
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at The Cairngorm Hotel, Aviemore on Friday 13th January 2006 at 1.30pm

PRESENT

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| Eric Baird | Alastair MacLennan |
| Stuart Black | William McKenna |
| Duncan Bryden | Sandy Park |
| Sally Dowden | Andrew Rafferty |
| Basil Dunlop | Gregor Rimell |
| Douglas Glass | David Selfridge |
| Angus Gordon | Joyce Simpson |
| Lucy Grant | Sheena Slimon |
| Marcus Humphrey | Andrew Thin |
| Bruce Luffman | Susan Walker |
| Eleanor Mackintosh | Bob Wilson |
| Anne MacLean | |

In Attendance:

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| Jane Hope | David Cameron |
| Murray Ferguson | Nick Halfhide |
| Fiona Newcombe | Francoise van Buuren |
| Don McKee | Hamish Trench |
| Heather Galbraith | Bob Grant |
| Sandra Middleton | Andy Rinning |

Apologies:

David Green
Richard Stroud

Welcome and Apologies

1. The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies as above. It was agreed to make one change to the order of the agenda, and to move item 9

(Operational Plan Update) to be taken immediately after item 5 (Outdoor Access Strategy).

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

2. The minutes of the meeting of the 2nd December 2005 were approved subject to two minor typographical errors.

Matters Arising

3. None

Outdoor Access Strategy: Key Issues Emerging (Paper 1)

4. Bob Grant and Murray Ferguson introduced the paper which summarised progress in developing an outdoor access strategy for the National Park and prompted discussion on some of the key issues that were emerging. The issues for discussion were:
 - a) Structure of the strategy – as set out in Annex 3.
 - b) Auditing of key issues as shown in Annex 2. Did this capture all the issues that impacted on outdoor access in the park?
 - c) Action themes or policies, as set out at paragraphs 13 and 18. Was the proposed way of dealing with policies the right one, and was the level of detail right?
 - d) Action mechanisms (ways of delivering policies) as set out at paragraph 20. Did the six mechanisms outlined capture the full range at the CNPA's disposal?
 - e) Eight action areas as set out in Annex 4. Did these provide a good basis to capture the different sorts of outdoor access issues in the Park?
5. Work on the strategy to date had been very much a collaborative effort and many people had contributed. Particular thanks were recorded to those Board Members who had attended the stakeholder meeting; Joyce Simpson who had sat on the Steering Group; David Selfridge who attended the Cairngorm Local Outdoor Access Forum discussion. Thanks were also recorded to Sandra Middleton who had done the lion's share of the background work.
6. Discussion focused initially on the key issues in Annex 2 and how these might be addressed. The following points were made:
 - a) Information provision was important so that walkers were aware of their responsibilities, in particular with respect to dogs and fire.
 - b) There was some discussion on multi use paths. Some felt these were inherently problematic, as bringing together horses, bikes, and walkers for example, was considered to be dangerous. This was particularly the case for wheelchair users and horses. It was suggested that paths should have defined uses making clear that paths were designated as fit for certain purposes only. Some parts of the Speyside Way permitted horses, while others did not, suggesting that this policy could be replicated on other paths as well. The idea that paths should be "barrier free" as suggested at point 6 in annex 2, needed further thought – providing no barriers to mountain bikes was not compatible with ensuring the safety of

walkers. All of this debate was encapsulated in point 18 of annex 2 about the need to manage potential conflicts between different recreational user groups.

