
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held by telephone/ video conference

on Friday 11th September 2020 at 11.00am

PRESENT

(By video conferencing unless stated otherwise)

Xander McDade (Convener)

Geva Blackett

Peter Argyle

Carolyn Caddick

Deirdre Falconer Items 1-5 & 7-11

Pippa Hadley

Janet Hunter Items 7-11

John Kirk

John Latham Items 5-11

Douglas McAdam

Eleanor Mackintosh

Willie McKenna

Ian McLaren

Dr Fiona McLean

William Munro

Anne Rae Macdonald

Dr Gaener Rodger

Derek Ross

Judith Webb

In Attendance:

Grant Moir, Chief Executive,

David Cameron, Director of Corporate Services

Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning & Rural Development

Dr Peter Mayhew, Director of Conservation & Visitor Experience

Peter Crane, Head of Visitor Services

Gavin Miles, Head of Planning & Communities

Alix Harkness, Clerk to the Board

Apologies: Peter Argyle

Welcome and Introduction

1. Xander McDade the Convener, welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. Apologies were noted.

Minutes of Last Meetings held – for approval

3. The draft Minutes of the last meeting held on 12 June 2020 were agreed with no amendments.
4. The draft minutes of the last meeting held on 28th August 2020 were agreed with no amendments.

Matters Arising

5. The Convener provided an update on the Action points from the previous minutes:
 - a) June Minutes - Action Point at Para 16 (i) – **Closed** – Willie Munro to sit on the Green Recovery Fund Group.
 - b) June Minutes - Action Point at Para 20 (i) – **Closed** –principals for Green Recovery Fund were developed and the fund is now live.
 - c) August Minutes – Action Point at Para 8(i) – **Closed** – revised timetabling for postal ballot of Deputy Convenership had been circulated.
6. **Action Points Arising: None**

John Latham joined the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

7. The Convener invited Declarations of interest.
8. Pippa Hadley, Fiona MacLean and Deirdre Falconer declared an Indirect Interest in Paper 2, as members of the Badenoch Great Place project.
9. Douglas McAdam declared an Indirect interest in Paper 4 as he is the Chairman of the South Grampian Deer Management Group.

Deirdre Falconer left the meeting.

CEO Report & Convener Update (Paper 1)

10. Grant Moir, Chief Executive, introduced Paper 1 which highlights the main strategic work streams that are being directed by Management Team. CEO explained that

these are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver National Park Partnership Plan priorities. He highlighted the following areas:

- a) Grow biz was launched last week, mentoring business advice and business network.
- b) Nature of Scotland Awards – shortlisting 4 projects in Cairngorms will circulate details after meeting
- c) Alt Lorgie project won the River Restoration award for the work that had been going on there for the past 7 years. Money for that originally came from shovel ready funding that the Authority and the SG put in. Great video has been released and will circulate it around the Board.
- d) Ongoing and worth noting, the Government Kick Start Program has just been launched for employing 16-24yr olds for 6month post, pulling together with National Parks UK looking at a potential program of posts that could be done using this scheme. Details to follow in due course.
- e) Green recovery fund is open – the closing date is 20th Sept and the panel will meet and make decisions on the applications received based on the established criteria.
- f) Gaelic Intern had done work on Shinty as part of Badenoch Great Place project which will be launched in the Autumn. An excellent piece of resource which is a digital storybook of Shinty.
- g) COVID and how it impacts the Authority as an organisation, staff will continue to work from home.

10. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:

- a) A member said that she was happy to see that the Deeside Way extension would be progressed and asked about the associated new timescales. CEO advised that it was tied into the Active Travel Heritage Horizons bid and during the next couple of months the timetabling would be discussed and the information would be circulated in due course.
- b) Could it be confirmed what the application period was for the Green Recovery Fund? CEO confirmed that it was 1 month.
- c) Was the work with the young people as detailed in paragraph 12 of the report as a result of COVID or were these activities decreasing because of the time of the year? CEO advised that it was partly as a result of COVID and partly because of the season. He advised that it was being taken as far as possible within the rules and were trying to move as much as possible online where appropriate. Head Of Visitor Services added that one the challenges was with the school and getting back into them, if there were more opportunities for engagement over the winter time these would be ceased.

11. **The Board noted the Paper.**

12. **Action Points Arising:**

- i. **Shortlist for Nature of Scotland Awards to be circulated.**
- ii. **River Restoration award winner video to be circulated.**

Deirdre Falconer and Janet Hunter joined the meeting.

