# Draft minutes of the Formal Board meeting

**Held at Lonach Hall, Strathdon**

**In person**

**25 September 2026 at 09.30am**

## Present in person

Sandy Bremner (Convener)
Geva Blackett (from 9.33am)
Peter Cosgrove
Hannah Grist
John Kirk
Fiona McLean
Duncan Miller
Michael Williamson
Eleanor Mackintosh (Deputy Convener)
Jackie Brierton
Paul Gibb
Russell Jones
Lauren MacCallum
Steve Micklewright
Ann Ross (from 9.39am)

## In attendance

Grant Moir, Chief Executive Officer
David Cameron, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Director of Corporate Services
Andy Ford, Director of Nature and Climate Change
Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place
Colin Simpson, Head of Visitor Services
Brenna Jessie, Head of Communications and Engagement
Karen Johnstone, Clerk to the Board

## Apologies

Kenny Deans
Ian McLaren
Bill Lobban
Derek Ross

## Welcome and introduction

1. Sandy Bremner, the Board Convener, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were noted.

## Matters arising not covered elsewhere

2. There were not matters arising.

| Action | Status |
|---|---|
| **Action Points from meeting on 27 March 2026:** | |
| **Action** | **Status** |
| **Paper 2 - Cairngorms National Park Authority 2026/27 budget** | |
| At Para 11<br>i. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services to continue close monitoring of inflationary impacts on staffing, procurement and delivery costs, and report any significant budget implications through the Resources Committee and to the Board. | In hand |
| **Update:**<br>No significant variances as yet. | |
| **Action Points from meeting on 26 June 2026** | |
| **Paper 2 - Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund** | |
| At Para 12<br>i. Risk 13 - transferred the risk to the delivery phase.<br>ii. Public consultation to be considered as a high risk. | Complete |
| | |
| **Paper 3 – Strategic Tourism Infrastructure** | |
| At para 16<br>i. Parking at Kincraig Bridge to be made a high priority. | Complete |

## Declarations of interest

3. There were no declarations of interest.

## CEO Report (Paper 1)

4. Grant Moir, CEO, introduced the paper, highlighting 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.

5. Board Convener highlighted to the Board two significant events which took place since the time of writing the paper. The visit by King Charles, who met with firefighters, landowners, gamekeepers, junior rangers, community representatives and public body leaders who were a key part of the wildfires over the summer months, discussing actions and challenges. Second event was the UK National Park Conference which is a once in a 30-year event for the Cairngorms National Park, with thanks to those who attended and took part in the discussions, noting there was a keen interest in wildfires given combined experiences throughout the UK over the summer. It was highlighted that this requires changes to national behaviours and messaging, and it was suggested that national governments have a role to play in achieving these changes. The event had fantastic feedback and special thanks went to Mariaan Pita, Sara Denner, Jenny Allen and Karen Johnstone for organising a successful conference.

6. CEO gave an update on the Glenmore / Abernethy fire since the time of writing the paper, noting the environment recovery group are working to repair damage, and an application has been submitted for funding to help cover the cost for resources used during the wildfires. A wildfire position statement will also be released soon from all National Parks.

7. CEO noted that he recently spoke at the Scotland Big Picture Conference on wildfires and has just returned from Spain attending a conference where he discussed wildfires with representatives from the forest fire service. He discussed techniques and resources other countries are using that could be implemented in Scotland and the UK.

8. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
    a) A Board Member questioned, relating to muirburn, the meaning of significant effect on National Park landscape relating to the muirburn licensing. CEO explained the muirburn licensing has only been in effect since last week,

which means impacts are difficult to assess thus far. Landowners will submit applications to NatureScot and that will determine what can be burned in what areas. There have been limited applications applied so far, but further data will follow in due course.

