
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at Kincaig Community Hall, Kincaig on Friday 27th September 2013 at 10.30am

Present:

Peter Argyle
Duncan Bryden
Angela Douglas
Katrina Farquhar
John Latham
Bill Lobban

Eleanor Mackintosh
Mary McCafferty
Willie McKenna
Fiona Murdoch
Martin Price
Gregor Rimell

In Attendance:

Stephanie Bungay
David Cameron
Peter Crane
Murray Ferguson
Bob Grant
Sandra Middleton

Gavin Miles
Grant Moir
Hamish Trench
Heather Trench
Francoise van Buuren

Apologies:

Dave Fallows
Jeanette Gaul
Kate Howie

Gregor Hutcheon
Gordon Riddler
Brian Wood

Welcome and Introduction

1. The Convenor welcomed everyone to the meeting at Kincaig Village Hall. He gave a brief resume of the previous evening event with the Spey Fisheries Board about catchment management on the Rivers Spey and Dee. There was need to continue to work with partners and further discussion is needed over the implications of further water abstraction from the Spey to the Tay system.

Minutes of Last meeting

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 6th June, 2013 were approved without change.

Matters Arising

3. A request was made for draft minutes to be circulated earlier than just before next meeting. Agreed that they will be circulated earlier.
4. Paragraphs 9 – 26 needed clarification, in particular about the CNPA offering advice to farmers. It was agreed that the CNPA should be able to give advice where it will help to deliver public good quality outcomes that others are not able to provide.

Declarations of Interest

5. None

National Park Partnership Plan Annual Progress Report (Paper 1)

6. Gavin Miles introduced the paper, the purpose of which was to report annual progress in delivering the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan and to consider any areas where further discussion at Board meetings or with partners is required. The Report showed a healthy progress, a lot of work has been reported and indications are that progress is being made in the right direction. There were no areas of concern to report. It was highlighted that the strategic group has been working well and is developing capital investment plans for the Park. The report provides the background for the partnership meeting chaired by the Minister for Environment on 21st October. Further information will be made available on indicators and these will be put up on the website soon.
7. In discussion the following points were made by Board Members:
 - a) It was recognised that the Partnership Plan is the central plan across the Park so is really important that we get the strategic report right and the metrics right.
 - b) A question was asked about the red, amber and green indicators on page 4. It was explained that they are just trying to provide a graphical indication of the direction of travel on the key indicators for the park partnership plan.
 - c) A Board Member asked about the agenda for the meeting with the Minister October. A meeting is scheduled with The Minister for Environment on 21st October for the annual review of the partnership plan. The meeting will be in 2 parts, the first hour will be between the Minister and public sector bodies looking at resources. The second part with other partnership members together with short presentations from various bodies and a discussion around the issues. On a question about a better buy-in to the park plan, it was generally thought that there was a greater degree of buy-in this time but that there was a need for greater focus from the economic development bodies. The upcoming meeting is a chance to get further partner buy-in.
 - d) Clarification was asked for on the CNPA involvement in the upgrade at the visitor centre at Glenmore. The Forestry Commission are revamping the current centre and CNPA are working with them as it is going to be a visitor centre within the National Park. This is a joint working relationship. There is a budget of £48K with the CNPA providing £15K. There will be further discussion on this at a later meeting.

- e) A Board Member raised a point about the COAT AGM and was concerned about on-going maintenance of path infrastructure. Issues around maintenance had been addressed at the recent AGM and public meeting and the COAT board are developing a business plan for 2015-2020 that takes into account maintenance issues. COAT have also launched a donations campaign for general maintenance work. A meeting has been arranged between senior staff in both organisations for the first week in November and maintenance will be one of the discussion points.
- f) A Board Member considered Table 1 in the Report will prove very useful in the medium to long term. Referred to pages 10 and 11 next steps.
- g) A Board Member asked that the Design Awards should be listed as a project for 2014. There was also a desire to ensure that the NPA receives good information on woodland expansion from FCS and that this topic should be considered for future board discussion.
- h) A Board Member asked if the NHS is one of the bodies involved in the partnership meeting and whether there has been more success in engaging with them than during the last plan period. The NHS has been invited to partnership meetings and there is a need for further engagement on the health agenda and the benefits that National Parks can provide. It was noted that COAT is trying to pursue an increased partnership with NHS Grampian to deliver healthy walks and that they are also attempting to co-opt an NHS representative onto their Board.
- i) The Convenor raised an item on the research strategy. It is important that the NPA benefits from the research that is taking place in the Park and that we are able to use the information in decision making. It is also important that we identify gaps in the research and work with institutes to plug these gaps. The Research Seminar in November is aiming to bring together researchers from research institutes to launch the Park as a long-term socio-ecological research site.
- j) The Convenor asked if members were generally happy to note progress of the delivery of the Partnership Plan, 10 outcomes, 14 indicators and 3 themes. This is a 5 year plan and this is the 2nd year. The report shows that we are making significant progress but we need to ensure delivery across the partnership. The Convenor asked senior staff to reflect on any issues that may warrant discussion at future board meetings including woodland expansion and the development of the research strategy.

