



Minutes of the Formal Board meeting

Held at Learning Hive at the Highland Wildlife Park, Kincaig,
Kingussie PH21 1NL

In person

26 September 2025 at 10.00am

Present in person

Sandy Bremner (Convener)

Geva Blackett

Peter Cosgrove

Paul Gibb

John Kirk

Lauren MacCallum

Ian McLaren

Steve Micklewright

Michael Williamson

Eleanor Mackintosh (Deputy Convener)

Jackie Brierton

Kenny Deans

Russell Jones

Bill Lobban

Fiona McLean

Duncan Miller

Ann Ross

In attendance

Grant Moir, Chief Executive Officer

Andy Ford, Director of Nature and Climate Change

Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place

Colin McClean Head of Land Management

David Berry, Head of Planning and Chief Planning Officer

Oliver Davies, Head of Communications and Engagement

Malcolm Smith, Agricultural Adviser

Karen Johnstone, Clerk to the Board

Apologies

Hannah Grist

Derek Ross



Welcome and introduction

1. Sandy Bremner, the Board Convener, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were noted.
2. Board Convener noted the sad passing of a previous Board Member, Greggor Rimmel saying he would be sadly missed and passing on thanks for all he had done for the Park Authority.
3. A special welcome to new Board Member, Ian McLaren. Ian will be sitting on the Resources Committee and replacing Peter Cosgrove on the Audit and Risk Committee.

Approval of minutes of previous meetings

4. The minutes from the previous meeting held on 27 June 2025 was approved with no amendments.

Matters arising not covered elsewhere

5. There were no matters arising.

Action	Status
Action Points from meeting on 22 March 2024:	
Paper 1 CEO report	
At para 7	Completed
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. CEO, to prepare a briefing note on farming activity and statistics within the Cairngorms National Park and distribute to the Board. 	
Action	Status
Action Points from meeting on 22 November 2024:	
Paper 1 - CEO Report	
At para 6b	In hand
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Review the Planning call-in protocol and discuss at a future planning committee. 	
Update:	
An informal discussion on call-in criteria has been scheduled after the last few planning committee meetings, although it has been deferred on each occasion due other agenda items	



over-running. The discussion has been re-programmed to be held later today after the Formal Board meeting.

Paper 5 - Active Cairngorms and end of season visitor report

At para 23a

- i. Include key challenges in mitigation and learning in future papers.

To be included in 2025 report

At para 23c

- ii. Statistics on camp site and luxury camping options within the National Park

In hand

Update:

Statistics on camp site and luxury camping options within the National Park.

As there is no firm definition of luxury camping or "glamping" and some premises can be listed as self-catering properties, the following is a best estimate. The Park Authority subscribe to annual reports on the volume and value of tourism which in turn use a database of premises in the area. This shows a total of 27 businesses listed as camping and / or caravan sites. 21 of these businesses have further accommodation that is neither touring pitches nor caravans and these are considered likely to be luxury camping properties - for example wigwams, yurts and even a train carriage.

Action

Status

Action Points from meeting on 28 March 2025:

Paper 1 - CEO Report

At para 10

- i. List of Cairngorms 2030 projects currently going through procurement processes to be circulated to the Board.

Completed

Update:

Board will be updated biannually a list of the procurement underway and completed.

Paper 2 – 2025/26 Budget and Operational Plan

- i. Information on the number of ecological barriers that are being removed on catchments to be sought and circulated to the Board and thought to be given to putting this into a staff members forward work plan.

In hand

- ii. Scope of extending the work on species management specifically geese further up the Spey into Badenoch to be investigated.

