
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held in the Village Hall, Braemar on Friday 12th August 2005 at 1.30pm

PRESENT

Eric Baird	Alastair MacLennan
Stuart Black	William McKenna
Duncan Bryden	Sandy Park
Sally Dowden	David Selfridge
Basil Dunlop	Joyce Simpson
Douglas Glass	Sheena Slimon
David Green	Richard Stroud
Marcus Humphrey (part of meeting)	Andrew Thin
Bruce Luffman	Susan Walker
Anne MacLean	

In Attendance:

Pete Crane	Rita Callander
Nick Halfhide	Andrew Harper
Jane Hope	Andy Rinning
Debbie Strang	John Thorne

Apologies:

Angus Gordon	Lucy Grant
Eleanor Mackintosh	Andrew Rafferty
Gregor Rimell	Bob Wilson

Welcome and Introduction

1. The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

2. The minutes of the previous meeting (1st July 2005) were approved with no changes.

Matters Arising

3. Further to paragraph 23, it was agreed that a briefing note should be sent round to all members setting out more detail on exactly how to respond to queries from the public about applying for use of the Cairngorms Brand.
4. **Action:**
 - a) **Andrew Harper to circulate briefing note to all members**

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (Oral Presentation)

5. Debbie Strang announced to the Board that the CNPA had been awarded the Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism in protected areas. This followed the submission of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan in March and the two day assessment in the Park area in May. She noted that the Cairngorms was the first UK National Park to receive this award and joined a growing number of Parks and protected areas throughout Europe who had demonstrated a clear commitment to the management of tourism in a sustainable way.
6. This was a significant achievement at such an early stage of the Cairngorms National Park's life. In gaining the award, the emphasis had been on putting in place good processes for developing the Strategy and including key partners who included a wide range of public bodies such as the LECs, local authorities, SNH, Forestry Commission Scotland, NTS, as well as tourism businesses, the communities, tourist associations, voluntary groups, and conservation interests. The award provided an endorsement at European level that all the key areas for action including environmental management and conservation, marketing, information and interpretation, quality and welcome, distinctiveness and discovery, enterprise and economy had been covered and prioritised. To receive the award at such an early stage in the Park's existence was unusual and there would be a review in five years time of how well the Strategy and Action Plan had been delivered in practice.
7. Central to the Strategy was the recognition that for tourism businesses in the area the top priority for action concerns the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, as this was the key reason for visitors coming to the area. There was a marketing advantage for businesses located within a National Park committed to this priority action, and this would be used by the CNPA to raise the profile of the area, and to support of any applications for European funding. The crux of the Charter had been the development of a straightforward and realistic plan for the sustainable management of tourism in the area. That was based in part on the priorities of tourism businesses and clearly outlined the sorts of projects that the Park Authority would be leading on, or working with partners on. It would be essential to promote a clear understanding of what it was hoped that all partners would collectively achieve. A summary booklet had been produced and would be provided to all businesses. Several Board Members and staff would be attending the Europarc Conference in the Netherlands at the end of September to sign and receive the Charter.
8. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) This had been a team effort, but Debbie Strang had been very much the driving force and was congratulated on the achievement.
 - b) The CNPA would be part of a network of other Parks and protected areas who had received the award, and it would be important to continue to exchange information and experience on best practice.
 - c) The Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan would be an important plank of the National Park Plan and Local Plan. Even though ahead of the preparation of the National Park Plan and Local Plan, the Sustainable Tourism Strategy would continue to evolve and develop in line with the development of these other Plans and any emerging new ideas.
 - d) The Charter had been awarded before the Strategy and Action Plan had actually been delivered, this was unexpected, and reflected the commitment shown across the Cairngorms area to working in partnership to achieve a set of shared goals. There would be a mid-term review in 2007 as well as the five year review in 2010. In both cases it would be essential to show tangible evidence of progress with delivery.
 - e) The question was asked as to how the Charter translated into commercial advantage for businesses. In answer it was pointed out that the relationship was an indirect one and flowed from the ways of working that were implicit in the Charter, as well as the fact of having an agreed Strategy. There should also be advantages flowing from being able to make stronger applications for European funding on tourism issues. It would be open to any business to make use of the fact in its literature that it was in a National Park that had achieved the European Charter status. This point would be rolled up into the Park Brand.
 - f) As well as raising awareness throughout the Park and amongst businesses, it would be important to raise awareness of the Charter more widely, for example within the Scottish Executive and other potential funding partners.
 - g) It was recognised that take up of the current Green Tourism Business Scheme needed to be encouraged and this required looking at the reasons why many businesses do not see the continued value of becoming GTBS members. The idea had been floated with Visitscotland of using the National Park as a pilot for taking this work forward had been raised with Visitscotland.
 - h) It would be important to raise awareness amongst visitors. This could be done through pre-arrival information, websites etc. It might be worth acquiring a relatively large number of signed certificates so that these could be displayed in prominent sites such as tourist information centres etc.
 - i) Ian Dunlop of Visitscotland was asked to comment, and observed that the commitment in the National Park to the European Charter would undoubtedly help in tourism development and promotion. The CNPA were to be congratulated in acquiring the Charter so early in the life of the Park and getting the Strategy and Action Plan in place. It was incumbent on Visitscotland to recognise this and promote it. The challenge now was to “walk the walk”.
 - j) Communication was so important that a more considered strategy was required in relation to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. There was a good story to tell here and a concerted effort to raise awareness far and wide was justified.
9. The Convenor summed up the three main strands of the discussion as follows:
- a) Award of the Charter was an excellent achievement, but it was now essential that the Strategies and Action Plan were delivered and be seen to be delivered;

