CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING
held at The Lonach Hall, Strathdon
on Friday 30th November 2007 at 11.30am

PRESENT

Eric Baird	Eleanor Mackintosh
Stuart Black	Ian Mackintosh
Duncan Bryden	Anne MacLean
Jaci Douglas	Alastair MacLennan
David Fallows	William McKenna
Lucy Grant	Fiona Murdoch
David Green (Convenor)	Sandy Park
Drew Hendry	Andrew Rafferty
Marcus Humphrey	Richard Stroud
Bob Kinnaird	Susan Walker
Bruce Luffman	Ross Watson
Mary McCafferty	

In Attendance:

Pete Crane	Patricia Methven
Murray Ferguson	Gavin Miles
Andrew Harper	Andy Rinning
Jane Hope	Francoise van Buuren

Apologies:
Geva Blackett
Nonie Coulthard

Minutes of Last Meeting – approval

1. The Minutes of the last meeting 5th October 2007 were approved: with no changes (subject to addition of Annex 1).

Matters Arising

2. None

Declarations of Interest

3. A number of members noted an interest in Paper 1 as follows: Eric Baird; Willie McKenna (employed as rangers within the Park); Bob Kinnaird, all councillors (employers of council ranger services); Stuart Black (Abernethy Trust, employer of ranger within the Park). In none of these cases was the interest deemed to be directly linked to the decision in the paper and therefore there was no need for Members to withdraw from the discussion.

Transfer of Grant Aid Function for Ranger Service in the National Park (Paper 1)

4. Pete Crane introduced the paper which summarised the work that had been undertaken to date on the development of a coordinated approach to ranger services within the National Park, and sought specific approval for the Cairngorms National Park Authority to take on the role of providing grants for ranger services from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). By way of background Pete Crane explained that when the Cairngorms National Park was created in 2003, there were twelve publicly funded ranger services within the Park employing 25 people as rangers. Rangers generally have a number of roles: they help visitors and communities get the most from a visit to the countryside; they help land managers manage visitors on their land; they connect people with the National Park. Rangers have a key role in delivering a number of the priorities for action in the National Park Plan, notably enjoying outdoor access, raising awareness and understanding, conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage, and helping sustainable tourism businesses.

5. The CNPA Board had previously agreed that while it was important to get a degree of coherence across all the ranger services within the Cairngorms National Park, this did not require the CNPA to take over and employ existing rangers, but rather it was preferable to maintain and build on the existing partnerships. It would however be important to have the rangers explicitly linked to the National Park via the National Park Brand. The role of the Cairngorms National Park Authority would therefore be a coordinating role, bringing ranger services across the National Park together, and influencing what they did so that this was more closely aligned to the priorities within the National Park.

6. In discussion the following points were made:
    a) The proposal to transfer the Grant in Aid function for ranger services from SNH to the Cairngorms National Park Authority was in line with the decision previously made by the Board, provided the grant transferred covered the whole cost and the CNPA was not left with any shortfall. It was still not clear whether or not SNH would need to decrease the funding allocated to rangers and would therefore transfer less across to the CNPA. Presentationally, it would be extremely damaging for this to occur, leaving the impression that the cut in funding to rangers was a CNPA decision. However, the recommendation in the paper made quite clear that the Board were being asked to approve the transfer of the Grant in Aid function subject to any settlement not reducing overall level of public support for ranger services in the National Park.
    b) The funding of rangers at Mar Lodge was covered by a separate agreement between SNH and NTS. While this meant that the ranger service at Mar Lodge would be somewhat anomalous given that it did not fit with the other funding

arrangements for rangers, there was no necessity to sort out all such separate agreements for the sake of tidiness. In time, all the various arrangements could be unified, but for the moment the first sensible step appeared to be to sort out the arrangements for the majority of the ranger services.

c) Annex 3, paragraph 42 (g) referred to the need to provide additional training to ranger services. Once ranger services across the National Park were unified through the common Cairngorms Brand, it made sense that all had to be able to talk knowledgably and with confidence about the National Park. It was reasonable for the CNPA to ensure the appropriate level of training (it was noted that the Land Based Business Training Project was well placed to provide for this).

d) It was noted that the transfer of grant aid for ranger services from SNH to the CNPA would mean that in practice in the future the Grant in Aid came direct to the CNPA from the Scottish Government and not via SNH.