In hand



Update:	
Information is being sought for the number of ecological barriers that are being removed on catchments, but not yet available. This is one of the indicators in the Cairngorms Nature Index. Will be shared with the Board once available.	
There has been little or no demand from farmers outwith the current area to extend the goose control scheme. Additional factors in considering extension have been capacity and practicalities in the contractor network. Also, high kill rates of geese are not directly translating to high reductions in numbers on control sites, which could indicate resident greylags are filling the control areas and thus having an effect on the wider area, or that there is more interchange between resident and migratory geese. This needs more time to establish.	
Paper 3 -Consultation response to Highland Council Visitor Levy Proposal	
i. Sentence to be added to end of consultation response as detailed in paragraph 18a.	Completed
ii. CEO to keep the Board abreast with any developments in the discussions between HMRC and the UK Government with regards to the impact any future tourism levy would have on VAT thresholds in Scotland.	Completed
Action	Status
Action Points from meeting on 27 June 2025:	
Paper 1 CEO Report	
At para 6 c	
i. Clerks to the Board to share the minutes from group meetings that Board Members sit on to the board portal.	In hand
Update:	
Advisory group meeting minutes that have been approved have been added to the website and linked to via the Board Site. Outstanding advisory group minutes will be added following the approval of the minutes at the next meeting.	



Paper 2 - Integrated Wildfire Management Plan - final approval	
At para 10 a i. Update action at 2.2 Muirburn: All muirburn practitioners to adhere to the requirements of the new statutory muirburn licensing system.	Completed

Declarations of interest

6. There were no declarations of interest.

CEO Report (Paper 1)

7. Grant Moir, CEO, introduced the paper which was to highlight to Board Members the main strategic areas of work that are being directed by the Management Team. These are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver, with partners, the aspirations of the National Park Partnership Plan.
8. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
 - a) Board Convener welcomed the Cabinet Secretary's approval of the Fire Byelaws noting this was an example of the Park Authority handling an issue of huge importance, listening carefully to consultation and taking action to reduce the threat of fires, save lives and wildlife. The Convener thanked everyone involved in helping with this work.
 - b) A Board Member questioned if the economic impact is being considered in the next stage of the gamebird management process. CEO explained the socio-economic impacts would be considered. The main issue is to ensure that the work is cairngorms focussed as most data on gamebird impacts has been collated in the south of England where the land use is very different.
 - c) A question was raised regarding the water management and how to encourage people to consider the impacts of this in the future. CEO explained that long term water management supplies are part of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) and information on this will be gathered as part of the Local Development Plan (LDP).



- d) Discussions were had around the new website, praising the vast improvements. It was suggested that a further improvement could be highlighting local businesses that have opened in the National Park with help of the grants offered by the Park Authority. CEO agreed this would be a positive story to share on the website and something the team could look into. It was also suggested having heads of service details on the website to allow the public to engage better. CEO explained that due to cyber security reasons, the decision was taken to keep a small number of email addresses / contact numbers on the website, however, agreed it would be beneficial to include Head of Service biographies on the website alongside Executive Team.

10.17am Steve Micklewright joined the meeting

- e) Discussions were had around consultation on the LDP Evidence Report and how the responses are gathered, suggesting it is too complicated and a lot of work for unpaid volunteers. Members asked to feedback concerns to Scottish Government (SG) as public have concerns of consultation overkill which will result in a lack of engagement during later stages of LDP preparation. CEO sympathised with this and noted this would be shared with SG.
 - f) A Board Member questioned if the results from the annual beaver survey would be fed back to those in areas of high risk. CEO explained the survey will be discussed at the beaver management and mitigation group.
 - g) Discussions were had around the fire management community asset register in Badenoch and Strathspey. Head of Land Management explained this was raised at a debrief regarding the Dava fire and acceptance in the community that the register needs improved. The Park Authority is working alongside the Strathspey Commander, to improve the working of the fire access register.
 - h) Discussions were had around the improvement in engagement through social media and the possibility of using content creators / influencers to share specific scientific and focused content around fires to engage public. Head of Communications and Engagement agreed this can be a good way of engaging with the public, and that we had experience of this from previous campaigns. This will be explored as part of the fire byelaws work.
9. The Board noted the paper. The Convener thanks the CEO and all staff on behalf of the Board.