- c) Many issues had a local dimension, and it would not always be appropriate to have a single policy across the whole of the National Park. Many issues needed to be managed at a local level, using local solutions.
- d) The public and landowners needed guidance on liability issues and responsibilities.
- e) The new access legislation gave a broadly based legal right to take access, and this needed to be reconciled with the points made on segregating different users.
- f) Annex 2 contained a mixture of issues, some of them very specific, and some of them about process. The Outdoor Access Strategy needed to create a structure of higher level policies relating to such things as health, social inclusion, etc. providing a framework for the more specific policies.
- g) The list of issues to be addressed needed to take account of fire risk management, and wild camping.
- h) Disabled access takers did not expect to be able to go everywhere, but would like some choice and a variety of paths to use. It ought to be possible to provide advice on which paths were suitable for disabled users and which were not.
- i) The issue of disease risk and its management needed to be added to the list, bearing in mind the consequences of the foot and mouth outbreak a few years ago. It would be important to have measures that can be readily put in place in the event of such disease outbreaks happening again.
- j) Regular effective maintenance was important for paths, and a partnership approach had proved useful in achieving this. The Explore Abernethy Project had encouraged local businesses to contribute to the maintenance of paths, with signs recognising their contribution. This approach could become more the norm than the exception.
- k) There was an issue of scale to be taken into account. The approach to mountain paths needed to be considered across boundaries, given that consistency was essential in respect of people's safety. However, it was perfectly appropriate and safe to have local differences with respect to essentially local paths.
- l) The Outdoor Access Strategy should be generally positive about outdoor access and should not just be focusing on problems.
- m) The Outdoor Access Strategy could not and should not be seen in isolation from other streams of work. For example, it was a potentially useful delivery mechanism for community development.
- n) It would be important to identify a lead person within the Park to bring agencies together in the case of a pan-Park problem such as a disease outbreak, or fire.

7. The Convenor summed up the main points arising from the previous discussion as follows:

- a) The strategy should have a policy context structured in a hierarchical way; the cascade of logic starting with what we were aiming to achieve, flowing through to the actions needed to achieve that.
- b) Regarding policy development, on multi use paths a policy was needed identifying potentially conflicting uses and clarifying what purpose paths were fit for – it would then be “irresponsible use” if the path were used for something

other than this. On consistency of style and information, there would clearly be some paths (e.g. long distance routes) on which consistency of approach was essential, while for local paths there was scope for local distinctiveness. Getting the message across about responsible use of access rights and responsible delivery of those rights was essential. In particular the need was identified on fire, dogs, wild camping.

- c) A policy was needed on disease risk management, and response plans for dealing with disease outbreaks.
 - d) Guidelines on path maintenance should build in the possibility of sponsorship.
 - e) In the hierarchy of policies, making the links to cross cutting areas such as transport was essential.
 - f) On particular policies, (such as car park charging) members had specific points to make and these needed to be captured as the Access Strategy was developed.
8. There was a short discussion about the example in the paper of a policy on car park charging. The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Strategy was not legally enforceable (except of course where it was simply reiterating what was set out in statute) and there was no question of “dictating” to private landowners. The point of such a policy was that this would provide a clear lead to others about what was expected in the Park and would determine how public resources were deployed, for example how grant aid and assistance would be given. It was noted that on this specific issue, as on others, there might need to be a local dimension.
9. It was noted that the Outdoor Access Strategy could not do something different from what was already spelled out in legislation and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, both of which had been approved by Parliament. The Strategy was one stage down in the hierarchy from the national policies set out in the legislation, and in essence was tailoring that national framework to the particular situation of the Cairngorms National Park.

[Angus Gordon, David Selfridge left the meeting]

10. In discussion on the action mechanisms as set out at paragraph 21, the following points were made:
- a) The action mechanisms could usefully be organised under various headings of types of incentive. Potential links to land management contracts needed to be considered.
 - b) A practical incentive might be the provision of a central service for providing signage.
 - c) It would be useful to develop a locally based workforce to deliver the actions needed on paths. Similarly, this implied delivering training to ensure the right skills base locally.
 - d) The idea of working through existing community based trusts was a good one, but with the caveat that different areas might well favour different mechanisms for delivery.
 - e) Ranger services would have an important part to play in delivering outdoor access.

