes. It might be useful for the Board to visit some examples of good practice on design. It was important for the CNPA to move quickly in developing practical policies on sustainability and energy efficiency in design (eg a policy on low energy lighting).
 - h) It would be useful to establish a database of all the public sector owned land in the Park to give some idea of the land available for land banking.
 - i) Consideration should be given to involving landowners in the building (or renovation) of houses for rent. This would help to involve land in private ownership in solving the local housing shortage.
 - j) It would be helpful for CNPA housing policies to incorporate the principle of priority being given to local people whenever affordable became available.
 - k) Housing policies should give consideration to housing extensions as well as complete new build.
 - l) The principle of shared equity should be contracted in to any new policies on affordable housing as this was a more effective way of ensuring that individuals benefited from the investment of their own capital.
 - m) Mechanisms should be investigated for designating land in the Local Plan for affordable housing only.
 - n) The fundamental question remained as to whether or not there was a theoretical limit to the population which could be sustained within the National Park before damaging the very qualities for which the Park had been created. A related

question was whether or not there should be zoning within the Local Plan to indicate areas where only affordable housing should be permitted.

- o) Any approach to affordable housing needed to ensure that there was a constant movement of people from affordable housing into the unrestricted market thereby constantly releasing houses back into the affordable housing sector.
7. The Convenor summed up the discussion. The first recommendation of the paper concerned the CNPA's strategic role in housing. The Board was broadly content with the proposals in the paper but with the strong proviso that there needed to be added to this that a key role of the CNPA would be to examine how good practice could be embedded across the Park on the range of issues concerning sustainability, energy efficiency, and the environmental footprint of housing in the Park.
8. The second recommendation concerned the streams of work to be taken forward in developing the Local Plan. While the Board was content with those proposals outlined in the paper from paragraph 13-17, a number of other issues had been raised which needed to be considered in the course of more detailed policy development:
 - a) The distinction between second homes and holiday homes for commercial rent;
 - b) Criteria for deciding the number of second homes acceptable within the National Park;
 - c) The rented sector to be considered as important as the owner occupier sector;
 - d) The level of population within the National Park compatible with the special qualities of the Park;
 - e) The importance of innovation, but in a way that recognised geographic diversity;
 - f) Making better use of land in public ownership;
 - g) Use of land by private landowners;
 - h) Local lettings policy;
 - i) Concern about houses being affordable, then extended and becoming no longer affordable;
 - j) Use of shared equity and other measures without creating a two-tier market; and
 - k) Designation of land specifically for affordable houses.
- 9. The Board agreed the recommendations of the paper as follows:**
 - a) The Board agreed the assessment of the CNPA' strategic role in housing development and noted the current work being under taken to coordinate and address housing issues within the Park. This was agreed subject to the proviso set out in paragraph 7 above.**
 - b) The Board approved more detailed consideration of the options set out in the paper at paragraphs 13-17 and for these to be tested as part of the Housing System Analysis Study being conducted by Heriot Watt. This was approved subject to the proviso set out at paragraph 8 above.**
- 10. Action:**
 - a) Further reports to be brought back to the Board as part of reporting on developments with the National Park Plan and the Local Plan during the course of 2005.**

The Sustainable Tourism and Action Plan (Paper 1)