8. Members indicated they were content to note progress.

Review of 2012 to 2015 Corporate Plan Delivery (Paper 2)

- 9. The Convenor reminded members that our Board duties are to scrutinise and to ensure the National Park Authority is delivering its corporate plan commitments.
- 10. David Cameron introduced the paper and gave an overview of performance of last financial year. Presentation of main areas of work along with priorities and budgeting for 2014/2015. During 2012/2013 income levels were significantly higher than previous years but still kept to targets in utilising our resources and revenue and capital allocations.

11. In discussion the following points were made by Board Members:

- a) A question was asked about the number of freedom of information requests. It was confirmed the numbers were low this year but we continue to meet the 20 day response time. There are no resourcing problems in dealing with FOI at present.
- b) A Board Member referred to the previous paper about preparatory work for the Deeside Way and its relationship to annex 3. It was confirmed that the broad heading covered both Deeside and Speyside Ways. Another member asked if there much room for movement, should we look more to the future as most of these projects have already started and they should be seen through. Convenor responded that we are looking for guidance for the next forward plan.
- c) A member queried the Estates development heading. It was confirmed that this refers to the offices in Ballater and Grantown and will be changed to office accommodation. Also wanted to raise that the split of net expenditure shows a high level of recreation and asks if only a small part of the budget against organisation excellence is sufficient. Chair of the Finance Committee was pleased to see that the figure is so small, would be more concerned if for a staff of 50 and a board of 19 that the figure is any higher.
- d) A member asked what the timescale was around the delivery of the LEADER Local Development Strategy. Officers responded that the implementation date is likely to be 1st January 2015. This gives the LAG part of 2014 to develop the Strategy.
- e) Reference to Page 7. It was confirmed that that any decision taken on accommodation will be subject to the completion of the consultation period. Any changes to accommodation should be within the financial year 2014/15.
- f) Convenor raised Annex 3, programme 5. He would like to emphasise increased participation, and the need to ensure we measure the impact of the paths being constructed in the Park. Under Programme 6 we will increasingly need to sharpen up our assessment on the impact of the Park in delivering sustainable economic growth.
- g) The paper is for discussion and the Board have noted the projects proposed for 2014/15. The development of the next Corporate Plan now has to be a priority for the Board to consider where we are going over the next 3 years.

12. Members indicated they were content with the recommendations set out in the paper.

Cycling Action Plan (Paper 3)

13. The paper was presented by Bob Grant and he stressed that this is a culmination of a lengthy process that the NPA has gone through to make sure the action plan captures the views of both people living in and visitors to the National Park. The Plan also hopefully captures the excitement and enthusiasm from the workshop held nearly a year ago. The Scottish Government have been at the forefront with increasing participation and ensuring that cycling contributes to the health agenda and low carbon use. The CNP has to play its part and if this plan is approved this can help to contribute to a Government plan for 10% of travel to be undertaken by bike. We are better than the current national average in Scotland however we are still some way off the 10%. We've been working with Sustrans on the electric bike project and we've built a good working relationship.

14. In discussion the following points were made by Board Members:

- a) The Convenor reminded the meeting that this is a 5 year plan and that the Park should become a recreational destination for cyclists and that participation is fundamental.
- b) Looking at what is mentioned about the 10% targets, it is ambitious but the emphasis is more about recreational cycling. People are concerned by road safety which doesn't appear to be covered in the report. There was a point about road signs but studies in Aberdeenshire show the main issue is road safety.
- c) A member asked about the Safer Routes to School plan and are we duplicating. There is no duplication as the cycle action plan has taken into account the work the local authorities are doing. In relation to road safety issue the plan focuses on off road cycling as there is a strong demand for off road routes i.e. between Dulnain and Grantown.
- d) A Board Member questions why we call it mountain biking and that biking has become very specialised and that we need to pick our words carefully, i.e. we should use mostly cycling and not mountain biking. As this is a Park for all, we should be supporting cycling for all.
- e) A Board Member asked how many bike shops are in the park and should this be included in the plan. The number of bike shops is quite high and we are well catered for. There are market forces in play here and this is a business opportunity rather than the Park providing bike shops. Also wanted to stress that cycling clubs have a role to play to encourage users to get back on a bike and get some training. In relation to the point made earlier about mountain biking, there were key areas that needed to be covered in the report and that there was an acknowledgement that there are things that the Park doesn't need to do. The promotion of extreme biking is not what the cycling action plan is aimed at.
- f) The connectivity of the Park to areas outwith the Park was raised as an issue. A point was raised around the Speyside Way and its suitability for cyclists. A Board Member asked whether Trikes and mobility scooters should be encouraged in the plan. Officers stated that Electric bikes are included but wary about going down the route of mobility scooters as this might not logically fit in a cycling action plan.
- g) A member asked what system would be put in place if members of the public found locked gates on paths. The plan is to use the current reporting system that is on our website for access cases.
- h) A member was concerned about significant weakness around access by public transport and wondered if there is a role for the CNPA. Wanted to know the market segments that CNPA wished to target. Pleased to hear about the working with Sustrans and queried if the preference was still to tarmac the routes due to maintenance issues. In relation to public transport there is a pilot with Stagecoach between Cromarty and Inverness with bike racks and for next year the bus between Braemar to Blairgowrie will have a with a bike rack and the open top bus to Lecht will also have one too. Sustrans do not insist on tarmac but they do give guidelines on width.
- i) It is important that we should steer clear on individual cycle factions as they are always very emphatic about their own cause. The broader aim is to get more people cycling rather than drilling down into individual groups.