- f) Privately owned land units, particularly the larger ones, had directly employed labour and might therefore have a role in managing outdoor access in the Park, and needed to be included in the list at paragraph 20.
11. There was some discussion on the action areas as proposed at paragraphs 22 and 23, and annex 4. Bob Grant explained that in the process of collecting information for the path audit, they had realised that across the Park there were different areas that had certain issues in common. This had led to the concept of action areas as illustrated. In outline, the rationale was as follows:
- a) A, B – Mountain areas.
 - b) F – generally good path networks and links between these.
 - c) G, D, C and E – generally good path networks but some of the areas had better linkages between networks than others.
 - d) H – unique to Rothiemurchus/Glenmore. A, intensively used recreational area of considerable environmental sensitivity with no through road. Not mirrored anywhere else in the Park.
12. In discussion the following points were made:
- a) The 8 action areas were attempting to find a balance between applying a consistent policy across the National Park, and also allowing for local differences where appropriate.
 - b) The 8 action areas did not imply that any particular action area was more important for outdoor access than any other. But each area had different characteristics and analysis of this would be the basis for policy development and deployment of resources.
 - c) The concept of the areas was useful. In further developing the criteria used to define the areas, indicator measures would be needed for example kilometres of paths, numbers of users etc.
 - d) It was emphasised that the two draft policies (car park charging and outdoor access events) were merely illustrative, and had not been decided in any way. There was still more work to be done in developing these. The point was also emphasised that this Outdoor Access Strategy was one of many strategies which had a very close and important link to the National Park Plan, and much of the work done in developing action plans for the National Park Plan would feed directly into developing the Outdoor Access Strategy.
13. The process for developing the strategy further was outlined as follows. A similar paper would be considered by the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum in January. Taking account of comments from that meeting, together with the Board's comments today, the Strategy would be further developed, with policies at the level of detail illustrated in the paper by the 2 examples (car park charging and organised outdoor events). (Note that these policies were only included in the paper as an illustration, and without prejudice to decisions still to be made on the detail of those policies.) The draft Outdoor Access Strategy itself would be discussed by the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum in March, reworked in the light of those views, and presented to the CNPA Board in April.

Operational Plan 2005/06 Quarter 3 Update (Paper 5)

14. The paper was introduced by the Management Team and reported on progress with delivering the Operational Plan for 2005/06 up to and including quarter 3. The Plan was the first year of the three year Corporate Plan 2005 to 2008 agreed by the Board twelve months earlier. That Plan had identified 20 goals for the three year period, of which 7 were identified as priorities. While the Operational Plan set out activities in some detail, and it was important to monitor progress with these, equally it was important to stand back and review progress in the context of the 7 priorities identified in the Corporate Plan. This could be summarised as follows:
- 1. Duties as the Outdoor Access Authority effectively and efficiently delivered.** On track, with CLOAF up and running, good progress with the Outdoor Access Strategy.
 - 2. National Park Plan in place by end of 2006.** On track. Draft Plan prepared and on track for consultation in the Spring 2006.
 - 3. Local Plan for CNP adopted by Spring 2007.** Good progress; draft Local Plan out to consultation. Some slippage in timing possible, but depending on possible Public Inquiry.
 - 4. Increased access to all forms of housing tenure for Park residents or people who are meeting economic or social needs within the Park.** Good progress, with policies on affordable housing set out in draft Local Plan. Considerable debate still underway.
 - 5. Plans policies and actions developed through transparent and robust process that engages with stakeholders.** Good progress – strategic environmental assessment on Local Plan and National Park Plan well in hand.
 - 6. Justly perceived as an open accountable and trusted organisation.** Good progress – good reports from Auditors; Freedom of Information handled; risk register in place.
 - 7. Effective and efficient development control service, blending planning policy and Park aims.** Good progress with clearing backlog of cases. Robust set of performance indicators now in place.
15. In summary therefore progress was good with the 7 priority goals, and resources would continue to be focused on these areas. The Operational Plan continued to be important as a way of monitoring whether or not actions were being completed, not as an end in themselves, but as a means of delivering the outcomes identified in the Corporate Plan. So the real issue was progress towards those outcomes. The paper in front of the Board used a simple colour coding system for this. Individual lines of activity, and hence particular goals were flagged up as amber if there were some changes to the timetable and/or delivery plans which posed some risk to delivery of the intended outcomes. While this was a simple and arguably quite effective system for monitoring activities, it did not tell the whole story, and the Management Team would be looking to improve the system of reporting on delivery of the Corporate Plan for the coming year. That new system would also look to achieve a better way of incorporating the monitoring by the three Board committees.