10. Action Points Arising:
 - i. CEO to write to SG to raise concerns about LDP Evidence Report process.

Revision of Planning Committee Standing Orders (Paper 2)

11. David Berry, Head of Planning and Chief Planning Officer and Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place introduced the paper which seeks formal approval and adoption of proposed updates to the Planning Committee Standing Orders. It follows consideration and agreement of updates to the Standing Orders at the Planning Committee meeting on 29 August 2025.
12. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
 - a) Discussions were had around Board Members having their cameras on while attending a meeting online. Some members felt that it shows presence in the meeting and can show public that you are actively listening. Other members explained due to broadband connections in rural areas it can be difficult for cameras to be on permanently. Suggestions were made for Board Members to go to a local public area with stronger broadband speeds, however this is not always feasible for members. Therefore, the decision was made to amend the wording in the Standing Orders to read: Members should have their camera switched on (unless there is a specific technical reason why it is not possible at that meeting).
13. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
 - a) Approve and adopt the updated Planning Committee Standing Orders set out in Annex 1 to this paper.
14. Action Points Arising:
 - i. Amend the wording in the Standing Orders to read: Members should have their camera switched on (unless there is a specific technical reason why it is not possible at that meeting).



National Park Partnership Plan annual update (Paper 3)

15. Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place introduced the paper which summarises the monitoring framework for the [National Park Partnership Plan](#) (NPPP) and identifies some of the key areas where indicators show progress or where officers expect progress to be demonstrated in future after the third year of delivery of the NPPP.

16. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
 - a) A board member raised the issues of childcare within the National Park and how to support new childcare businesses and encourage young people to start careers in childcare as this would be a fantastic business opportunity which is desperately required, especially through the school holidays when tourists visit the area, this can have a detrimental impact on economy.
 - b) A Board Member explained they felt like objective 12 b i) is beyond the Park Authority's remit and careful consideration should be given to NPPP if this should be retained, and if so, this should be measured against proportion of young and working age populations maintained relative to comparable areas in Scotland as this would be a better way to approach it.
 - c) Discussions were had around "green jobs" and if they should just be called "jobs" in the next NPPP while also including traditional skills within these as well as skills and training being offered. Director of Planning and Place explained that Economic Steering Group have discussed how to identify key areas and gaps in skills and how to identify courses and programmes within the National Park to target these. Economic Steering Group also discussed the demographic in the National Park, noting that there was more than 50% of people living in the area over 50 years old who could be encouraged to take up employment or start up a small business on a part time basis with help from pilot programmes which is important to be included in the NPPP to encourage partners to develop and reach objectives.
 - d) A Board Member noted that public transport is still an issue due to bus / train times not being suitable for those working in the towns / villages. Also noted that cycle paths still need improvement. Director of Planning and Place explained the Park Authority are working alongside other organisations to



improve this, but noted work on Aviemore to Carrbridge cycle path is tied in with the work being carried out on the A9.

- e) A Board Member praised the transport improvements in Deeside, noting the new bus route from Aberdeen to Dundee is being very well used and has made a big improvement.
- f) Board Members commented that the NPPP should be considering the impact of peatland work, not just the quantity.
- g) A discussion was had around 20-minute neighbourhoods and the struggles of achieving this in the Highlands. Director of Planning and Place explained the methodology of this was to have key services within a 20-minute walk, drive or cycle to rural communities, which is achievable, especially now with electric vehicles being more popular.
- h) A question was raised if the 75% target for affordable housing was achievable. Director of Planning and Place explained that this target is not likely to be achievable for an individual developer on their own but will require significant public sector investment as well as communities and the public sector taking more ownership of land.

17. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:

- a) Note the progress summarised in the paper and associated Annex 1.

18. Action Points Arising: None.

National Park Partnership Plan 2027 – 2032 Timetable (Paper 4)

19. Grant Moir, CEO introduced the paper which provides an initial timetable for the development of the 2027 - 2032 National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP).

