
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at The Gordon Hotel, Tomintoul on Thursday 20th March 2008 at 11.30am

PRESENT

Eric Baird	Bruce Luffman
Stuart Black	Mary McCafferty
Geva Blackett	Eleanor Mackintosh
Duncan Bryden	Anne MacLean
Nonie Coulthard	Alastair MacLennan
Jaci Douglas	William McKenna
Lucy Grant	Fiona Murdoch
David Fallows	Sandy Park
David Green (Convenor)	Susan Walker
Bob Kinnaird	Ross Watson
Ian Mackintosh	

In Attendance:

Bob Grant	Don McKee
David Cameron	Hamish Trench
Andrew Harper	Francoise van Buuren
Jane Hope	

Apologies:

Drew Hendry	Andrew Rafferty
Marcus Humphrey	Richard Stroud

Welcome

1. The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced proceedings by giving a quick run down of the outcome from two important events the previous week. On Thursday 13th March there had been a debate in the Scottish Parliament about National Parks. The transcript of the debate was available on the Parliamentary website, but the Convenor summarised the key points emerging from the debate which were of importance to the CNPA. The Minister for Environment and Rural Affairs (Mike Russell) had announced the Strategic Review of the two Scottish National Parks starting in May. The debate had been very supportive of the progress made by both National Parks to date and in that context the Convenor noted that the CNPA had nothing to fear

from the Strategic Review – indeed it provided opportunities to consider whether there were changes to structure and functions which could enhance the effectiveness of the Park Authorities. The Minister had ruled out the possibility of National Park Authorities being merged with SNH as being “incompatible with the local democracy” that the Minister wanted to see “at the forefront”. The Minister had also announced that an area of northern Perthshire would be brought within the boundaries of the Cairngorms National Park, following due process as set out in the National Parks (Scotland) 2000 Act.

2. The Convener suggested that he and the Chief Executive should make an early move to meet with Perth and Kinross Council. He also suggested that in view of the Board Meeting arranged in Glen Clova on the 15th May, if Members were agreeable, it might make sense to visit the proposed new area for the Park and even meet with some key stake holders. Finally, the Convener noted that the Minister was of the view that the impetus for any future National Parks had to come from the communities upwards rather than be imposed from the centre downwards.
3. The Convener went on to report that on Friday 14th March the Minister had attended a meeting of the Cairngorms National Park Strategy Group – this is the group of chairs and chief executives from the key stakeholders which meets annually to take stock of progress with the National Park Plan. There was considerable enthusiasm around the table from all partners for the Cairngorms National Park, for progress made over the last five years, and recognition of the contributions that all partners were making to this now and in the future. A note of the meeting would be circulated separately.

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

4. Approved with minor typing corrections.

Matters Arising

5. None.

Declarations of Interest

6. None.

Corporate Plan 2008 - 2011 (Paper 1)

Operational Plan 2008-2009 (Paper 2)

7. These two papers were considered together given the obvious close linkages between them. Francoise van Buuren introduced the paper on the Corporate Plan setting out the strategic programme of work for the CNPA for the next three years. The plan itself was set out in three sections: Part A set out the role of the Cairngorms National Park Authority; Part B explained how the work of the Cairngorms National Park over the period 2008-11 contributed to the Cairngorms National Park Plan; and Part C presented

the same information but in the form of how the Park Authority's work would contribute to the delivery of the Scottish Government National Performance Framework. Importantly, given its strategic nature, the Corporate Plan presented the Park Authority's work for 2008-11 in terms of achievements and the impact that these would make. The more detailed explanation of the activities and work streams to deliver those achievements was the job of each year's Operational Plan.

8. David Cameron then went on to introduce the Operational Plan for the first year of the Corporate Plan. He explained that the organisation's budget comprised essentially two types of expenditure: core or overhead expenditure comprising staff, office, Board, etc. and amounting to around £2.9 million in 2008-09; the other element was Operational Plan expenditure, namely cash invested in projects, grants, etc., which were non recurring costs amounting to around £1.8 million. These two types of expenditure put together comprised the total budget. In the Corporate Plan the total annual budget for each of the three years was shown allocated across the ten priorities for action, with the figure for each priority comprising the Operational Plan cash figure plus an element of the core expenditure allocated on the basis of staff time input. The Operational Plan by contrast was a subset of the total budget for the year and simply showed the Operational Plan expenditure, i.e. the cash investment in projects, grant etc. The lines of activity did not show the cost of staff time allocated to each of the priorities for action. It was presented in this way simply because this provided a much easier and more transparent way of monitoring expenditure throughout the year.
9. The Operational Plan included a degree of over-programming in order to allow for some inevitable slippage of activities towards the end of the year. Over-programming ensured that efficient use was made of all the available cash, minimising the chance of underspend at the end of the year. While the corporate plan was essentially presenting the achievements and outcomes for the planned period, within each of the individual years the Operational Plan presented the input designed to achieve, or make progress towards achieving, those outcomes. The Board was being asked to take a view on whether the direction in the Operational Plan was in line with the strategic plan set out in the Corporate Plan; whether the two plans achieved the right balance across the various priorities for action; and finally, to consider if the Operational Plan represented good progress in delivering the Corporate Plan in the first year.
10. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) The Finance Committee and Management Team had already looked at the Corporate Plan and the Operational Plan. In particular the Finance Committee had considered the Operational Plan and raised a number of questions about the inputs and associated costs. In particular they had questioned whether the inputs allocated to the issues of affordable housing, and planning enforcement were adequate given the high priority which the committee felt these issues represented for the CNPA.
 - b) The Finance Committee also had flagged up the need for the Operational Plan to acknowledge the cost implicit in the recent announcement of the boundary change to the Cairngorms National Park. Some of the costs would be in effect staff time and therefore not necessarily showing in the Operational Plan;