11. Debbie Strang introduced the paper which presented the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan to the Board for endorsement, and recommended that the Strategy formed the basis of an application for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. This paper followed up the approval by the Board in January 2004 of the production of a Sustainable Tourism Strategy to meet the requirement of the Europarc Federation European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in protected areas, and authorisation at the February 2004 Board meeting of expenditure to commission consultants to undertake the majority of this work.
12. The point was made that the Charter placed great emphasis on engaging with all tourism stakeholders in the development of the Strategy. This was reflected in the paper and Strategy in front of the Board, which had been prepared following an extensive tourism businesses survey, a successful workshop with 70 stakeholders, and extensive work by the ViSIT Forum in reviewing and finalising the Strategy. The point was also made that since the Strategy had been completed, work had nevertheless continued on fleshing out the detail of the Action Plan, pinning down the financial implications and the leaders on the various actions.
13. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) The Strategy and Action Plan were welcomed as a good and thorough piece of work.
 - b) Paragraph 3.5 of the Strategy set out strategic objectives. Although this was not a ranked list, nevertheless it would be more consistent with the text of the Strategy to place the objective of "environmental management and conservation" at Objective 1 rather than Objective 7.
 - c) Paragraph 3.2 set out in clear terms the importance of the environment: "the key role for the CNPA tourism is in environmental management, access management, information, interpretation and support for specific initiatives." Later in the same paragraph: "conserving and enhancing environmental quality should be central to the Tourism Strategy with tourism contributing to this where possible". The text was quite clear that conserving and enhancing the environment underpinned the whole of the tourism industry within the Cairngorms National Park.
 - d) The document might usefully make a cross reference to the UK Sustainable Development Strategy which had been launched earlier that week. The UK Strategy had highlighted as a priority environmental conservation taking place alongside community development.
 - e) Paragraph 5.4 of the Strategy concerned monitoring. The question was raised as to whether there should be an indicator which recorded the amounts raised by direct visitor contributions to conserving the natural heritage of the Park (visitor payback schemes). Indicators were an important part of the Strategy and would be refined and developed further as work continued on the Action Plan.
 - f) The question was raised in relation to monitoring the quality of the environment, whether a critical level could be set for the number of tourists above which the special qualities of the area, which attracted tourists in the first place, would be damaged. This had been considered during the preparation of the Strategy which recognised the need to be inclusive in the visitors it attracts and caters for, whilst being clear about the volume and type of tourism activity suited to different parts of the Park; the Strategy clearly recognised that it was the quality of the experience

that was important rather than numbers. In particular there is a need to keep wilderness areas free from pressure.

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

- a) **The Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan were endorsed, subject to two amendments;**
 - **At paragraph 3.5, Objective number 7 should become Objective 1;**
 - **The section at 5.4 on monitoring should incorporate some reference to the need to monitor the amounts raised by visitor payback schemes;**
- b) **The Strategy was endorsed as the basis of the application to Europarc for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.**

15. Action:

- a) **Debbie Strang to submit the CNPA's application to Europarc for the European Charter, and report back to the Board on developments, which were expected around July 2005.**

[David Green left the meeting]

Developing Park-Wide Ranger Service Provision (Paper 2)

16. Pete Crane and Murray Ferguson introduced the paper which reported on the progress to date in developing a Park-wide approach to ranger services in the Park, and sought endorsement for further streams of work. Before the discussion started, it was noted for the record that two Board Members were employed as rangers; this was not considered as any conflict of interest but was simply noted for the record. It was also noted that Local Authorities were ranger service managers, but this did not represent any conflict for the local councillors present.

17. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) In response to a question about the current funding of rangers in the Highland Council, it was explained that Highland Council funded two full time ranger posts within the National Park. The CNPA paid a small grant for a ranger as part Explore Abernethy.
- b) Paragraph 25 sets out a number of principles for Park-wide ranger provision. The wording at 25(c) needed to also reflect the importance of linkages between a ranger service and the local communities. However, it was acknowledged that 25(d) and 25(i) did to some extent cover this.
- c) The principle of an even spread of ranger service across the Park was not necessarily what was needed. The provision of ranger services should reflect demand and the pressures on different areas. Not every area of the Park required management, and indeed for some areas, the attraction for visitors was the silence and the solitude.
- d) Any transfer of rangers from one organisation to another would have financial implications. Any such transfer should be matched by a transfer of appropriate funding.
- e) It would be helpful to have an analysis of the distribution of the current ranger services. (It was noted this had been made available to the ranger services)

working group and could be made available to other Board Members who were interested.)