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

- a) A Board Member questioned the safety of cyber-attacks from using mobile apps. CEO noted that the Park Authority have cyber essential plus security, meaning it is as secure as possible.
- b) Discussions were had around consultation fatigue and approaching this is a new way to more effectively engage with communities. CEO explained they will build on evidence already gained from work on Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) such as community drop in events, to speak with public and gather



information in less of a consultation situation. Head of Communications and Engagement noted that the C2030 Engagement team have been testing a variety of innovative engagement techniques, and these will be considered as part of our plans for the NPPP consultation.

- c) Discussions were had around childcare and how to encourage this to be a business opportunity. CEO noted the Park Authority can work alongside organisations as some aspects are for other partners to lead on, as they would be better suited to deliver on certain objectives.
- d) A Board Member questioned the change to facilitate implementation, asking if this will affect the process to talk with other agencies. CEO explained the Park Authority always works alongside other organisations within the public sector, and if they have a statutory duty to facilitate implementation, rather than simply having regard to the NPPP, then they may be more invested. Director of Nature and Climate change noted there is a potential strength in this as agencies could be more likely to speak with one voice, giving more clarity to land managers with clear objectives and would result in more alignment.

21. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:

- a) Agree the timetable for the development of the NPPP 2027 – 2032.

22. Action Points Arising: None.

Formal Board broke for a comfort break at 11.15am

Formal Board resumed at 11.30am

Agricultural land use and farming activity (Paper 5)

- 23. Colin McClean, Head of Land Management and Malcolm Smith, Agricultural Adviser introduced the paper which sets out an overview of farming and crofting in the National Park over the past 20 years, based on June census data. The information provides preliminary context on agriculture in the National Park, how systems have changed and some of the influences which have driven those changes. Subsequently, more detailed discussions on policy setting and strategic direction will take place as part of developing the next National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP).



Further discussion will be supported by an evaluation of the amount of public money invested in farming and crofting in the National Park and the outcomes towards which it is directed. This will be as part of a study of the environmental, social and economic value of farming and crofting in the National Park. This work is currently being commissioned in partnership with the Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) and will be presented to Board in due course.

24. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
- a) Board Members noted the importance of this work and the difficulty of gathering the data for the paper, thanking the authors for their work on this.
 - b) A Board Member praised the appointment of the Agricultural Adviser, noting the Park Authority is moving in a positive direction, keeping discussions ongoing with farmers, crofters, and advisory groups.
 - c) Discussions were had around the change in farming and how it is imperative to encourage young farmers to move into the sector, training them and to continue with trials for cutting costs and improving business developments. A suggestion was made to support young farmers with creating robust business plans to support farms in times of market volatility and changing policy. In order for young people to want to come into the industry, farm businesses need to be able to support incomes that give people a decent standard of living.
 - d) A Board Member questioned the impacts of inheritance tax, (noting some farms are keeping sheep grazing land to avoid this, if there would be a possibility to re-wild land to give the same benefits). Director of Nature and Climate Change explained that work in the C2030 Program the National Park has included looking at land-based business's resilience, vulnerabilities and changes. The work is led by Land Managers identifying the impacts of change in policy and income streams on business plans and how a work force strategy could support a transition. This will support them in dealing with vulnerabilities and strategies that are changing and navigate an outcome from a business sense. Part of the Farm adviser's job is to facilitate Knowledge Exchange events where farmers can be shown new technologies



and discuss ideas. These meetings have the added bonus of improving mental health by getting farmers off farm and speaking to each other.