b) A Board Member noted that the Park Authority chaired one of three subgroups and questioned if the Park Authority was represented on the other two groups and what they consist of. Director of Planning and Place explained the Park Authority sat on the Business Recovery subgroup, which is led by Highland Council and this supports addressing business impacts of the wildfire and marketing in the National Park, giving out £700,000 funding to date in support of these aims. The other subgroup is Community Health; this is led by NHS Highland focuses on the NHS views on community wellbeing impacts of the wildfires. A Board Member questioned if Communities affected by the smoke and on the verge of evacuations will be included. Director of Planning and Place confirmed this has been raised and other areas affected in the National Park will be included.

c) A Board Member questioned if the cause of the wildfire had been determined yet. CEO explained it had not been determined.

d) Discussions were had around fire byelaws and if anyone had received fines. CEO explained two cases have been reported to the Procreator Fiscal, and this is in the process of a fine being considered - it was highlighted this is a long process, and the Board will be updated when this has been completed. CEO informed the Board that legislation will be introduced into Parliament this autumn that will allow Park Authority rangers to hand out fixed penalties in due course if enacted.

e) A question was raised if the data is showing that the fire byelaw is acting as a successful deterrent. CEO confirmed there has been a significant reduction in fires, rangers' data previously shows one in five patrols spotting fires, to now one in 25 patrols spotting fires. Estate rangers are also collating data, and this will be available around November showing results.

f) Discussions were had around Scottish Government (SG) announcing they have secured a helicopter on standby with a member expressing they felt unconvinced by the words, and who asked if the Park Authority is following up with this. CEO explained that if there is a high fire risk warning, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) have the ability to have a helicopter on standby during those periods, however the Park Authority will continue to

push on further policy development on this through the wildfire group directly to SG.

g) Discussions were had around muirburn and questioning whether the right people have the right access to muirburns at the right time. CEO explained there is no direct link between muirburn licensing and wildfire. Muirburn can reduce the fuel load which can reduce the intensity of the wildfire. Licensing sits with NatureScot.

h) Question was raised if the Park Authority had seed banks available to plant seed to replace native trees to the wildfires. CEO explained there was not anything formal in place, however there are nurseries around the National Park which offer native seeds. The CEO recognised it may be beneficial to look into this.

i) A Board Member questioned the negative coverage relating to grant funding and questioned if the Park Authority considered impacts to local businesses when granting funds and their distribution areas. CEO explained grants are provided based on strict criteria. Grant funds have been oversubscribed, unfortunately, therefore not every applicant is successful, however there is a robust process in place to ensure the correct procedures are followed, and a fair distribution of grants are awarded across the Park to those who meet the criteria.

j) Praise was given to the procurement update, noting how much of an improvement this has been over the last two years, thanking all the staff involved in the efforts. CEO noted that the Audit and Risk Committee report showcases the amount of money spent, regulated and unregulated throughout the National Park and worthwhile to read.

k) A Board Member mentioned the Communications during the wildfires, noting these were issued later than was ideal due to lead times in working with other agencies and their internal processes, and questioned if those conversations have been shared. CEO confirm this is a key area which will be highlighted in the review.

l) A question was raised regarding tools to use for future wildfires such as satellite data and raised aroura technology and if the Park Authority had looked into these. CEO explained this is more of a national level than a National Park level, explaining the fire service is looking into these resources.

m) A question was raised if the Park Authority could purchase a fire bucket for helicopters. CEO explained that the issue is the lack of trained pilots, and

having helicopters available on standby and needs to be resolved at a national level.

n) Discussions were had around the wildfire byelaw signs, questioning when they the permeant ones will be put in place. CEO explained the temporary ones are out for this year, and the permanent signs will be erected next year before 01 April 2027. Some temporary ones may still be used in key areas.

o) A question was raised regarding local communications during the wildfire and if this will be fed back to the review. CEO explained his understanding that the review will be shared with all those involved in the efforts to allow feedback to be gathered.

p) Discussions were had on the impact of the Integrated Wildfire Management Plan (IWMP) questioning if this is being reviewed or changed due to the recent wildfires. CEO explained that the key was to create maps showing firebreaks, where there are gaps and where maintenance is required. There will also be an up-to-date asset register, with resources, equipment and insurances in place to allow SFRS and land managers and communities to take action, quickly and with a clear plan and understanding in place.