- j) A member brought up the issue of safety on the paths and queried why we are not including wheelchair users in this plan. Safety gear is the responsibility of parents of children and adults for themselves. This plan is catering for cyclists. The Outdoor Access Strategy and the Inclusive Cairngorms report already cover wheelchair usage.

15. Members indicated they were content with the recommendation set out in the paper and to approve future funding commitments linked to corporate plan.

Developing the Cairngorms National Park Brand (Paper 4)

16. Pete Crane presented the paper. It is 10 years since the creation of the Cairngorms National Park. Part of the work since that time has been to create a sense of place and to improve the quality of the experience and develop a brand. Currently 82% of visitors said they knew they were in a National Park and one third of people in Scotland could name CNP as a National Park. In a UK survey CNP came mid-table. In terms of reputation, last visitor survey 88% thought the area was well managed, but only 20% strongly agreed with that. Evidence suggests there are areas to improve on. One of the areas that had been highlighted was business engagement. The 'Make It Yours' campaign relates to the use of the brand image and to deliver quality, sustainable experiences. At the moment the current criteria are a barrier to use of the brand and whilst 10 years ago the VisitScotland assurances and environmental schemes were a good guide, these are now in decline. More and more sectors have asked to use the brand identity we've found it harder to set criteria i.e. self-certification versus VS criteria and the system is currently unfair. In the report we are looking towards a brand charter, which is much more manageable. Within the report the last area of recommendation relates to the use of the brand image. The Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) has put together a marketing campaign around 'Make It Yours' and there is a specific request to align the strapline with the brand.

17. In discussion the following points were made by Board Members:

- a) The Convenor asked for clarification on the difference between code of conduct and charter. It was confirmed they are one in the same.
- b) A Board Member who has been a member of the brand management group since the start felt disappointed that we have had to move to a charter rather than retain criteria. Was concerned we are suggesting removing the need to be quality assured. This led to a lengthy discussion around the table regarding quality assurance and how this could be managed in a self certification way, also how would this be policed and monitored. Discussion around training days for businesses and how we need to encourage businesses to incorporate the CNPA branding. It was agreed that the proposed charter needs further work and members will get an opportunity to approve changes by email prior to the next meeting.
- c) Further discussion held around the CPB request to add the strapline "make it yours" to the CNP logo. A number of members agreed with concerns about the risk of opening this up to business use. The options were either leave the branding as is and the CPB use the logo within the current confines or, we allow them to use the brand as outlined in the paper. A Board Member stated that if the brand is in decline, then doing nothing is not the right way forward.

- d) The Convenor proposed the motion as follows. To keep the brand as it currently is and make no changes or to allow amendments at the CNPAs discretion. Vote taken and the count was 4 to keep brand as is and 7 to allow amendments at CNPA discretion.

18. Members indicated they were content with the recommendation set out in the paper. Agreed that charter needs to be reworked and final wording to come back to the full board by email.

Review of Committee Membership (Paper 6)

19. The Convenor stated that there are 5 board members who are not currently on any of the Park Authority's statutory committees. Discussion took place and **agreement reached** that committee membership will be as follows for the next 12 months to September 2014:

Staffing and Recruitment Committee

Brian Wood
Duncan Bryden
Katrina Farquhar
John Latham
Willie McKenna

Audit Committee

Gordon Riddler
Jeanette Gaul
Gregor Hutcheon
Brian Wood
Fiona Murdoch

Finance Committee

Kate Howie
Eleanor Mackintosh
Duncan Bryden
Gregor Rimell
Angela Douglas

When the committees reconvene they elect their own chairperson.