**Strategic Risk Management and Monitoring Corporate Performance
(Paper 2)**

13. David Cameron, Director of Corporate Services introduced Paper 2 presents an update on the Authority's performance to date in working towards delivery of strategic objectives established in the 2018 to 2022 Corporate Plan. He explained that the paper focuses on delivery against the Key Performance Indicators adopted as measures of performance in delivery of our Corporate Plan, while highlighting by exception any significant constraints, risks or shortcomings on planned delivery. He added that the paper also presents the latest version of the Strategic Risk Register, following ongoing review and mitigation action by the Management Team and review by the Audit and Risk Committee.
14. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
 - a) In terms of rural development exceptions specifically level of business satisfaction KPI which has moved into an amber risk category what was the reasoning for this? Director of Corporate Services advised that this was as a result of the latest survey results which showed a downward trend in terms of business satisfaction on all categories of that survey which was not surprising given the negative impacts on businesses of COVID-19. Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning & Rural Development explained that the Business Barometer is a survey that the CBP carries out on a quarterly basis, sent out to a wide range of businesses with an average response rate of 13%. He suggested that this issue be raised at the next meeting of the Cairngorms Economic Forum.
 - b) With regards to Wee Walks Week, were we encouraging the public to walk virtually around the Cairngorms, seen a lot more enjoyment of local network during lockdown. Head of Visitor Services advised that they have been actively promoting 17 community path network leaflets, sharing on social media.
 - c) With regards to exception reporting on the tourism project around on raptors what was behind this shading? Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience

advised that the following week there would be a press release going out on the first sea eagle breeding pair. He explained that had been delayed because of covid19.

- d) Comment made that the review of the Glenmore and Cairngorm Strategy needs to be prioritised and that there is real benefit to having a joined up approach.
- e) With reference to Annex 3 Risk Register, welcome the remedial actions detailed paragraph 8. Regarding the accountable body issue, high costing thoughts of listing high level projects individually as opposed having them all under resourcing on page 4. Director of Corporate Services advised that they sought to treat it as a single strategic risk, acting as lead body for a number of projects, each project has its own Risk register, if any of those projects has a significant risk it would be escalated and come into this Risk Register in its own right. Keep at corporate level, recognising more detail elsewhere.
- f) With reference to the back of the Risk Register, the last one about governance, while appreciating the large scale land management issues, what on a Board level could be done to help that? Director of Corporate Services highlighted the importance of the Board skills matrix for recognising aspects of corporate governance and identifying training needs.
- g) With reference to Priority 2 in Annex 1 a member reported that the South Grampian Deer Management Group were focussing on deer population management specifically focussing on landscape planning and large woodland planting.
- h) Comment made there had been a down turn in the market for venison that the National Park Authority were looking to assist Deer Management Groups with this.
- i) Wildlife crime what were the number of incidents and rate of crimes. CEO reported that Police Scotland publish this information annually however there had not been any arrests in the Park. Scottish Government has been taking forward an increase in sentences associated with wildlife crime.
- j) With reference to Annex 4 on social media, could it be explained why Director of Conservation did not have a Twitter account? CEO advised that Cairngorms Nature do have a Twitter account and that it is not compulsory for staff to have one although they can if they want to.
- k) Suggestion made to merge risks A14 and A15 into one and keep it on the risk register. Query at keeping the wildlife crime risk green as it was still high risk and also until the community aspect of affordable housing could be progressed, suggestion made to keep an overview of it. Director of Corporate Services advised that the Audit & Risk Committee did not look at the detail of the register knowing it was being laid before the full Board and that he was happy with the suggestion of monitoring the overall reputational risk of NPA and to roll the risk into one. He explained the reasoning behind not rating a downward trend had been a result of instances of negative media attention while the

balance of positive work on visitor management and conservation content and as a Management Team over past few months on a whole decided that was the case.

- l) Strong support on Glenmore situation, had personal experience of cycling all over the area and agreed to have conversation with the Head of Visitor Services after the meeting to discuss what could easily be done to fix some of the issues.
- m) Suggestion made to bring risks A14, A19 and A21 altogether into one as they have the common theme of reputational risk. Director of Corporate Services agreed and advised he would made the changes and bring it to the Audit & Risk Committee meeting then back to the Board in March 2021.
- n) With reference to Annex 4 on social media how could younger people be attracted? CEO advised that a lot of work had taken place targeting younger audiences linking to VisitScotland and Instagram and the effects of that would be seen in the next few years.
- o) The Audit & Risk Committee Chair reported that the Audit & Risk Committee at their meeting that morning had focussed on the Business Continuity Planning register and what should be kept on it. She added that the Board's comments on the main Strategic Risk Register had been well made.

