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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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## MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at The Albert Hall, Ballater on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2006 at 1.30pm

### PRESENT

Eric Baird	Alastair MacLennan
Duncan Bryden	William McKenna
Nonie Coultard	Sandy Park
Angus Gordon	Gregor Rimell
Douglas Glass	David Selfridge
David Green	Sheena Slimon
Marcus Humphrey	Richard Stroud
Bruce Luffman	Andrew Thin
Eleanor Mackintosh	Susan Walker
Anne MacLean	Ross Watson

### In Attendance:

David Bale	Jane Hope
Murray Ferguson	Fiona Newcombe
Bob Grant	Andy Rinning
Nick Halfhide	Francoise van Buuren

### Apologies:

Stuart Black	Andrew Rafferty
Basil Dunlop	Bob Wilson
Lucy Grant	

### Additional Agenda Item

1. The Board agreed to add this item to the agenda. Earlier in the day the Board, sitting as the Planning Committee, had agreed to adopt the Aberdeenshire Local Plan as it applied to the National Park. The Board ratified that decision. (The interest of Aberdeenshire Councillors was noted, and they took no part in this ratification.)

### Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

2. The minutes of the special meeting held on the 19<sup>th</sup> May to discuss housing were approved subject to an amendment at paragraph 7(g) so that this read as follows: “it was crucial to keep houses available for rent. It might be more sensible to offer people plots of land for them to build on.” The amendment was suggested in the interest of clarity, and it was noted there was some linkage to the specific point made under paragraph 7(o).
3. It was acknowledged that a paper would be brought to the Board in due course with proposals for finalising the policy on housing, and how this should be reflected in the National Park Plan, the Local Plan, and other strategic documents. That paper would also report back to the Board on the outcome of the further work that had been agreed at the meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> May. It was also noted that there may in addition be actions arising from the discussion on the 19<sup>th</sup> May which could be implemented immediately and without further approval by the Board.
4. The Minutes of the meeting of the 2<sup>nd</sup> June were approved with no changes.

### **Matters Arising**

5. None.

### **Draft Outdoor Access Strategy (Paper 1)**

6. It was noted for the record that Marcus Humphrey was a director of UDAT (Upper Deeside Access Trust); this did not constitute a conflict of interest and was simply noted.
7. Bob Grant introduced the paper which summarised the development of the draft Outdoor Access Strategy for the Park and sought the Board’s approval to undertake a targeted consultation exercise on its contents. He noted that the Outdoor Access Strategy dovetailed with the National Park Plan. The consultation would run for six weeks, following which the Board would have the opportunity to approve the final document following the consultation. In addition the paper considered the various alternatives for development of a mechanism to repair, maintain and improve the paths resource and sought approval to enable a fuller investigation into the three options to be undertaken. The three options were: a Park-wide trust, direct delivery by the CNPA, and working through existing mechanisms. Subject to the Board’s agreement to this, the proposal was to put a further paper to the Board later in the year with fully worked proposals for a decision.
8. In discussion the following points were made:
  - a) While no Board decision was currently sought, the view was expressed that there were clearly some advantages of the Park-wide trust option, which seemed to offer the greatest potential for leveraging in additional funding. On the other hand, as an arms-length organisation there would always be issues of governance, and these needed to be dealt with satisfactorily. It was also noted that the innovation that tended to come with such arms-length from government needed to be fostered and not constrained. There was a difficult balance to be struck there.