Audit Committee Annual Report 2012/13 (Paper 7)

20. David Cameron presented the paper in which he stated the main area of work was to overhaul and review mitigation actions of the strategic risk register around the delivery of the corporate plan. That has been going on since Jan/Feb this year and has now been finalised. Details are set out in the report.
21. In discussion the following points were made by Board Members:
- a) A Board Member who took part in the workshop asked if there was anything specific to planning. It was confirmed there was not one specific risk but line 10

and 23 referred to this topic. Adjustments can be made to the document as necessary to retain it as an active document. The convenor confirmed that this audit is vitally important and that the audit committee has picked up all threats and due process has been followed.

- b) A question was raised on the frequency of audit of internal processes. In terms of the timescale it is a yearly plan. There are certain elements that are audited every year i.e. core financial processes and key administrative services. In the coming year we are proposing to look at the planning service aspect. This is an ongoing process and the audit committee are trying to aim for a 3-5 year cycle for all areas.
- c) A Board Member commented on the audit quote contained in paragraph 15, Reasonable basis – could be interpreted as excellent in auditors language and on that basis our systems provide an excellent method of maintaining control and was a recognition of the work achieved by staff involved.

Planning Performance Framework Annual Report 2012/13 (Paper 5)

- 22. The Chair for this item was passed to Convenor of Planning Committee who explained this was a very important paper for the Planning Committee with regard to our overall performance and our commitment to service improvement. The main point coming out of this paper for remainder of this year is that there will be an enhanced focus on a small number of key areas of improvement, including significant staff restructuring, whilst maintaining delivery of the other planned improvements as far as possible.
- 23. Murray Ferguson presented the report and made clear that the Planning Performance Framework had to be submitted to the Scottish Government by Monday 30th September. The report takes account of feedback received by Scottish Government on our last report and covers what we are good at, but it is also self-critical so that we can improve further. Timescales for determinations have dropped, the delegated call-in process is more efficient, the Local Development Plan is on track and the Design Awards were a great success. However, determination timescales for applications are still too long and it was disappointing that the proportion of applications considered by CNPA that were subject to pre-application discussions has dropped.
- 24. A Board Member stated that the information on pages 13 and 14 of the report around focussing on the bigger issues is really important and we needed to deliver these changes to make the real changes needed to the system.
- 25. Clarification was sought on the period the report covered and on the figure of 100% of applications determined in line with officer recommendations. Would next year show a lower number than 100%? The period covered was confirmed as financial year 2012-13 and yes the figure for the current year would be lower.
- 26. A Board Member stated that what the government is trying to do is look holistically at the planning process. If a developer invests a lot of money and officers make a recommendation but the developer doesn't know if they are going to get the planning permission until the day they come to Committee, then this is not a good system. We want a planning system where there is a high degree of certainty about the outcome from an early stage. The onus is on the Planning Committee to give guidance to planning staff and applicants about what we want planning system to deliver in the Park.

There has to be a straightforward movement through the system with agreement at the end and we have to decide what we want these developments to deliver and the standard at which we want to deliver them and then we want the planners to deliver these standards to the applicants.

27. This prompted a wider discussion. One Board Member felt that the Planning Committee was there to give an approximate steer through preparation of the Local Plan which gives a broad outline of which development was acceptable where. In considering the individual planning applications the individual members of the Planning Committee had to be able to use their judgement and to make a decision on in the light of all the information available.
28. Members of the Board were reminded that the report on performance was for Scottish Government and was part of a wider programme of work to modernise the planning system. A Board Member stated that the Park Authority is an NDPB and not a local authority and as such is directly accountable to Scottish ministers and must act within the relevant framework. This promoted some discussion about the role of Board members in determining particular applications.
29. Officers clarified that as a planning authority CNPA had legal duty to ensure that all decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The whole planning process works best if there is good alignment between planning officers who are out on the ground and the Committee who are making the final decisions. Further discussion was required with members about the role of material considerations. It was noted that there is now a scheduled development programme for Committee Members and an appropriate session would be planned soon.
30. A Board Member commented favourably on the induction process for new members and the support from Committee and communication from staff over the past three years. The Local Development Plan is important, as the first reference point, however a degree of interpretation is involved and that is where the mixture of skills on the Committee helps.
31. The Board asked that the report make clear that the planning system in the Cairngorms is unique.
32. **Members indicated they were content with the recommendation set out in the paper.**

AOCB

33. A Board Member mentioned a presentation to the Kingussie book festival hosted by Cameron McLeish. The whole event was entirely focussed on the National Park.
34. Date of next Board meeting is 13th December, venue to be confirmed.
35. Meeting closed at 3.30pm.