- e) A question was raised regarding the total workforce figures being up and if this was affected by holiday lets adding to tourism lists. Agricultural Adviser explained the data depends on the percentage of the work they are doing on the farm.
- f) A Board Member questioned when the future data will be gathered and what the intention of this data will be, if it will be shared with advisory groups. Director of Nature and Climate Change explained this is a rudimentary cut of data to give members a snapshot of recent trends in farming. Future work will be done to take the census further and look at payment in the National Park to understand where funding is being targeted. It was noted that advisory groups were made aware of the survey and were consulted on the metric to be examined. Future data will be taken to them to consider and develop.
- g) Discussions were had around the challenges of technology in farming and if this was reducing jobs. Agricultural Adviser explained there are less farmers now due to technology, however this allows farmers to spend more time managing the farm and concentrate on other aspects, even though the technology still requires the farmer to operate it.
- h) A question was raised regarding farm plans and if the Park Authority were supporting farmers to write these. Agriculture Advisor highlighted that the whole farm plan has five measures set out for farmers to achieve by 2028, it is in the farmers best interest to complete all measures that apply to their business as it can give access to funding like the recent Future Farm Investment Scheme. The Park Authority can help them to apply for funding and support throughout, with the Agriculture Advisor offering individual support to those who need. Director of Nature and Climate Change noted it's important to look for areas where the Park Authority adds value and where it might be at risk of duplicating services provided by the private sector, explaining it is a complicated landscape of providers and the Park Authority should carefully consider where would another organisation be best served to lead.
- i) A Board Member raised concerns about discrepancies in the workforce data presented in the paper. It was also noted that women now make up 40% of the workforce, reflecting increased opportunities. The Head of Land Management will review the census data and investigate the inconsistencies,



including demographic breakdowns and trends such as the younger age profile of farmers.

- j) A Board Member commented that the dates for the environmental payments are not suitable for the area and would encourage SG to make changes to coincide better with the later seasons to benefit the wildlife.

25. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:

- a) Note the overall picture of farming activity, trends and predictions for the future.

26. Action Points Arising:

- i. Head of Land Management will investigate the figures and amend the data, update paper and share figures with Board Members.

Formal Board broke for lunch at 12.00pm

Formal Board resume at 12.30pm

Kenny Deans and Bill Lobban left at 12.30pm

Public Sector Reform (Paper 6)

27. Grant Moir, CEO introduced the paper which provides an overview of the Public Sector Reform (PSR) agenda within Scotland and the role the Park Authority will play in delivering this.

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

- a) A Board Member questioned how PSR would work with local authorities. CEO explained that there is close working through the place prototype work, both nationally and locally.
- b) A Board Member was concerned about the timescale as there would be an election and if this would affect the Park Authority's position. CEO noted that there would be the same general pressures around budgets post election but that the solutions may be slightly different depending on the Government.
- c) A Board Member queried if funding could be ring fenced at a national level, for example for ranger services. CEO explained that the Park Authority cannot ring fence funding, the Board make the decision on what the funding is spent



on. The PSR commitment is to reduce 20% of corporate costs, however the Park Authority still needs to deliver on the ground, cutting budget will affect front line delivery and the Board need to be aware of the impacts of cutting budgets in different areas.

- d) A Board Member queried monitoring the progress of the work that could impact the Park Authority. CEO explained there is a PSR meeting in October, and the Park Authority are involved through their SG sponsor team and collective government work, commissions that are all linked together, and the Board will be updated on all strategic impacts.

29. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:

- a) Note the strategic direction from Scottish Government.
- b) Note the place prototype work in the Dee and South Esk catchments as part of the developing PSR work.

30. Action Points Arising: None.

Environment Strategy and Land Use Strategy consultation (Paper 7)

31. Andy Ford, Director of Nature and Climate Change introduced the paper which explained that Scottish Government are currently consulting on the draft Environment Strategy and Scotland's Fourth Land Use Strategy, to be published March 2026. The paper presents the key points the Park Authority wishes to make in order for public policy and strategy to best support delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP).

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

- a) A Board Member shared support for the multi benefits approach of the strategy, noting that the direct link between peatland restoration and upland biodiversity are underplayed and undervalued.
- b) Discussions were had around the strategy moving in the right direction, however, clear, defined guidance to support land use decision making would be required. CEO noted the key factor is what this strategy influences, it is only as strong as how it aligns funding and regulation below it. Consultation response to SG will highlight this.

33. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:



- a) Note the key points the Park Authority wishes to make as part of the consultation responses

34. Action Points Arising: None

Committee Minutes (Paper 8)

35. Convener introduced the paper which presents the minutes for the following meetings from 14 March 2025 to 13 June 2025 (Annex 1).