- b) As part of this it would be essential to raise awareness widely and this required a strategic approach to communications;
- c) Further thought was needed on exactly how businesses might use this award to deliver long and short-term advantages.

10. Action:

- a) **Tourism team to develop strategic communication plan for raising awareness and understanding of the Charter and its implications for businesses within the Park**

The CNPA's Role in Cultural Heritage (paper 1)

11. Andrew Harper introduced the paper which aimed to prompt a discussion by the Board on the CNPA's role in relation to cultural heritage issues, with a view to informing a more detailed Board decision paper in October. In discussion the following points were made:
- a) Cultural heritage was potentially a very broad term and could mean all things to all people. For the CNPA to play a meaningful role, it would be important to try and focus more clearly on a limited number of themes, for example living landscapes, spirit of the Cairngorms, etc. Developing a set of guiding themes along these lines would be helpful in developing a focused strategy.
 - b) In relation to paragraph 6a, while cultural heritage was undoubtedly a cross cutting theme, there was a danger of developing a "tick box" approach unless cultural heritage was championed in its own right.
 - c) In relation to paragraph 6d, a strategic approach based on principles would be important, provided this did not provide too much of a straight jacket ignoring local diversity.
 - d) An informal group had met to discuss issues related to place names and what actions might be taken to conserve and enhance them in the park. One of the actions identified was producing an introductory leaflet, the CNPA was currently taking this forward.
 - e) Gaelic was an important element of the cultural heritage in the Park. Gaelic place names were one manifestation of this; there needed to be research into the gaps in Gaelic material in the National Park. The Gaelic language needed a boost within the Park.
 - f) Land use activities such as farming were and continued to be an important part of the Cairngorms cultural heritage. There was a lot of evidence on the ground of past activity including field systems, shielings and abandoned settlements.
 - g) The planning system did not appear to be able to take account of buildings which were not listed, but which were nevertheless important as part of the area's social and cultural heritage. While one could not stifle change, it was important to be aware of the consequences of our actions and what we might be losing.
 - h) People, and particularly visitors, were enthusiastic about some elements of the cultural heritage.
 - i) A broad interpretation of cultural heritage could extend to arts based activities and the use of arts to interpret surroundings. There was a question as to how you draw a line between cultural heritage on the one hand and this broader interpretation of cultural activities on the other.

[Marcus Humphrey arrived]

- j) It was important to consider one's audience. Tourists were an important part of the local economy. Businesses would clearly want to focus on what attracted the visitors. By having themes for cultural heritage activities, one could create a focus and avoid activities being spread too thinly. For example focusing on Gaelic place names might be even more effective if the focus was put on the names of hills, with the idea of targeting hill walkers. Focussing on themes and target audience together would be more likely to provide effective action.
- k) While tourists might expect a focus on tartanry, contemporary youth culture would extend to mountain biking etc. The Highland Year of Culture 2007 was recognising a wide range of activities from archaeology up to IT – it was not just focused on traditional culture.

12. The Convenor summed up the points made under the headings presented in paragraph 6 of the paper:

- a) There was concern that unless cultural heritage had its own separate focus, it could be lost. The analogy here was that the natural heritage – while clearly cross cutting, it is nevertheless important in its own right.
- b) Broadly content with the definition.
- c) Contemporary culture was also important, but the focus must be on what is unique and special to the Cairngorms.
- d) A community-based approach was important in order to reflect cultural diversity and the evolving nature of cultural heritage. The CNPA had a leadership role in focussing resources on those aspects of culture which were special to the Park area.
- e) Two specific aspects had been mentioned: Gaelic language, and cultural landscapes.

13. Action:

- a) **Andrew Harper to bring a further paper to the Board in October.**

Highland 2007 and the Cairngorm Festival (paper 2)

14. John Thorne introduced the paper which considered options for the CNPA to support Highlands Year of Culture 2007 (H 2007), including the possibility of establishing a Cairngorms Festival. The paper sought a steer on two issues:

- a) The principle of CNPA involvement in H 2007 and whether the focus should be on Badenoch and Strathspey or pan-Park;
- b) The various options for participation in H 2007 and a steer on the favoured option

15. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) The title “Highland” Year of Culture was unfortunate; the Cairngorms were part of the Highlands and so should be included, implying that the initiative should be pan-Park. However funding was clearly geared to only one side of the Cairngorms and this was of concern.
- b) There were many existing events in and around the National Park which might fit within this umbrella initiative and it would therefore be essential to consult communities if there were to be a Park-based initiative. It would be particularly important to avoid conflict between communities in the Park and those just outside.
- c) Levels of awareness were already fairly high, and people in communities were already discussing H 2007 and thinking about what events they would want to see happen.