- b) The timing of the Outdoor Access Strategy needed to dovetail with that for the National Park Plan. Approval of the Outdoor Access Strategy (OAS) should depend on the approval of the National Park Plan from which the OAS took its lead and this would be towards the end of the year. Similarly agreement to the delivery mechanism, whether a trust or one of the alternatives would also be towards the end of the year. The consultation on the OAS did not include a consultation on delivery mechanisms. It was a moot point whether in offering comments on the OAS consultees needed to be aware of the various delivery mechanisms that were being considered.
  - c) A Park-wide trust was more likely to be able to lever in additional funding than smaller trusts, and the idea that a Park-wide trust could be a way of strengthening the operation of smaller trusts was to be welcomed.
  - d) With reference to paragraph 16, it was noted that local trusts have associated core costs which arguably detracted from project monies. In considering the options for the Park, the viability of smaller trusts also needed to be considered.
  - e) The next paper to the Board on the outcome of the consultation on the draft Outdoor Access Strategy would include more detail on overall funding levels that were likely to be needed to deliver the strategy. In order to lever in partnership funding, particularly from other public bodies, good forward planning would be essential. It was noted that the creation of local outdoor access authorities had also created expectations about path provision, and an associated financial burden. This was potentially huge and it was essential that the CNPA got an early feel for the likely extent of that burden.
  - f) In considering the possible structure of a trust it would be important that, first and foremost, it had to meet the needs of the Park. The future viability of the Upper Deeside Access Trust would therefore not be the main driver in reaching a decision, although both outcomes were not exclusive.
  - g) Access to SACs (Special Areas of Conservation) and other designations needed careful consideration in the context of the OAS. It would be important to ensure that these special sites were not overrun so that they lost their special status.
9. It was noted that an early decision on delivery mechanisms, whether a Park-wide trust or not, would be very useful given that UDAT would need to make a decision very soon on its own future. A paper would be brought to the August meeting of the Board seeking approval for funding a programme of works by UDAT in the current year. One of the implications of that paper would be the need for consistent delivery arrangements across the whole of the Park. However, no further comment could be made at this stage about the future of UDAT until the Board had been able to consider a fully worked up proposal for future arrangements for delivery mechanisms.

**10. The Board approved the recommendations of the Paper as follows:**

- a) **The contents of the draft Outdoor Access Strategy were approved on the basis that it would be issued to stakeholders as part of a targeted consultation exercise and brought back to the Board for final approval in due course; and**
- b) **The Board supported further investigation into the feasibility of the establishment of a Park-wide Outdoor Access Trust. This would be done on the basis that officers would pursue the relative merits of each option (as set**

out at Annex 1 of the paper) and report back on matters of detail seeking Board approval for a single option.

**11. Action:**

- a) **Bob Grant to bring a further paper for Board decision following the consultation on the OAS**

**The Rural Development Programme (RDP) – Consultation Response and Pilot Project (Paper 2)**

12. The Board noted that a number of Members had a financial interest in LFAs (Less Favoured Areas) and the outcome of the RDP. However, the connection between Paper 2 and that interest was considered to be sufficiently distant for there to be no conflict of interest.
13. Fiona Newcombe introduced the paper which sought approval of the CNPA's response to the consultation on the implementation of the Rural Development Programme. This included proposals for a pilot project for the CNPA to play a strategic role and involve a range of stakeholders to achieve three outcomes:
  - a) Agree the priorities for the programme in the Cairngorms;
  - b) Establish and oversee an effective advisory mechanism that delivers high quality applications under the programme; and
  - c) To monitor and review the outcomes of the programme.
  - d) She emphasised the need to manage expectations; the consultation on the Rural Development Programme foreshadowed some potentially huge changes in the delivery of rural policy. In reality, the Scottish Executive still had a significant amount of work to do prior to finalising arrangements. Although some changes could happen immediately, in practice the full extent of the changes implicit in the Rural Development Programme would take five to seven years to implement and bed in. This was not just a question on a single decision.
14. In discussion the following points were made:
  - a) The proposal for a pilot project in the Cairngorms National Park was welcome.
  - b) The consultation response was right to say that the RPAC (Regional Project Assessment Committee) approach was not welcome. It smacked of an additional layer of bureaucracy. There were other models and mechanisms already in existence which could be used.
  - c) In the section on the pilot project for how RDP regionalisation could be implemented in the Cairngorms National Park, the suggestion was that a Cairngorms Regional Committee would agree the priorities for the Cairngorms National Park and specifically for land management contracts for Tier 3. There might also be a case for that committee to decide priorities for Tier 2 as well but that needed further thought.
  - d) Although the national budget was not yet set, this was quite likely to be tight, and it was essential to manage people's expectations as to what would and could be delivered by the Rural Development Programme within the Cairngorms.