- f) Any arrangement which involved the CNPA taking over some public ranger services alongside grant aiding private ranger services ran the risk of creating a two tier approach which might not be helpful.
- g) SNH were currently looking closely at the role of rangers in the delivery of the new access provisions. The CNPA were a statutory consultee, liaison needed to be much closer between the CNPA and SNH than was implied by simply that of a statutory consultee.
- h) The paper represented an enormous amount of work on an extremely complex issue. Paragraph 11 of the paper made clear that at least three pieces of work were in hand which would have a direct influence on ranger services and what they do in the Park. It made sense to keep all options open until there was a clearer picture from these three strands of work as to what was wanted from ranger services.
- i) The conclusion that option 5 should be ruled out did not fit logically with the idea that we would have in a few years a National Park Plan which placed a duty on all partners to work to that Plan. If there was an effective National Park Plan in place, it was questionable whether there would be a need for the CNPA to directly employ rangers that are currently employed by other partners.
- j) The difficulties with option 2, as outlined at paragraph 30, were not insurmountable, being more a reflection of the internal organisation of SNH. It might well be possible to put in place a single point of contact within SNH. It would seem on the face of it easier to get SNH to reorganise internally than to reorganise six different ranger services.
- k) The paper was not seeking an irreversible decision, just looking to narrow the options and in this context option 1 and option 4 appeared to be the extremes which could be ruled out even at this early stage. The difficulty with waiting for feedback from the strategies emerging through the work outlined at paragraph 11 was the time that this would take. There was already pressure for the CNPA to put in place mechanisms to address the delivery of an Outdoor Access Strategy as well as its role as the Access Authority. The actions in the Sustainable Tourism Strategy would be requiring mechanisms for delivery in the next few months. Added to this, the complexity of the existing 13 different ranger services within the Park meant that progress would inevitably be quite slow. The extra layers of bureaucracy referred to at paragraph 30 in relation to option 2 concerned the necessary existence of concordats and SLAs (Service Level Agreements) which would be needed. The result would be each separate ranger service in effect having two masters.
- l) The principle of ranger services being linked to communities was accepted. The important point here was conducting a needs analysis to see where ranger services were needed. Feedback indicated that all the customer groups were looking for locally delivered services rather than centralised services.
- m) It made a certain amount of sense for the CNPA to be in charge of rangers in the National Park, given its function as the Access Authority. Discussions with the relevant Local Authorities would be important in this respect.
- n) The paper appeared to be examining mechanisms before there was clarity on what was needed.

18. The Convenor summed up the discussion as follows. The extensive amount of work that had been undertaken to date was noted and indeed welcomed on what was a very complex subject. There was broad endorsement for the general principles for a Park-wide ranger provision as set out at paragraph 25 of the paper. However, a number of additional points had been raised which needed to be reflected:
- a) Community involvement with ranger services provision;
 - b) The need to reflect demand rather than providing a general spread of provision;
 - c) The dangers of creating a two tier system;
 - d) The financial implications of any transfer of responsibilities.

The Board was giving a cautious endorsement to these general principles and recognising that further thought was required.

19. The discussion on which of the five options at paragraph 27 should be the focus for further work suggested that options 1 and 4 were recognised as being significantly less viable than the others, but equally restricting work to options 3 and 5 was too limiting at this stage.

20. The Board approved the paper as follows:

- a) **The work to date was noted and welcomed;**
- b) **The general principles at paragraph 25 were endorsed as principles that were being developed, in other words as work in progress.**
- c) **Work should continue in investigating the full implications of delivering options 2, 3 and 5 as described in the paper.**
- d) **Additionally, it was agreed that close consultation with Board Members was needed as this complex work was taken forward. Further consideration should be given to establishing a smaller group to focus on this issue, as well as reporting back to the whole Board at appropriate points.**

21. Action:

- a) **Murray Ferguson to bring forward proposals for closer involvement of a small number of interested Board Members on Park-wide ranger service provision;**
- b) **A further report on progress to be brought to the whole Board before the end of 2005.**

[David Selfridge and Bruce Luffman left the meeting]

Update on Corporate Plan Theme 5 (Paper 4)

22. Danny Alexander and David Cameron introduced this paper which was for information. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) Considerable effort was put into communicating with a wide range of local and national audiences. In doing so staff tended to focus on their particular areas of responsibility; getting the more general messages across about the bigger picture was really a matter for Members. The open evening prior to Board meetings were a useful forum for such communication and feedback, and while attendance by Members was generally good, it would be useful if a rota was established.