e) Paragraph 15 referred to the fact that SNH wished to see rangers continuing to deliver some outputs that directly assisted with their area of interest. This was largely about work associated with National Nature Reserves. It did not imply additional bureaucracy but was simply about ensuring the continued delivery of the existing management plans of National Nature Reserves.

f) There was some discussion about the expectation of an enhanced ranger service within the National Park. Transferring the current amounts of funding would imply no enhancement. However, the argument was generally that any enhancement within the National Park would come from the Park Authority's resources. At the moment what was proposed was simply the transfer of a function and the money that went with it; any enhancement by way of additional resources was a decision for the CNPA which would have to be taken alongside all the other priorities.

g) There was some discussion about the administration cost associated with the CNPA taking on the role of dispersing Grant in Aid to ranger services. There was no precedent for this given the move towards an outcome based approach. The National Park Plan was drafted in that way, as were the agreements between the Scottish Government and other public bodies. The idea was to negotiate a programme of work to be delivered by rangers with the CNPA's role being to agree performance indicators and monitor and oversee these.

h) The real benefit of the proposed transfer of the grant function would come not so much from any additional monetary resources but from a better focus and coordination of the rangers' work in the National Park.

i) It was crucial that the transfer of the grant aid function for ranger services from SNH was on the basis of no cut in funding. It would be wrong to take decisions now which would affect other services in the future.

7. **The Board agreed the recommendations of the paper as follows:**
   a) **Approved the transfer of the Grant-Aid function for ranger services from SNH to the CNPA, subject to any settlement <u>not</u> reducing the overall level of public support for ranger services in the National Park, and subject to final approval by the Finance Committee.**

Grant Integration and the Future of the Community Investment Programme (Paper 2)

8. Andrew Harper introduced the paper which outlined the options for integrating grant funding mechanisms with a view to creating efficiencies for funders and simplifying processes for all project applicants. In discussion the following points were made:

   a) Paragraph 5 referred to Scottish Enterprise Grampian considering the radical step of approving the planned funding contribution upfront to be administered alongside LEADER funds. It was felt that this arrangement would not require SEG to agree in advance exactly the project it would fund but more likely that it would say which types of projects and their funding would be administered in keeping with these. This highlighted an approach that the CNPA could potentially take.

   b) The LEADER strategy and business plan had been prepared taking account of the National Park Plan and community plans, and one could therefore be confident that the proposed pooling of CNPA funding with the LEADER resources and delegating authority to make funding decisions to the LEADER Local Action Group would deliver the aims of the National Park Plan (although it was noted there were some issues in the LEADER strategy which were not specifically itemised in the Priorities for Action of the National Park Plan).

   c) Views were sought on whether or not the community investment programme funding should be ring fenced. There was a general feeling that some flexibility was welcome but this needed to be constrained. Some ring fencing was desirable, but equally the ability to vire between headings if there was an underspend was equally desirable.

   d) It was noted that lasting benefits tend to come from bigger projects, although it was also noted that the small grants given to communities through the previous small grants programme had been very well received by the communities within the National Park, there was a good argument for keeping small grants small precisely because they enabled projects to be funded with minimal bureaucracy which otherwise could not find funding through other grant schemes.

   e) There was slight concern over the lack of CNPA visibility if the proposal was followed. It was suggested that use of the Cairngorms Brand could be helpful in this respect; it was also noted that the names of the grant schemes could also incorporate the word Cairngorms National Park (eg Cairngorms National Park LEADER, and Cairngorms National Park Community Investment Programme), although it was noted that the name used by the LEADER programme was a matter for the Local Action Group.

   f) It was pointed out that the grant schemes should be about investment for the future and should be focused on building capacity for the future.

   g) It was confirmed that the proposed arrangement would not restrict the ability of the CNPA to couple it's funding with multiple funding partners.

   h) The proposal would allow the CNPA to retain influence rather than control. It represented a good opportunity to build trust with partners by delegating funding decisions.

   i) Ring fencing had its merits but could lead to a situation of pressure to spend money towards the year end rather than concentrate on achieving something.

j) The proposal provided an opportunity to make sure money was dispersed locally in an effective way.

k) The LAG membership was broadly based and reflected cross-membership with various Community Planning Partnerships. Andrew Harper was currently representing the CNPA.