- e) There was a case for National Parks being included in the list of landscape designations in Annex C of the RDP consultation paper.
- f) There was some discussion about the point made in paragraph 16 of the proposed consultation response. The point being made in paragraph 16 was welcomed, but it was felt this could be strengthened. The Capital Grants Scheme had been available for many years as a source of funding for village halls, but had recently been dismantled with the promise that its future would be covered within the consultation in the RDP. The specific concern was that it was not at all clear where this particular funding stream was located within the RDP. The more general point was that in bringing a variety of schemes together under one umbrella, the RDP had resulted in the distinctiveness and hence accessibility of different funding streams becoming very blurred.
- g) Following on from this point, it was also suggested that while farmers and land managers may be familiar with much of what was contained within the RDP, those “beyond the farm gates” would probably need help to access the schemes within the RDP.
- h) The CNPA envisaged doing further work to look at what these various schemes had purchased in previous years. It was pointed out that the SCVO was currently doing work on this and some useful linkages could be made.
- i) Paragraph 10 of the consultation response set out the proposed CNPA policy on regionalisation. It was felt this should, for completeness, make reference to the National Park Plan.
- j) Paragraph 14 expressed the view that the CNPA was willing to participate in a pilot project; it was suggested that this should be strengthened.
- k) Members commended the paper.

**15. The Board approved the recommendations of the paper as follows:**

- a) **The consultation response for submission to the Scottish Executive was approved subject to three amendments:**
  - i) **Paragraph 10 – to refer to the National Park Plan;**
  - ii) **Paragraph 14 to strengthen the word “willing”;**
  - iii) **Paragraph 16 – the end of the first sentence should be adjusted to reflect concerns about the loss of access ability and distinctiveness of schemes within the RDP.**

**16. Action:**

- a) **Fiona Newcombe to submit the consultation response, as amended, to the Scottish Executive.**

**CNPA Support for the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2006-2010 (Paper 3)**

- 17. David Bale and David Cameron presented the paper which sought the Board’s agreement to continuing support for the LBAP project within the Cairngorms. This was essentially a policy principle to be approved by the Board, although inevitably it carried some financial implications, for which indicative costs were set out under paragraph 32. It was proposed that the Finance Committee should be asked to deal with the detailed

financial consequences and the Staffing and Recruitment Committee to deal with any staffing consequences.

18. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) It was noted that Moray Council was not involved as a partner. This was a resource issue, but efforts were being made to encourage them to become more actively involved. Angus Council had committed their finances to 2010. Aberdeenshire had committed so far to 2007, with a paper going to the council shortly seeking approval to commit funding out to 2010. Highland Council approved its funding contribution on a year by year basis.
- b) A number of comments were made about the key outcomes listed at paragraph 26. Under paragraph 26 (d) it was suggested that increased involvement of communities and visitors in the enjoyment and understanding of their local biodiversity should be made more measurable so that this work could be better targeted at particular groups. In practice this work was being delivered through the Integrated Grants Programme which was showing good take up by communities. In respect of paragraph 26 (g) which referred to two large scale projects on Cairngorms habitats and species, the suggestion was made that Pine Martins should be considered. In practice, these judgements would be made against the priorities for action set out in the LBAP. In respect of 26 (g) the point was made that it would be essential to ensure that large-scale projects had clear outputs and objectives which could be delivered over the lifetime of the projects. The meaning of 26 (b) was queried – this was simply referring to the importance of ensuring a joined up approach across the public sector. The best way of making a difference with limited resources was to agree priorities and focus action on these.
- c) Paragraph 38 listed a number of individual sums of money put towards specific projects, Members were reassured, in response to a question, that these did not duplicate monies available through other existing schemes. Importantly, these projects within the LBAP were partnership projects.
- d) The point was made that by agreeing the recommendations of the paper, the Board would be committing funds in the Operational Plan for the next three years without being able to make comparative judgements against other possible funding commitments. It was made clear that the paper was about establishing a policy direction. Inevitably that would bring financial consequences, and the detail of those would rightly be dealt with by the Finance Committee at the appropriate time. There was a balance to be struck between on the one hand recognising the need to plan ahead and being prepared to set policy direction for the future, and on the other hand not tying up such a high percentage of future funds that there was no flexibility when it came to preparing the Corporate and Operational Plans. By agreeing the paper, the Board was agreeing a policy direction out to 2010. Other mechanisms, notably the committee system, were in place to agree the detail of finance and staffing in the future.
- e) The potential linkages with the previous discussion on the Scottish Rural Development Programme were noted. In practice the LBAP partnership fed its views into a range of other bodies and groups deciding on other priorities. So it was important to continue to ensure that the LBAP Steering Group