16. Further information was then given on the five areas which had been highlighted as amber:
- a) *Development Control (goal 7)*: this goal was marked as amber, not as a reflection of the quality of the advice on planning applications, but a reflection of the fact that a back log of cases had built up. Resources continued to be directed primarily towards processing applications, but more recently additional effort had been put into developing a system for recording and reporting on statistics so that the processing of caseloads could be more efficiently monitored. This was being refined in conjunction with the development of the e-planning system. The new reporting format was handed out to Members for their information and feedback requested. The intention was to produce quarterly reports for Members. On the figures themselves relating to the final quarter of 2005, it was noted that the 43 cases in hand had been reduced to 38 as a result of the morning's planning committee, and was significantly reduced from between 60 and 70 earlier last year. The aim was to reduce the running total to around 30. It was noted that of the cases in hand, 60% were less than six months old. The average determination time was a confusing figure, and was skewed by a number of factors, for example, the fact that thirteen individual house plots had been submitted as individual applications rather than one. It was also skewed by deferrals, the need to complete Section 75 agreements in some cases, and the fact that the CNPA were sometimes waiting for information from others. The new reporting system would attempt to take these factors into account. Overall, all the indicators were moving in the right direction.
17. The Convenor commented that the planning team had delivered an excellent collective effort. The last two years had been a very difficult period, and the team had absorbed a lot of pressure arising from a larger than expected caseload at the same time as the challenge of building a new team to deliver a new function from scratch. The whole team were to be congratulated.
18. *Good quality outdoor access infrastructure (goal 9); wide range of opportunities to experience the special qualities of the Park (goal 11)*. Although good progress had been made in some respects with goal 9, (extension of the Speyside Way for example) the reason for flagging the goal as amber was because of limited progress on a number of one off projects planned for delivery within the year. Delays in finalising joint projects, finding funding and securing contractors had led to slippage - in some cases for reasons outside the CNPA's control. This was an inevitable consequence of complex projects involving a number of partners. The solution was to lengthen the planning horizons so that one was working within a three year time frame, rather than a single year. The development of the Outdoor Access Strategy would assist with this. On goal 11, the issue was staff resources. The delivery of the Point of Entry Marker Project was taking a huge amount of time, as was the effort required to manage the Small Grants Scheme. As a result other things had slipped, for example work on Park signage both within and to the Park.
19. Board Members noted that giving priority to helping people with their grant applications was a good judgement. There was some discussion of the work stream identified in goal 11 concerning a visitor information website for the National Park. It

was noted that the ECAP Project was due to end at the end of 2006 so it was not intended that they would take over the provision of a visitor information website for the Park. Discussions were currently under way as to what should be done in respect of pan-Park websites, and there was no commitment to any particular solution at the moment. It was clear that no one wanted a proliferation of websites, and it was equally clear that visitor information was not as good as it needed to be. This area needed further work, and was one of the things that had slipped for the reasons already outlined.

20. *Good communication and consultation by land managers on objective setting for public benefits.* This goal was focused on promoting a more open and transparent approach to objective setting by land managers. Work had focused on three areas:

- a) Training. Courses had been run under the Land Based Business Training Project and had been well received. There were now plans for further courses on specific aspects of communications.
- b) A grants scheme for promoting two way dialogue by land managers.
- c) Reactive work on specific situations, for example encouraging the Cairngorms and Speyside Deer Management Group to provide opportunities for the wider public to understand and comment on their deer management plan.