- b) Work was continuing on developing the Website, in particular to augment the content. Work was also looking at an e-mail Newsletter, and the use of the Website for delivering e-planning. Work on the Interpretive Strategy for the Park would also address the broader question of Web-based communication.
- c) It was important that CNPA offices were accessible and welcoming places for those looking for information.
- d) A mini studio was being installed in the CNPA office at Grantown-on-Spey so that interviews could be conducted for the media from Grantown-on-Spey, rather than travelling large distances to studios.
- e) Plans were in hand to ensure a presence at agricultural and other shows throughout the summer.
- f) Following a Green Office Audit, plans were being drawn up for both offices for implementation over the next couple of years.

Cairngorms Leader + Update (Paper 5)

23. Nick Halfhide introduced the paper which was for information. In discussion the following points were made:
- a) This was an extremely successful project and congratulations were offered to all the staff concerned. There had been much positive feedback.
 - b) Funding for this particular project would run out in 2006, and the CNPA and its partners would need to give careful thought during the next year to what scheme or schemes might replace the current Leader +.

Point of Entry Markers at Railway Stations (Paper 6)

24. Pete Crane introduced the paper which was for information. In discussion the following points were made:
- a) The confirmation that National Park entry point signs would be appearing at railway stations between late April and early May was welcomed.
 - b) In time the main Aviemore station sign will require to be a bespoke design to match the existing listed building surroundings.
 - c) Interim entry point signs on roads were in hand, and expected to appear in late April and early May. This involved working with four different contractors.
 - d) In publicising the arrival of the interim signs, it would be important to confirm to the general public that these were indeed only temporary signs and that the permanent granite markers were still planned for delivery in the next two years.
 - e) Brief feedback was given on progress with the permanent entry point markers. Designers had been commissioned to develop the initial schematic designs of the granite marker so that they embrace the newly launched Cairngorms brand. It was likely that some adaptation in the original design would be needed. There was some concern expressed about changes to the design of the granite markers, given that these had already been well discussed and communicated to communities. Nevertheless, having engaged a professional designer to deal with this issue, it was not the Board's role to design, but to ensure that the outcome was properly researched and consulted upon before proceeding.

[Gregor Rimell left the meeting]

AOCB

25.

- a) The Convenor reported on progress with establishing the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF). The Board had previously agreed to 20 seats on the LOAF. These had been recruited/appointed from the 75 applicants and the successful 20 candidates had been informed. However, the need for a direct link between the LOAF and CNPA had become increasingly clear recently; this was supported by the Paths for All Partnership and indeed was common on other access fora. It was therefore proposed to increase membership to 21 members so that one seat could be for a Board Member of the CNPA. The Board agreed to this modification. The convenor then reported that in view of the difficulties of ensuring an appropriate geographical spread as well as sectoral spread in the membership it was proposed that the Board Member should come from an area which was in danger of being under represented. It was therefore proposed that David Selfridge (Angus) should sit on the LOAF. This was agreed by the Board.
- b) The Convenor referred back to the previous Board meeting at which it had been agreed that a Brand Management Committee should be set up to oversee the use of the Cairngorms Brand. It was proposed that 2 Board Members should sit on that Committee: Eleanor Mackintosh, in view of her links with the Food Marketing Group, and Sally Dowden, given her knowledge and experience of the tourism industry. These proposals were agreed by the Board.
- c) The Convenor thanked everyone for their donations to the "Red Nose Day Fund", which stood at £173 (subsequently increased to £223). He acknowledged the generosity of all those who had contributed, and welcomed the fact that a public body was able to make its contribution to such a worthwhile cause.

Date of Next Meeting

26. Friday 8th April at Carrbridge.