9. **The Board agreed the recommendations of the paper as follows:**

a) **Agrees the principle of pulling CNPA funding with LEADER resources and delegating authority to make funding decisions to the LEADER Local Action Group; that the LAG should be invited to consider the possibility of adopting a name which reflected the Cairngorms National Park; and that use of the Cairngorms National Park Brand be investigated as a way of emphasising the association of the Grant Scheme with the Cairngorms National Park;**

b) **Notes progress on the establishment of a Cairngorms Sustainability Fund; that the potential synergy in funding projects that may exist between LEADER and the Sustainability Fund will be explored as part of future development; and that the administration of the Sustainability Fund by LEADER staff will be explored as an option for the most effective and efficient delivery of this project;**

c) **Agrees to the Cairngorms Community Investment Programme continuing as a small grants scheme but as part of the LEADER Programme rather than a separate Park Authority scheme.**

Programme of Board Meetings 2008 (Paper 3)

10. Andy Rinning introduced the paper which sought Members agreement to the schedule of Board meetings, Finance, Audit and Planning Committee meetings for the calendar year 2008.

11. The paper was noted with a number of observations:

a) The date of the 19th April for a discussion session was an error and should read the 18th April.

b) The climate change discussions were all shown as being in Ballater; this was not fixed and venues were for further confirmation.

c) There was to be an Audit Committee on February 8th.

d) The format of open evenings before Board meetings was still to be resolved. It was noted that at the recent AOCC workshop some of the view expressed indicated that the CNPA was still not giving communities what they needed in terms of engagement.

e) A more structured approach to the informal discussion session was suggested albeit allowing for flexibility to deal with issues as they arose.

12. **The Board agreed the recommendations of the paper as follows:**

a) *Dates:* **the proposed dates for Board meetings and Planning, Finance and Audit Committee meetings;**

b) *Venues:* **that monthly consideration of planning determinations by the Planning Committee alternate between Ballater and Grantown, with all other meetings (formal Board meetings and informal Board discussion sessions) rotate round the**

Park, using venues known to be accessible under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act;

National Park Plan Implementation Progress Report (Paper 4)

13. The paper was for information and was noted with the observation that the attached paper by the Macaulay Institute was worthy of a fuller discussion and a considered response; it was also noted that a commitment was made at the last Advisory Forum meetings to providing feedback and this was due very shortly.

Corporate Plan Report: Theme 1 (Paper 5)

14. The paper was for information. The following points were noted:
    a) Discontinuing the publication of the Events Guide had raised concerns in some quarters. However, it was noted that this had only followed extensive consideration with the Visit Forum of the full range of publications. The National Park Plan delivery team had taken a collective decision to discontinue publication, although a number of rangers were not content. The publication had become increasingly costly as the number of events had increased, and more information was now going onto the internet which was the obvious and logical way forward.
    b) The 50 live access cases were noted. A paper was regularly given to the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum on caseload and these were on the website. Fifty was felt to be a reasonably comfortable number; there was no standard way of recording caseload across Scotland and so it was difficult to compare. However, there was some indication that fifty was a relatively low caseload compared with other access authorities. Many cases raised relatively minor issues and a judgement had to be made on how urgent the case was; and all the while that a case was not addressed it remained on the list. Further consideration was needed on how best to report to the CNPA Board.
    Action: Murray Ferguson to advise the Board on how best to periodically report to the Board on Access caseload.
    c) There was some discussion about evidence for levels of understanding and awareness increasing as a result of the enabling work undertaken in the National Park. The public attitude survey to the environment in Scotland had not yet been repeated and neither had the visitor survey within the National Park first done in 2003. Statistics on levels of awareness and understanding would therefore not be available until these surveys were repeated (expected soon). The relevant delivery team was looking at performance measures and indicators.

AOCB

15. The Aviemore Fence. To date this had been addressed as a planning issue; the Reporter had now determined that the fence should be reduced in height in one place and had also noted that the fence nevertheless obstructed access rights. Access implications therefore remained, and the CLOAF (Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum) had agreed that formal action should be taken if necessary under the Land Reform

legislation. CNPA staff would therefore write to solicitors, asking for removal of the fence by a specified date; if that did not happen, CNPA would serve the relevant notice.

16. Child Care. Provision of child care was a continuing problem in the area impacting on employment. CNPA agreed to use its influence to raise in the relevant forums (e.g. Community Planning Partnerships).

Date of Next Meeting

17. Special Board meeting 18th January at Boat of Garten (in place of meeting on 25th January which will be a Board training day).