- a) Audit and Risk Committee, 21 March 2025
- b) Resources Committee, 16 May2025
- c) Performance Committee, 13 June 2025

36. This paper also presents the confidential minutes for the following meetings from 24 January 2025 to 14 March 2025 (Annex 2).

- a) Audit and Risk Committee, 21 March 2025
- b) Resources Committee, 16 May2025

37. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:

- a) Note the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee, Resources Committee and Performance Committee.
- b) Note the confidential minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee and Resources Committee.

38. Action Points Arising: None.

AOCB

39. None

Date of Next Meeting

40. The date of the next meeting is 28 November in Grantown on Spey in person.

41. *The meeting concluded at 12.51pm.*

Action	Status
Action Points from meeting on 22 November 2024:	



Paper 1 - CEO Report	
At para 6b ii. Review the Planning call-in protocol and discuss at a future planning committee.	In hand
<p>Update: An informal discussion on call-in criteria has been scheduled after the last few planning committee meetings, although it has been deferred on each occasion due other agenda items over-running. The discussion has been re-programmed to be held later today after the Formal Board meeting.</p>	
Paper 5 - Active Cairngorms and end of season visitor report	
At para 23a iii. Include key challenges in mitigation and learning in future papers.	To be included in 2025 report
At para 23c iv. Statistics on camp site and luxury camping options within the National Park	In hand
<p>Update: Statistics on camp site and luxury camping options within the National Park.</p> <p>As there is no firm definition of luxury camping or "glamping" and some premises can be listed as self-catering properties, the following is a best estimate. The Park Authority subscribe to annual reports on the volume and value of tourism which in turn use a database of premises in the area. This shows a total of 27 businesses listed as camping and / or caravan sites. 21 of these businesses have further accommodation that is neither touring pitches nor caravans and these are considered likely to be luxury camping properties - for example wigwams, yurts and even a train carriage.</p>	
Action	Status
Action Points from meeting on 28 March 2025:	
Paper 2 – 2025/26 Budget and Operational Plan	
v. Information on the number of ecological barriers that are being removed on catchments to be sought and circulated to the Board and thought to be given to putting this into a staff members forward work plan.	In hand
vi. Scope of extending the work on species management specifically geese further up the Spey into Badenoch to be investigated.	In hand



Update:

Information is being sought for the number of ecological barriers that are being removed on catchments, but not yet available. This is one of the indicators in the Cairngorms Nature Index. Will be shared with the Board once available.

There has been little or no demand from farmers outwith the current area to extend the goose control scheme. Additional factors in considering extension have been capacity and practicalities in the contractor network. Also, high kill rates of geese are not directly translating to high reductions in numbers on control sites, which could indicate resident greylags are filling the control areas and thus having an effect on the wider area, or that there is more interchange between resident and migratory geese. This needs more time to establish.

Action	Status
Action Points from meeting on 27 June 2025:	
Paper 1 CEO Report	
At para 6 c vii. Clerks to the Board to share the minutes from group meetings that Board Members sit on to the board portal.	In hand

Update:

Advisory group meeting minutes that have been approved have been added to the website and linked to via the Board Site. Outstanding advisory group minutes will be added following the approval of the minutes at the next meeting.

Action	Status
Action points from meeting on 26 September	
Paper 1 CEO Report	
At para 8 e) i. CEO to write to SG to request a change in LDP consultation process.	
Paper 2 Revision of Planning Committee Standing Orders	
At para 12 a) i. Amend the wording in the Standing Orders to read: Members should have their camera switched on (unless there is a specific technical reason for that meeting).	
Paper 5 Agricultural land use and farming activity	



At para 24 i)

- i. Head of Land Management will investigate the figures and amend the data, update paper and share figures with Board Members.

The figures being queried were taken directly from information supplied by RESAS. On contacting RESAS, the discrepancy is most likely due to respondents not supplying complete information on age range.