however there would be other costs implicit in the boundary change, as previously reported during the debate on John Swinney's boundary bill. The strategic review would also be likely to take up considerable staff time, and again while not therefore necessarily a cash item to show up in the Operational Plan, it was undoubtedly a resource constraint. The same argument applied to the proposed work on a single service point with Highland Council.

- c) The third part of the Corporate Plan showing the Plan in terms of an outcome agreement based on the fifteen outcomes in the Scottish Government Strategic Performance Framework, could be of crucial importance in the CNPA's ability to engage with other partners. The outcome agreement provided a common language with which to engage with local authorities in particular.
- d) The work on enforcement activity was crucial. It provided a good opportunity to get local authorities engaged with the CNPA and this was already being pursued. Under the new Planning Act every Planning Authority had to prepare an Enforcement Charter and it made sense for the CNPA to join up with the local authorities. The Head of Planning at CNPA was already in discussion with Highland Council and Aberdeenshire Council on this and it looked as if it might be possible to set up two joint enforcement posts, one with each of these authorities. It was confirmed that the provision in the Operational Plan was probably sufficient on this basis to provide a significant enforcement capability in the Park, although it was also acknowledged that Moray Council in particular did not have significant resources devoted to enforcement in its area of the Park. This was an issue that would need to be addressed.
- e) An argument was put forward for a change of emphasis in the Operational Plan, with more emphasis on economy/tourism/business.
- f) The question was asked in respect of the priority for action on sustainable deer management. Personal experience from one member suggested that visitors found it difficult to see deer in the Park, implying that excessive populations of deer were not a problem. However, in reply it was confirmed that there was plenty of evidence that deer numbers were in places damaging to the natural environment; however it was also pointed out that tourism was an important part of the activity in the Priority for Action on sustainable deer management. The Operational Plan contained reference to a project with Wild Scotland on developing the economic benefits that flowed from taking people to watch wild deer.
- g) On page 13 of the Corporate Plan under the item of "making tourism and business more sustainable" it was accepted that the impact in the first box should refer to and/or environmental accreditation standards. This was needed to reflect the fact that the use of the brand was associated with both quality and environmental standards.
- h) There was some discussion about the presentation of the outcome agreement in Annex 3 of Paper 1. This presented the outcomes in the National Park Plan grouped under the various Scottish Government outcomes. Those National Park Plan outcomes which were substantially being led by the CNPA were shown in red while all the other outcomes to which the CNPA might well have some input albeit on a lesser scale, were shown in black. There was some debate as to whether or not this was confusing to the public. In discussion it was concluded

that the Corporate Plan was directed at Ministers and to some extent strategic partners, and for this audience the presentation of the Park Authority's input in the context of all the outcomes in the National Park Plan was actually quite helpful. However the point was noted that communicating the CNPA's work over the next three years to the public was equally important and for this a separate and distinct approach was required. The sensible way of doing this might well be to update the leaflet on the work of the CNPA, a successful leaflet when it was first produced in 2005, but now undoubtedly in need of revision and update. The new Corporate Plan would seem to provide the ideal opportunity. The presentation of the outcome agreement in red and black did help to give a clear message that the National Park Authority could not deliver all of the National Park Plan on its own. Further thought would be given as to whether this might warrant further explanation to clarify in the accompanying text.