q) A Board Member questioned if there would be long term health checks available to support fire fighters and volunteers to monitor for any long-term health effects. CEO explained he would not be able to answer that as it would be for SFRS as the responsible organisation when volunteers / staff crossed their cordon. CEO offered to share the concern with SFRS.

r) A Board Member requested an update relating to the regional firefighting team. CEO explained that this is in the national wildfire plan. CEO is to meet with Assistant Chief Officer to understand exactly what this will look like, noting SFRS will lead on this.

s) Discussions were had around insurance, noting feedback from a member that this stopped estate workers from helping during the wildfires as they were not insured to work on other estates. CEO explained there is insurance available to allow estate workers to work on other estates, and it is down to individual estates to ensure this is in place and this should be made clear to estate owners / land managers. Clarity should be given from SFRS regarding insurance while in their cordon.

9. The Board noted the paper. The Convener thanked the CEO and all staff on behalf of the Board.

10. Action Points Arising:
    i. CEO to forward to SFRS the concern over what long term health checks are in place to firefighters and volunteers who were part of the wildfire efforts.

*The Board broke for a comfort break at 10.21am*
*The Board meeting resumed at 10.30am*

## National Parks Partnership Plan annual update (Paper 2)

11. 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 final year of delivery of the current NPPP to 2027.

12. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
    a) A Board Member noted that under farm management it mentioned muirburn then in the summary spoke about the wildfire, however these were not linked. Director of Planning and Place acknowledged they were not linked; however, it was appropriate that the wildfire was noted in the paper.
    b) A Board Member noted it would be beneficial to speak to Academies as they are working hard on approving apprenticeships. Director of Planning and Place explained there is little data available, however he is hopeful this will improve as curriculum is changing and focusing more of apprenticeships in the future which will help the data gathered.
    c) A Board Member noted there was no mention of NHS Grampian, explaining they offered tours for senior officers and the Director of NHS Grampian agreed to come on a tour. Director of Planning and Place asked for the Board Member to mention the Green Health referral as communities are keen for this.
    d) A Board Member noted that it would be beneficial to ring fence the second home council tax, therefore money raised in the National Park should remain in the National Park.

e) Discussions were had around the working age population in the National Park, noting there are issues that need to be addressed to make it more inviting and easier for younger people to be able to live here, eg childcare, well-paid jobs available in the area, improvements to healthcare, transport and affordable housing.

f) Discussions were had around the Short Term Let (STL) control zone and whether second home tax has had a positive effect in housing and if this is helping the working age population. Director of Planning and Place explained Highland Council have statistical analysis available; however, it will take time for the improvements to be seen. More houses will become available which in turn should benefit the working age population.

g) A Board Member noted that green investment appears to not have been as lucrative as anticipated, questioning if this was just in the National Park or if this was national issue. Director of Nature and Climate change explained this was a national issue. It was highlighted that NatureScot are running natural capital investment programmes and there is 13% of private investment in the Park Authority's peatland programme for the 2026/27 pipeline. CEO explained the upcoming National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) will have a more realistic understanding of the situation.

h) Discussions were had around second home council tax with a Board Member having the understanding the money raised from this has to be used towards affordable housing. Director of Planning and Place explained that the money does not have to be used on affordable housing, the funds go back into the council and can be used for what the council determines is required.

i) A Board Member sought reassurance on the RAG rating on the following:

   i. 14 - Deer densities. CEO confirmed the target will be met by 2030.

   ii. B9 - Four less GP Practises in health referral. Director of Planning and Place explained the GP practice number is the same, it is the number relating to the green health referrals that has changed, targeting effectiveness has improved.

   iii. B11 - 15 less rangers, assuming this has progressed through the year. Director of Planning and Place explained there has been fewer volunteer rangers this year, however volunteering activity is still high. Occasionally some volunteers do sign up and drop out. The process to recruit another 25 volunteer rangers has begun for the winter period. 75-100 volunteers

annually are sustainable without increase costs. Recruiting the target of 200 will be achieved in the timeframe.