15. The Board:

- a) **Reviewed the update on corporate performance and strategic risk management set out in this paper.**
- b) **Highlighted any achievements or exceptions which, from a strategic leadership perspective, Board members believe are of particular significance to the delivery of the Authority's strategic objectives.**
- c) **Review and comment on the risk register for completeness in coverage of current strategic risks and adequacy of mitigation actions.**

16. Action Points Arising:

- i. **Director of Planning & Rural Development to raise the issue of business satisfaction at the next Cairngorms Economic Forum.**
- ii. **Risks A14, A19 and A21 altogether into one as they have the common theme of reputational risk and bring the Strategic Risk Register back to the Audit and Risk Committee at their March 2021 meeting.**

Cairngorms Visitor Management Update (Paper 3)

17. Grant Moir, CEO and Pete Crane, Head of Visitor Services presented an interim report to the Board on the visitor management work that has been undertaken in

the Park this summer. A full report will be presented after the end of season review at the end of October.

18. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
- a) Congratulations to the team given the challenging times a positive picture is emerging. Comment made that despite the pandemic not being positive overall it had been a real opportunity for the Authority to make a positive impact and be seen out and about. The improvements at Glenmore specifically the reduced speed limit will hopefully continue and other improvements made on the back of this. Wild campers was a big issue along with waste removal and car parking however effort was made to address this and external people were appreciative.
 - b) Comment made that the paper was welcomed, there had been a considerable increase in litter including throw away tents showing people were not giving any thought to the impact on the climate emergency which leads to questioning what was being taught in schools about taking litter home. Suggestion made to bring schools on board with the vision that the National Park is a special place that must be treated with respect. The Convener agreed with this sentiment and suggested that Local Authority nominated Board members have these conversations with their respective Education Authorities.
 - c) Congratulations for the good work achieved and it was good to see that in a crisis the Authority were solution focused. Comment made that it had been a huge disappointment that a small proportion of people did not know how to behave in a National Park and that it was vital that going forward securing powers for our Rangers particularly on irresponsible fire lighting. Suggestion made to make the traffic management measures more permanent whilst ensuring that it is aesthetically pleasing and in keeping with the National Park. Campervans and motorhomes sale increased, can make it more welcoming for them, by booking a night, there had been a demand for dropping off black and grey waste. Offer of making links with a National campervan organization if links had not already been made. CEO advised that he had had conversations with Campa and that the Cairngorms Business Partnership were looking at working up a project on that front too.
 - d) Comment made that one issue that was not just in the National Park but also Highland wide was the number of camping sites that did not open or those which were operating were operating at 60% below capacity in order to adhere to the social distancing measures. VisitScotland had added to the perfect storm and while the circumstances were unusual it meant a lot of work, working out the infrastructure for welcoming so many visitors.
 - e) Comment made that at Loch Muick there had been some management issues where some people were camping overnight in the car park which meant hillwalkers arriving early morning were arriving to a car park that was 50% full. Comment made that this should be addressed for next year.
 - f) Comment made that some of the issues experienced during the summer would be an ongoing problem. Encouraging people to have a staycation would remain. The issues seen on Skye and in Glenmore were here before the pandemic struck and were amplified by the increase in visitors.
 - g) Suggestion made that the funding coming from Scottish Government should be used in a coordinated way with Local Authorities to ensure a consistent

message is delivered by way of signage. CEO agreed and advised that he would be attending a meeting the following Monday with MSP Fergus Ewing to discuss the national coordination surrounding visitor management.