There had been much more input required to the reactive work than had been expected but it remained important to get involved in specific cases in order to build the culture of communications and consultation to deliver the longer term goal. Nevertheless the plan was to become more strategic by providing guidance, developing policies, and working with other agencies on grant schemes. Once additional staff members had been recruited, as planned, work could move ahead in this area. One lesson that had emerged in the last year was that while large discussion groups and meetings were important, they were not in themselves enough, and the best way of communicating and persuading was through small one-to-one meetings.

21. *Stronger and more diverse economic opportunities within the CNPA area.* Work on taking forward a Youth Apprenticeship Scheme had broadened out and required more discussion than originally envisaged. The Steering Group had commissioned three pieces of research and a decision paper would come to the Board in March. The timetable for implementation would depend on what decisions were made on the alternatives. On the Sustainable Business Development Strategy, a brief had been prepared and was ready to go out to tender. However, those involved had been taking a step back to reconsider this work in the context of the National Park Plan, and the development of associated action plans. Some further thought was being given to whether or not this was the best way of proceeding.

22. Although not flagged up as amber a point was made in respect of goal 19 and the provision of transport within and across the National Park. The agreed transport audit was in hand, but in the meantime an opportunity had arisen unexpectedly to put in place a limited cross Park bus service sooner rather than later. Given the close interest of some of the Board in this issue and previous discussions on the matter, a paper would be brought to the Board shortly.

23. In response to a question about the potential danger of too many strategies and too many players in respect of economic development, and the implied danger of the CNPA adding to this proliferation, it was reported that a Cairngorms Economic Development Group had been set up with representatives of all the main players (the LECs, Local Authorities and Chamber of Commerce). This grouping would be the most likely body to oversee the action plan in the National Park Plan and provided a means of all the interested parties working together.
24. Arrangements for operational and corporate planning for the next year were outlined. An operational plan for 2006/07 had been prepared, and following approval by the Management Team, would be brought to the Board in February or March. This would set out the Action Plan for delivering year 2 of the current Corporate Plan (covering 2005-2008). Monitoring Operational Plan performance in 2006/07 would pick up on the status of the 20 Corporate Plan goals at the end of the current year and seek to link activities more explicitly to delivery of agreed outcomes set out in the Plans. With a new Spending Review imminent within the Scottish Executive, the CNPA would need to provide the Scottish Executive with an outline Corporate Plan for the next planning period, in effect feeding in to the Spending Review process the Park Authority's estimates of what it planned to deliver and the finances it would need to do this. Therefore, over the next six months both staff and Board would need to engage in this quite fundamental process of assessing its goals and objectives. Crucially, this could for the first time be done in parallel with the priorities already established in the National Park Plan (albeit in draft at this stage). There was every indication that the spending review would be "a tough one" and the emphasis for the Park Authority as for other public bodies would have to be on making the most of the existing resources by working more efficiently and effectively together, in line with initiatives such as Efficient Government and "On the Ground". Further information would be brought to the Board in due course.

[Andrew Rafferty left the meeting]

The CNPA's Role in Research (Paper 2)

25. Hamish Trench introduced the paper which set out for discussion the role that the CNPA should play in research in the Park. With the imminent publication of the draft National Park Plan, now was the time to set out a more planned and coordinated approach to research across the Park. Four roles were envisaged for the CNPA:
- a) Promoting the Park as a research pilot or study area;
 - b) Coordinating a research agenda relevant to the Park;
 - c) Commissioning specific research; and
 - d) Collating and disseminating research findings.
26. The Board was invited to consider whether or not this was the right basis for the CNPA to be involved in research, and whether the roles identified in the paper fulfilled the opportunity that the CNPA had to promote relevant research and its use in the Park as well as meeting the CNPA's own organisational needs.

27. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) Among the four roles proposed, one was missing, namely that of monitoring whether we were collectively achieving the aims of the National Park.
- b) On the second proposed role, that of coordinating a research agenda relevant to the Park, it was suggested this might include the vetting of the competency and usefulness and relevance of research.
- c) The CNPA had a role in ensuring the integrity of long-term datasets.
- d) The CNPA had a role in encouraging implementation and monitoring the success of that implementation.
- e) The suggestion at paragraph 14 that the CNPA had a role in dissemination was fine, but should not result in the CNPA taking over sole responsibility for this; responsibility fell to others as well.
- f) The four proposed roles should include that of getting involved in national policy development. In respect of paragraph 20 clearly the CNPA should take the opportunity to influence SEERAD.
- g) The list of potential research partners at paragraph 15 could be usefully split into providers, procurers, and users. The CNPA should think further about the useful alliances that could be formed with these various groupings. A key issue for national research policy was that of skills base. The CNPA could have a strong influencing role in making sure this point was taken seriously.
- h) It was neither sensible nor feasible to suggest that the CNPA should have to approve all research within the National Park. The proposal was more about influencing the activities of others, and maximising the value from each piece of research undertaken.
- i) If the proposals in the paper were directed towards all research, and not just those of other public sector bodies, the proposed role for the CNPA would be unrealistically large.

28. The Convenor summed up the main threads of the discussion as follows:

- a) The CNPA had a leadership role in research; but it needed to be clear why and prioritise accordingly. There must be a clearly defined benefit in any role that the CNPA undertook.
- b) Important additional elements of the CNPA role were monitoring; ensuring the integrity and availability of long-term datasets; quality control but only in respect of research that is relevant; promoting the implementation and dissemination of research but via others rather than taking over the role.
- c) The CNPA had an important role in influencing national policy priorities and their delivery.

29. Next steps were discussed as follows:

- a) Investigation of the options set out at paragraph 9 should be pursued and extended to implementation.
- b) The CNPA needed to give thought to how to influence the spending patterns of SEERAD and other public bodies.

- c) The paper in front of the Board should be reshaped as a position paper, and a public statement of the CNPA's role in research. It should link to the National Park Plan, and should be used to influence other organisations as described.
- d) In taking forward these next steps the crucial point was prioritisation – this was potentially a huge area of work and the Park Authority needed to be very clear as to what role it could usefully play.

Sustainable Tourism Action Plan: Update (Paper 3)

30. Heather Galbraith introduced the paper which provided a six monthly update on progress with the Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action Plan.

[Sue Walker, Douglas Glass left the meeting]

31. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) The paper reflected a lot of hard work, and much had been achieved.
- b) On the Green Tourism Business Scheme, goals were needed on a quantitative basis so that the impact could be assessed. It was important to be able to demonstrate that projects like this actually achieved the long-term goals – simple measures such as numbers of business joining the scheme, while a useful monitoring measure did not give any indication of any real impact. Work was currently underway at monitoring and setting of indicators.

32. The Board noted progress.

[Marcus Humphrey, Bruce Luffman left the meeting]

Audit Committee Annual Report (Paper 4)

33. David Cameron introduced the paper which presented the Audit Committee's annual report to the Board. He highlighted paragraph 17 which explained that the finalisation of the accounts for 2004/05 had been delayed by a protracted resolution of the correct accounting treatment for Grant in Aid between the Authority's officers and the Scottish Executive. This was a problem which potentially went much wider than the CNPA, and the CNPA had already written to the Scottish Executive seeking a long term solution. A briefing note would be presented to Members in due course.

34. The Committee Convenor (Eric Baird) drew Members attention to paragraph 4a about risk management and noted that this was ongoing. He also drew attention to paragraph 25, and noted that the Committee would be looking to broaden its activities in the future to look beyond effective controls on process, and look at the effectiveness of projects, not just efficiency.

35. In response to a question about the organisation's own sustainability policies, it was noted that the Park Authority had already undertaken a green audit on each of its offices and had put in place a number of actions as a result. A fully worked up Action Plan and Strategy was being developed.

AOCB

36. The Convenor drew the Board's attention to the new pamphlet on the work of the Park Authority which had just been produced. He offered congratulations to the Communications Team for its production and asked Members to disseminate the pamphlet widely.

Date of Next Meeting

37. Friday 10th February 2006, at Grantown-on-Spey (Ben Mhor Hotel).