- d) Groups would come to the CNPA looking for match funding. One possible approach was for the CNPA to use its resources to fund those groups not getting money from Highland Council.
- e) Support should be given to events that had a lasting benefit and this should be build into the criteria for funding.
- f) One possibility was to put match funding into a large number of small events which could then all be badged under the term Cairngorms Festival.
- g) There was the question as to whether the CNPA should be actively promoting a Cairngorms Festival, or whether it should simply be supporting existing initiatives. Having two events might be seen as confusing. The point was also made that 2007 was only eighteen months away and provided relatively little time for planning a big event such as a Cairngorms Festival. It was important to avoid being dragged into promoting a big event without having thought it through carefully first. Now might be the time to think about the Cairngorms Festival beyond 2007, which might usefully build on some of the enthusiasm and initiatives to come out of H 2007.
- h) A Cairngorms Festival should not be a priority. It was important to stick to the objectives set out in the current Corporate Plan, and avoid being stretched “too thin” and fail to deliver on priorities. Some of the things being undertaken by the CNPA would in any event dovetail nicely with H 2007. The effect of H 2007 would be to bring many partners together and raise awareness of culture in the area. The idea of a cultural pledge had emerged from the application for the 2008 City of Culture. All of these things would create a momentum which suggested that there might be mileage in hosting an international festival in the National Park but after 2007. This would provide an important boost to the area. A Cairngorms Festival was an action under the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan. This would be looked at irrespective of H 2007, but clearly there were synergies. If there were to be a Cairngorms Festival, it would clearly need to be done in partnership with other organisations and communities. In the meantime it would be possible to support community level events as part of H 2007.
- i) The CNPA should not be sucked into organising a festival; it would be for the CNPA to facilitate others to do it.
- j) While the idea of making H 2007 a pan-Park event was attractive, there were dangers. It would be difficult to marry this event up with a number of well established events which already took place in for example Ballater and Aboyne. A genuine pan-Park festival might be better done separately and in a later year.
- k) The clear priorities for the CNPA were the production of the Local Plan and the National Park Plan in the next two years. Planning a big festival was a major undertaking and the CNPA should not be distracted at this stage from its priority of producing the Local Plan and National Park Plan.
- l) There was still a tendency particularly in the Scottish Executive to consider “Highland” to be just the Highland Council Area.

16. The Convenor summed up as follows:

- a) On paragraph 13, there was a general feeling that the CNPA should be involved in H 2007, and that this should be on a pan-Park basis.
- b) There was a general feeling that the CNPA should avoid being diverted into a major undertaking such as a new festival, and should stick to its priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan. However there was a sense that H 2007 was an opportunity to further some of the Park’s aims and the CNPA grant scheme could be used to match fund

events under 2007. There was a feeling we should try and extend H 2007 into the rest of the park and to help spread the enthusiasm.

- c) The idea of an international Cairngorms Festival was attractive, not in 2007, but possibly in future years building on the enthusiasm generated by H 2007.

17. Action:

- a) **John Thorne to bring a further Board paper forward in due course.**

Corporate Plan: Theme 1 (paper 3)

18. Pete Crane introduced the paper which updated the Board of work on delivering the first strategic theme of the Corporate Plan (“to enable current and future generations to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the Park in a way that fosters those qualities and supports the activities of others”). In discussion the following points were made:

- a) The John Muir Award was an extremely successful project and the Board would receive a paper early in 2006 on the possibilities for the long-term future of this project. Other project-partners were being very supportive.
- b) The consideration of the future of the project would take account of the argument that in projects such as this, the deliverers can become semi-autonomous, doing away with the need for a project leader. Nevertheless, experience elsewhere suggest that there was always a need for award management of some kind to keep the momentum of the project going, even if this was no longer a full time post. This would all be considered in the paper to the Board in early 2006.
- c) Paragraph 16 referred to the fact that two tourist information centres had now been branded and plans were at an advanced design stage for four more. The TIC at Crathie had not been amongst the first TICs to be branded, because although visitor numbers there were very high, organisation of space in that TIC was particularly difficult. However, Crathie was on the list of TICs to be branded.
- d) The members of the Visitor Services and Recreation team were congratulated on what they had achieved to date.

AOCB

19. The Convenor drew the Board’s attention to the letter received from Ross Finnie (Minister for Environment and Rural Development) about the handling of a complaint against Sally Dowden. While the Minister had endorsed the decision of the Board and the matter was now closed, some 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. Members agreed that the Convenor should contact the Scottish Executive to clarify the matter.

Date of Next Meeting

20. Friday the 9th of September, Edzell.