complemented other arrangements rather than duplicated them. This would be particularly the case if the Cairngorms became a pilot region in its own right. The Partnership working implicit in the LBAP Project was welcomed. However, it was suggested, in line with paragraph 36, that other partners should be encouraged to help fund the project. It was important to have a broadly based partnership.

19. In summing up the Convenor noted that the five cross cutting principles set out in the draft Cairngorms National Park Plan encapsulated many of the points made in discussion.

**20. The Board approved the recommendations of the paper as follows:**

- a) The Board agreed the continuation of the CNPA's active involvement with the Cairngorms LBAP process for the period 2006 – 2010; and**
- b) The Board approved in principle the allocation of resources as appropriate so support the employment and hosting of the Cairngorms LBAP Officer to 2010. This recommendation incorporated amendments to reflect comments made and agreed by Members.**
- c) Approval to these recommendations was given with the rider that the Board was concerned that a fuller range of funding partners should be sought.**

#### **CNPA Board Meeting Schedule (Paper 4)**

21. Jane Hope and Don McKee introduced the paper which proposed new arrangements for the format of Board meetings and Planning Committee meetings to be implemented from January 2007. The essence of the proposals was that the Board would continue to meet every fortnight on a Friday, at venues around the Park. Every meeting would start with the Planning Committee considering call-in decisions. However, the remainder of each day would be used either for a Board meeting, or for planning determinations, or for an informal discussion or visit. In other words, Board meetings would be held once every two months, and Planning Committee consideration of planning applications once every month. Once every two months there would also be the opportunity to use the major part of a day (once the call-in meeting was finished) to have an indepth discuss on strategic issues, and possibly to have a visit out and about to engage with partners. One further change that was proposed was that there should no longer be a presumption that small committees (finance, audit, staffing and recruitment) would meet at 9 o'clock in the morning. This early start had the effect of precluding some Members from taking part. It was therefore proposed that the presumption should be that these committees would meet in the afternoon following the conclusion of other business, but that having established a committee, if they wished to change that time with the agreement of all of their members, that would be acceptable.

22. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) The revised proposals were welcome. Informal discussions had proved to be very useful in the previous months and had shown how effectively these could be used to help develop policy proposals.

- b) Board Members were expected to read and absorb a huge number of papers in a short space of time; the request was made that papers be circulated in tranches, where this was possible, to allow Members more time to read them.
- c) The point was made in respect of planning determinations that the new scheduling of Planning Committees would operate in tandem with other changes to the processes as set out in the paper. It was therefore expected that there would be relatively little impact on the time taken to process applications.
- d) The possibility of the Board getting out and about and meeting partners who are helping to deliver the National Park Plan was welcomed.
- e) There would need to be further thought given to the scheduling of Board papers, to ensure that there were sufficient meetings to meet requirements such as approving the Corporate Plan, etc.
- f) Members were invited to offer their suggestions for informal discussions. The point was also made that even under the current arrangements if the Planning Committee finished early, it would make good use of Members time if an informal discussion could be held following the early conclusion of the Planning Committee.

**23. The Board approved the recommendations as follows:**

- a) **The Board approved the revised arrangements as set out in the paper, to start from the New Year;**
- b) **The Board agreed that the new arrangements be reviewed from time to time to ensure that they are fit for purpose.**

**Date of Next Meeting**

**24. Friday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2006, Ben Mhor Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey.**