
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING **held by telephone/ video conference** **on Friday 12th June 2020 at 11.00am**

PRESENT

(By video conferencing unless stated otherwise)

Xander McDade (Convener)	Eleanor Mackintosh
Geva Blackett (Deputy Convener)	Willie McKenna
Peter Argyle	Ian McLaren
Carolyn Caddick	Dr Fiona McLean
Deirdre Falconer	William Munro
Pippa Hadley	Anne Rae Macdonald
Janet Hunter	Dr Gaener Rodger
John Kirk	Derek Ross
John Latham	Judith Webb
Douglas McAdam	

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
Alix Harkness, Clerk to the Board

Apologies: None.

Welcome and Introduction

1. Xander McDade the Convener, welcomed everyone to the first live streamed meeting of the Board.
2. There were no apologies.

Minutes of Last Meetings held – for approval

4. The draft Minutes of the last meeting held on 27 March 2020 were agreed with no amendments.

Matters Arising

5. The Convener provided an update on the Action points from the previous minutes:
 - a) Action Point at Para 19 (i) – **Closed** – The Convener and Director of Corporate Services to draft progression plan should the Convener and Deputy Convener be off at the same time clearly stating the process. This was circulated to the Board once drafted.
6. **Action Points Arising: None**

Declarations of Interest

7. Declarations of interest were invited. There were no interests declared. For transparency, the following wider responsibilities of members with relevance to items under consideration were stated and noted.
 - a) Eleanor Mackintosh sits on Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership (TGLP) Board, mentioned in several of papers.
 - b) Doug McAdam chairs south Perthshire deer management group mentioned in papers.

CEO Report & Convener Update (Paper I)

8. Grant Moir, Chief Executive, introduced Paper I which highlights the main strategic work streams that are being directed by Management Team, and which covers activities of the Convener and Board members. The CEO explained that these are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver National Park Partnership Plan priorities. He highlighted the following area:
 - a) Cairngorm Nature big 10 days online – this had been a great effort by all concerned. Social media statistics confirm the event had been really successful, reaching a wide audience and leading officers involved to believe it would be very worthwhile to blend things next year with some on line content continuing. The adaptations made as a consequence of COVID have helped to look at different models going forward.
 - b) National Park Partnerships Cliff bar relationship – a Cairngorms project had been put forward for partnership funding and had been chosen. The CEO

highlighted it is good to see funding coming in to support Cairngorms delivery from different sources.

- c) A great deal of work was progressing on Visitor Management as the Authority prepared with partners and stakeholders for the relaxation of travel restrictions and the start of the visitor season.
- d) Local Development Plan Examination has gone ahead, and will hopefully conclude in summer.
- e) Stakeholder engagement has been incredible across the Park, with the CEO remarking that positive partnership working over the past 3 months has been the best in his experience.

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

- a) Members commended the work undertaken by interns, with valuable research work undertaken. Members commented this was excellent experience for young people and expressed a desire that the Authority continue and expand these opportunities if possible. The CEO responded that this represents part of our youth employment strategy and Management Team will be looking at that again in Autumn.
- b) Members noted that they took part at home in some of the Cairngorms Nature on line events which were really enjoyable and a good way to engage people who can't enjoy the Park. Members enjoyed that different way interacting with Park agreed this was interesting for ongoing use in the future.
- c) Members questioned whether woodland expansion GIS work is open data that people can access? The CEO responded that the product still needs a bit more work internally, while the intention is to share the final product widely. The work has covered 50% of Park area.
- d) The Board noted that among the impacts of COVID19 there had been significant reduction in activity and lost income in the venison market. The CEO responded that Cairngorms Upland Advisory Group has discussed that issue, and the Authority were engaged in feedback to Scottish Government, including being part of a stakeholder group on the subject.
- e) Members enquired on the level of dialogue and consultation with estates in the Park with regard to the introduction of a Seasonal Ranger Service by the Authority. The CEO reported that he and management were doing extensive work through the visitor management group, which includes estates which have rangers in park. The CEO has also spoken at stakeholder meetings which have included Scottish Land and Estates and other relevant parties, with feedback all positive. Staff will be sending out further information to estates and others to further clarify service intentions.

14. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
- a) The Convener expressed thanks on behalf of board to staff for huge amount of work which has clearly gone into this paper and prior consultation with partners and brought together a plan for recovery. There was broad agreement from members commending the CEO and the team for the work in developing these proposals.
 - b) Members noted feedback that the Cairngorms Economic Steering Group was going well, while there was evidence of some businesses either not applying for available funds or being refused in some instances. Members noted there was perceived lack of awareness amongst businesses of the broad scope of some of the funds available.
 - c) A member fed back that there was widespread support for the recovery plan approach being taken, nationally and internationally, with Europarc really interested and noting Cairngorms is ahead of other protected areas in this regard.
 - d) A member noted the success of the Emergency Tourism Response Group which had been dynamic and generated wide cooperation across groups without any sense of geographic divide – a benefit of virtual meetings. The Convener agreed these points and noted that action in Cairngorms had raced ahead of some other areas.
 - e) Members discussed work being done on Visitor Management with the CEO confirming preparatory activity invested in signage, toilets, car parks and other information needed by around 15 July. The CEO confirmed we will put in place all the right things we can with resources we have.
 - f) Members discussed tone of messaging and need to welcome in positive manner, rather than do not this and that. The CEO confirmed officers were working on positive guidance.
 - g) A member raised the remaining issue of path maintenance as more visitors come to use the Park. The CEO agreed in the need for appropriate maintenance, provision and reported that officers are developing contractual approaches for those paths the Authority is responsible for.
 - h) In discussion on timetables, the Convener noted that special meetings would be arranged on existing Board dates if any “milestone” agreements had to be taken by members. The CEO also noted that the Finance and Delivery Committee would be consulted at stages of development of aspects of the Green Recovery Fund, with further strategic decisions on this taken at the Board.
 - i) The CEO confirmed he would be eager for projects for the Green Recovery Fund to come forward from diverse areas of the National Park. Development of the Deeside Way as a project within the Plan was discussed, and noted that

there was considerable work to do in scoping route and land management agreements.

- j) Members noted the support of the Cairngorms Nature steering group for the Plan.
- k) Members discussed the legacy aspects of the Plan and whether, for example, there is potential for rented housing in Park - bringing EPC of houses to improved standards. The CEO agreed this is an issue for rural Scotland while a project around that would need the right partners.
- l) In response to concerns about litter, fly tipping and other risks the CEO confirmed officers were working to circulate signs messaging on barbeques and fires.
- m) In response to questions on the timetable for a Green Recovery Fund, the CEO reported that the team need a bit of time to work up criteria, with a target for August for bids open. There would be a quick turnaround and the idea of a fund was being promoted to allow potential applicants to start thinking about ideas now.
- n) On wider questions on the relative priority of ideas set out in the Plan, the CEO explained the proposals were a list of potential capital projects. Prioritisation would take place on an ongoing basis and immediate assessed priorities were being brought forward now. Equally, if any further resources became available over the course of the year, there would be further evaluation through the Board on where these funds should be redirected.
- o) On further discussion on visitor management and messaging, members noted concerns among many communities about a large increase in visitors while public infrastructure such as car parks and toilets was not available to cope with visitor numbers. The CEO confirmed he and senior managers were, on daily basis, discussing things with Local Authorities on toilets and infrastructure. The recovery fund would aim to deliver projects that fell into gaps in existing resource provision.
- p) On the Cairngorms Dark Skies Observatory project, the CEO clarified the bid was led by Crown Estate and sought to secure £1.3 million from European Funds via SNH, with this investment supporting the development of that bid in an area we are aiming to increase visitor footfall. A local community group would have to take the final project forward.
- q) Members commented that the green recovery plan presented opportunities for increasing resilience in communities while building a green economy.

15. **The Board:**

- a) **Agreed to the Cairngorms National Park Green Recovery Plan.**
- b) **Considered alongside the 2020/21 Budget & Operational Plan Review paper.**

- c) **A board member to sit on Green Recovery Fund Group – to put forward names to the Convener.**
- d) **Use agreed meeting dates for added Board meetings to cover significant decision points.**

16. Action Point Arising:

- i. Identify member to sit on Green Recovery Fund Group.**

2020/21 Budget and Operational Plan Review (Paper 3)

17. David Cameron, Director of Corporate Services introduced Paper 3 which presents a review of the Authority's budget and Operational Plan for 2020/21 in light of the impacts of COVID19 affecting the Authority since commencement of the financial year. He explained that the paper presents an overview of the Authority's income and expenditure position in the year to date. The expenditure position focuses primarily on payroll position to date, which represents a key indicator of the reliability of initial budget estimates at such an early stage in the year. He went on to advise that the paper considers the position of the 2020/21 Budget and Operational Plan investment proposals in context both of the management of investments between 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years, and of the assessed impacts of COVID19 restrictions on operations. He added that the paper follows consideration of these matters by the Finance and Delivery Committee at its meeting of 22 May 2020.
18. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
- a) Some rangers within NP were furloughed other rangers services didn't furlough their staff. Grant funds had been reduced where rangers were furloughed as we cannot double fund.
 - b) Whether the Dark Skies Project represented a niche market? The CEO advised this is not a niche market, rather a growing tourism market, with Cairngorms the furthest north Dark Skies Park in world, with potential to drive tourism in shoulder and winter months. Another member noted while having concerns going forward the project represented a potential unique selling point for the area. Members noted there was a risk factor with the project, while the Director of Corporate Services noted all projects at initiation represented a delivery risk to some degree and our normal business was to manage that risk. He noted that this represented an allocation of funds, not a cash transfer. If the project stalled there was potential in normal management of funds to reallocate funds elsewhere.
 - c) In response to comment on the scale of the investment, the CEO and Director of Corporate Services noted this was not a large scale investment in the context of a range of other project interventions under management. Director of Corporate Services highlighted that when we look at any project appraisal,

the standard appraisal is on the minimum amount of money we at NPA can put in, to make a project happen.