j) Discissions were had around private landlords and an understanding that this is not as lucrative as it previously was due to having to meet current regulatory standards. However, estates are looking to be private landlords in order to house staff asking if there is tax subsidy to support this. Director of Planning and Place this is not an option, previously it was with very limited success.

k) Discussions were had around the indicators around 'park for all' with some Members feeling this is not a true reflection of the objective, hoping the next NPPP will have a truer picture. Director of Planning and Place explained it is a very complicated with multiple objectives, however the trend is going in the right direction, and the Park Authority are following the objectives for the NPPP. Survey results show this is going in the right direction therefore this is the correct rating colour / indicator. Further discussions were had around indicators and if there was a better way to capture these as there are many good new stories, eg volunteer rangers and positive impact on lives and how this is captured in the indicators.

l) A Board Member requested for CEO to attend an Aberdeenshire Council meeting to discuss with councillors why the money raised in the National Park through second home tax should be used within the National Park. CEO would be content to accept an invite to a discussion.

m) Discussions were had around net zero, with a question being asked when the Cairngorms will be able to announce they are net zero. Director of Planning and Place explained there is a UK National Parks model available to input data in to and this will collate the evidence of when the Cairngorms National Park will be net zero. The data from 2024 is currently being analysed and once available, this will show if the Park is on track or nearing the status. This will be shared with the Board once available.

n) It was suggested using good news stories, such as the volunteer rangers experience that should be shared through communications to allow residents and visitors to be aware of what the Park Authority can do.

o) Discussions were had around the target of 75% affordable housing with clarity being sought. Director of Planning and Place explained the target of 75% affordable housing is for all the houses build in the National Park, not 75% of each development.

13. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
    a) Note the overall progress in delivery of the NPPP summarised in the paper and in Annex 1.

14. Action Points Arising: None.

## Sustainable Tourism Action Plan Annual Update (Paper 3)

15. Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place introduced the paper which updates the board on delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan 2022-27 and give wider context on associated policy and research.

16. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
    a) Chair of Sustainable Tourism group noted there will be a planning and partnership meeting taking place in October which will be useful to discuss the impacts of the summer. It was noted that it would be beneficial to have more input from businesses in the National Park dealing with visitors to give a better understanding of their interactions and impressions of changes happening throughout the year, welcomed all businesses to attend and asked Board Members to pass this onto businesses they are aware of.
    b) Director of Planning and Place noted that Highland Folk Museum, Highland Wildlife Park and Landmark Adventure Park hold good visitor information for analysis and explained Landmark have data on cancellations etc due to the wildfire which will be interesting to review.

17. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
    a) Note the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan annual update.

18. Action Points Arising: None.

## Committee Minutes (Paper 4)

19. Sandy Bremner, Convener introduced the paper which sets out Committee minutes from meetings from 23 March 2026 to 12 June 2026.

20. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
    a) Note the minutes for the Committee Meetings.

21. Action Points Arising: None.

## AOCB

22. None

## Date of Next Meeting

23. The date of the next meeting is 27 November 2026 in person.

24. *The meeting concluded at 11.25am*

| Action | Status |
|---|---|
| **Action Points from meeting on 27 March 2026:** | |
| **Action** | **Status** |
| **Paper 2 - Cairngorms National Park Authority 2026/27 budget** | |
| At Para 11<br>i. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services to continue close monitoring of inflationary impacts on staffing, procurement and delivery costs, and report any significant budget implications through the Resources Committee and to the Board. | In hand |
| **Update:**<br>No significant variances as yet. | |
| **Action Points from meeting on 25 September 2026** | |
| Paper 1 - CEO Report<br><br>At para 8q<br><br>i. CEO to pass on concerns to SFRS regarding what long term health checks are in place to firefighters and volunteers who were part of the wildfire efforts. | Complete |