- h) Agreement that a national approach would be essential going forward to continue the good work started. Query about the areas where there were no estate rangers, such as Glenesk who had been left to deal with the increase in visitors themselves and did not get much support from their Local Authority for litter removal, increase in visitors. Suggestion made to make use of the estate staff, foresters and keepers. CEO advised that he had a meeting coming up with Angus Council to discuss Glen Esk and Glen Doll going forwards.
- i) Resounding congratulations to the team on their fast work on this over the summer.
- j) Comment made that the increase in visitors seen this year was only really the beginning. Suggestion made that the Girl Guides and Scouts do a lot of fire safety badges and have a fantastic set of resources available on their website.
- k) Comment made that there was a need to educate visitors around definitions and expectations for example where not to light fires and where to set up camp. And the definitions of dirty camping and wild camping.
- l) Comment made that Local Authorities having removed bins from laybys was a big issue, as visitors were throwing rubbish out of their car windows and into fields which was a big problem for farmers and land owners. CEO noted this and said he would pick it up with Local Authorities at the end of the season.
- m) Comment made that they hadn't seen the campaign with TISO and National Parks UK on responsible camping.
- n) Plea made to be ready for the school October holidays as they would be on differing weeks depending on Local Authority area. CEO agreed and advised that this was why the Seasonal Rangers were contracted until the end of October 2020.
- o) Comment made that it had been good that work was being carried out doing the brashing on the path between Boat of Garten and Aviemore which makes it easier for cyclists using that section of the Speyside Way.
- p) Suggestion made to target big supermarket chains in urban areas who sell cheap tents to give out an information leaflet at the time of purchase. The Convener agreed with this point and recognized that many tents were purchased in the locality of where the visitors reside rather than buying them when they arrive in the National Park.
- q) Suggestion made that National Parks UK are encouraged to take this work with big supermarket chains on board to get the message out. CEO agreed to take those conversations forward to National Parks UK, He added that there was no link between people buying cheap tents and dirty campers. Dirty campers come from all different backgrounds and socio economic groups and the vast majority of campers have been doing the right things across the National Park.
- r) The Convener thanked the staff team for their effort over the past 6 months for managing the situation which involved a huge amount of planning locally, nationally and on the ground. He stated that the huge effort had resulted in positive results, rangers and partnership working together leading to positive outcomes, should be proud of the team for that.

19. **The Board noted the update.**
20. **Action Points Arising:**
 - i. **Local Authority nominated Board members conversations with their respective Education Authorities regarding encouraging schools to teach the message of taking litter home in order to help combat climate change.**
 - ii. **CEO to pick up the removal litter bins from laybys with Local Authorities.**
 - iii. **CEO to encourage National Parks UK to encourage big supermarket chains to distribute a responsible camping leaflet with every tent purchase.**

East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership (Paper 4)

21. Dr Pete Mayhew, Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience introduced Paper 4 which reviews the progress of the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership (ECMP) to date, as well as considering its future development. He reminded the Board that whilst the project was set up in 2015 they did not have staff in place until 2018 so this was an update on work undertaken since then.
22. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
 - a) Pleased to see the paper being brought to the Board.
 - b) In the paper there is some discussion that predators are the biggest cause of nest failure, was there scope for that to be brought forward?
 - c) With reference to paragraph 8, was there data to back it up? Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience explained that it was counter intuitive, woodland adjacent to the woodland areas impacted on the level of predator management.
 - d) Praise for the paper that it was very informative and that the progress being made and comment made that the project is exemplar nationally. Board Member reported that she had attended the Europarc conference which was held virtually which had talked about gathering mass accurate data such as this and what more could be done and how to encourage a national debate about this. Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience explained that with the resources the Authority had which equates to half a person they are focusing on how waders are doing in which areas, the types of woodland that we have and where we are with Muirburn. Agreement that people are looking at the project from outside the National Park with interest. There is more that the Authority would like to do as part of this project and the conservation team are collating data to inform the Cairngorm Nature Index which will provide excellent data in the next few years. The more objective the information can be the better.

- b) Board self-assessment is a requirement of Scottish Government, when would it be scheduled? Convener advised that it was due to be undertaken in August but had slipped but it was hoped that it would take place in October once a new deputy Convener had been appointed. He advised that he would keep the Board updated on that front in the next couple of months. Director of Corporate Services added that a governance review would be undertaken by the auditors and that it would be good to have a fresh set of eyes on the process. With reference to the CEO Report, where only 8% of the population responded to last capercaillie survey, request made to be invited as a board member to Capercaillie Steering Group meeting. CEO to discuss this with the individual board member.
- Recognition that only 200Ha of woodland expansion was needed to reach the target set in the National Park Partnership Plan. CEO advised that the future rate would take account of changing national targets and would be part of the next National Park Partnership Plan.
- c) A Board Member reported that there was a small section of the Speyside Way at Drumguish that was impassable. CEO asked that the Board member advise him of the grid reference and he will seek to address it.
- d) Could an update be given on the Dark Skies Project? CEO advised he had had a meeting with Crown Estate Scotland and that they should know if the project would be a runner by the end October 2020. A Board Member asked what would become of the £40k committed to the project if it wasn't required. Director of Corporate Services advised that the Green Recovery Panel would meet to agree funding on applications already received. Discussion would take place at Finance & Delivery Committee if Observatory project does not go ahead.

26. Action Points Arising:

- i. **CEO to circulate to the Board NatureScot new shared approaches around conservation and species management.**
- ii. **Deirdre Falconer to provide CEO with grid reference of Speyside Way section at Drumguish.**

Date of Next Meeting

27. Next formal Board meeting to be held on 27 November 2020.
28. The meeting concluded at 13.20.