- d) On the Dark Skies project timeline, the CEO confirmed if the applicants don't apply for grant from SNH this year they will miss the bid.
- e) In response to a query on costing of the seasonal rangers the Director of Corporate Services confirmed cost is based on band B1, recognizing staff in those bands work on 7day week, slightly enhanced than normal band B, inclusive of national insurance, pension contributions. The salary was above Scottish living wage.
- f) On the timeline for the project, the Director of Corporate Services explained that some recruitment aspects had to be taken forward prior to this meeting if staff were to be secured in time for the summer relaxation of travel restrictions. However, final contract award had been delayed pending the final decision of the Board at this meeting. The Convener noted this point and also highlighted the previous discussion to have more fluid Board meeting dates where specific milestone decisions were required.
- g) The CEO clarified there was no CNPA funding in the Glenmore route extension proposals.
- h) Members welcomed work on procurement highlighted in the paper to secure as much economic benefit for the Park from the Authority's spending as possible, and that work would be done on awareness raising within local businesses on how to interact with procurement processes.

19. **The Board:**

- a) **Noted that payroll costs are on budget for 2020/21 and there are no areas of risk of overspend currently identified within current year budget monitoring;**
- b) **Agreed that £0.271 million identified in this paper can be released from current year budget provisions;**
- c) **Agreed to redeployment of £0.266 million to Green Recovery Plan actions identified in this paper (paragraph Error! Reference source not found. and subsequent expanded detail);**
- d) **Agreed to commission the Glenmore NMU route extension should capital funding be secured for this project (paragraph Error! Reference source not found. and subsequent detail).**

20. **Action Point Arising:**

- i. **Develop Principles and Criteria for Green Recovery Fund.**

**National Park Partnership Plan 2017-2022 Delivery Update for 2019-20
(Paper 4)**

21. Grant Moir, CEO introduced Paper 4 which presents an update on delivery against the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2017-2022 for the year 2019/20.

22. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
- a) On the suite of strategic plans, the CEO confirmed that the LDP is a requirement, as would be a Local Development Strategy if we have LEADER or an equivalent replacement while the others are within our gift and there may be other pressing strategy requirements to support the next NPPP.
 - b) Members questioned whether there is an objective way of measuring whether something green or amber in the risk rating or just a subjective judgement. The CEO confirmed there is a degree of subjectivity though ratings are discussed with as many as possible to seek consensus.
23. **The Board:**
- a) **Reviewed the update on delivery against the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2017-2022 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.**
24. **Action Point Arising: None**

AOCB

25. Grant Moir CEO and Pete Crane, Head of Visitor Services provided the following update on Visitor Management Plans. They made the following points:
- a) Visitor management plans are on website and framework with CBP went out with press release yesterday
 - b) Feedback will be provided to those who attended community meetings: this being sent out today
 - c) Happy to talk further about signage, with members advised to have a look at management plans and phone either Grant or Pete if any further questions.
26. The Board discussed the update and had the following comments and points of clarity:
- a) A wish to discuss the Carrbridge Caper project at Board at some point.
 - b) Agreed that minutes of Board Committees be circulated to all board members.
 - c) Clarification sought on election timescale for Planning Convener.
27. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee reported that the Committee had been asked to look at the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. The Committee had, at its meeting that morning, looked at the audit and assurance point of view of the project with internal and external auditors in attendance. The Committee had found general sound assurance on how project has been run, and while there were some communication issues in beginning, those have been acknowledged and improvements made with local community. General feeling with those in attendance that with almost

everything we do there will always be people who will have a contrary opinion. Overall, the Committee had found that the project had delivered from a sound basis of controls.

28. More widely, it had been noted that the Authority need to keep perspective and a proportionate view of reputational risk: issues experienced would be minor compared to feedback if capercaillie were to go extinct in the Park.
29. Auditors had added that from hearing discussions on reviews and actions taken internally they could see nothing they would add from audit and assurance point of view. There is a need to note vast majority of partners value the project.
30. The Convener noted that stakeholders and people of all views should be encouraged to respond to the consultation that is ongoing.
31. **Action Points Arising: None**

Date of Next Meeting

32. Next formal Board meeting to be held on 11 September 2020.
33. The meeting concluded at 13.45.