- i) The resources associated with completion of the Local Plan were questioned, in particular whether the costs of a local plan enquiry had been factored in. It was noted that there was indeed provision but that it was very difficult to put a precise figure on this. Some LPI costs might fall into the following year in any event. However, there was provision in other parts of the budget, notably under general staff support, and provision of legal advice which were relevant. In response to the question as to whether or not there should be "war chest" for such things as PLIs, it was concluded that this would not be good use of money. The budget set out all the anticipated costs, and in reality if significant costs were incurred which could not have been foreseen then agreement would need to be reached with Board or Finance Committee as appropriate to redeploy parts of the budget to deal with such emergencies.
- j) Questions were asked as to whether the resources allocated to the Sustainable Design Guide were adequate. This was a crucial piece of work and needed to comprise more than just publication of a document. Importantly, to make it fully effective, effort would have to be put into promotion, and linking up with other partners. It was acknowledged that to some extent those resources would be rolled up into staff time rather than being cash expenditure showing in the Operational Plan.
- k) In the same vein, a question was asked as to whether sufficient resources had been allocated to the priority for action on affordable housing. Considerable resource needed to be invested in demonstrations and pilot projects. There was a view that more resources needed to be shifted into this part of the Operational Plan. The Finance Committee had queried whether the Operational Plan might be misunderstood by others, given that the CNPA's role in "affordable housing" was in practice quite limited and would be largely delivered through the Local Plan, the Sustainable Design Guide, and some pilot projects. Further thought needed to be given to presentation.
- l) While the Corporate Plan made reference to climate change explicitly in Annex 3 setting out the Scottish Government Performance Framework, there was no explicit reference in the Operational Plan. Even though there were quite a number of elements of work in the Operational Plan which contributed to the mitigation/adaptation to climate change, there was a good argument for making the reference to work on climate change much more explicit. It was difficult to

do this in the Operational Plan given that the CNPA's role, as previously agreed at the Board, was very much one of coordinating through the National Park Plan. It had been agreed at the Climate Change Group the previous day that there would be a paper coming to the Board shortly showing all the various strands of work being done within the Cairngorms National Park, and how this could be presented as a package.

- m) There was some discussion about the role of the Park Authority in respect of education as set out on page 16 of the Corporate Plan in box 4. The point about the achievements outlined in the Corporate Plan was to maximise the leverage of the CNPA's limited funds by making sure that the National Park was factored into a whole range of learning opportunities. The monitoring framework only made reference to John Muir Award; it was recognised that this was only one of many educational awards that might be relevant but the JMA was a useful indicator not least because it was under the control of the CNPA and therefore was relevant in the context of the CNPA's Corporate Plan. The number of JMA awards was only intended to be a performance indicator and not a complete measure of achievement.
- n) On climate change and in respect of the Operational Plan, Green Farm Audits were not seen as being the complete answer in terms of working with farmers to mitigate the effects of climate change. It was seen as being part of a first step in raising awareness; other steps would follow in terms of practical action to mitigate effects. It was acknowledged that ultimately the ideal would be to look at the impacts of activities rather than just the number of individuals undertaking particular actions. It was noted that other work was in hand with land managers on projects to mitigate climate change.
- o) It was noted that the visitor survey first undertaken in 2003 was scheduled for the second year of the Corporate Plan. A suggestion was made that it would be helpful to bring it forward into 2008/09 particularly in the context of the forthcoming strategic review where a good evidence basis for the Park would be useful. It was noted that the timing of the Visitor Survey was to tie in with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, plus our own capacity to deal with this major piece of work. However, it was also noted that work was currently underway with the two DMOs to develop a Park-wide visitor feedback survey on a more regular basis.
- p) Lines 55 and 56 of the Operational Plan referred to expenditure in relation to the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust and to improvements to strategic routes. The two lines together amounted to substantial expenditure and fuelled the concerns previously discussed by the Board about perceptions that all path repairs and improvements would fall to the Park Authority, a bill which the Park Authority's budget could not possibly satisfy on its own. It was noted that the expenditure on strategic routes, mainly the Speyside Way, was a historical inheritance. However, the arrangements were ripe for review. SNH funding to local authorities was no longer to be channelled through SNH but would go to local authorities direct, thus removing any ring fencing. Bob Grant was therefore doing a paper on future funding options for the Speyside Way to the next meeting of the Speyside Way Management Committee. In addition to these new funding arrangements with local authorities and SNH, there were new

developments such as the SRDP which now offered other funding options. As part of this re-evaluation of the funding for the Speyside Way, the CNPA needed to consider its strategy for the funding of strategic routes and non strategic routes, and the part played by the Trust in such funding.

11. The Board agreed the recommendations of the papers as follows:

- a) **Paper 1 (Corporate Plan 2008-2011) approved.**
- b) **Paper 2 (Operational Plan 2008-2009) approved subject to the comments made above.**

12. Action:

- a) **Corporate Plan 2008/11: Jane Hope to submit Corporate Plan to Scottish Government for Ministerial approval.**
- b) **Operational Plan 2008/09: Management Team to consider comments made and revise Operational Plan as appropriate. Revision to be brought to next meeting of Finance Committee.**

Information Papers

13. A number of information papers were noted with no further discussion as follows:

- Audit Committee Annual Report (Paper 3)
- Operational Plan 07/08 Update Quarter 3 (Paper 4)
- Corporate Plan 05/08 Review of Achievements (Paper 5)
- Corporate Plan 07/08 Theme 1 (Paper 6)
- Corporate Plan 07/08 Theme 2 (Paper 7)
- Corporate Plan 07/08 Theme 3 (Paper 8)
- Corporate Plan 07/08 Theme 4 (Paper 9)
- Corporate Plan 07/08 Theme 5 (Paper 10)

Date of Next Meeting

14. Friday 16th May Glen Clova Hall, Glen Clova.