Draft minutes of the Formal Board meeting

Held at Victoria Hall, Ballater

In person

26 June 2026 at 10.00am

Present in person

Sandy Bremner (Convener)
Geva Blackett
Peter Cosgrove
Paul Gibb
Russell Jones
Lauren MacCallum
Fiona McLean
Duncan Miller
Derek Ross
Eleanor Mackintosh (Deputy Convener)
Jackie Brierton
Kenny Deans
Hannah Grist
John Kirk
Ian McLaren
Steve Micklewright
Ann Ross
Michael Williamson

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
Eilidh Todd, Communities and Rural Development Manager
Bridget Trussell, Community Grants Manager
Karen Johnstone, Clerk to the Board

Apologies

Bill Lobban

Welcome and introduction

1. Sandy Bremner, the Board Convener, welcomed everyone to the meeting, giving a warm welcome to the representative of Ballater and Crathie Community Council who attended in person. Apologies were noted.

2. Board Convener noted the Park Authority were delighted to be meeting in the Victoria Hall in Ballater as part of the commitments to take meetings around the National Park, noting the next Formal Board meeting will be held in Strathdon.

3. Board Convener explained that the Park Authority are developing the next National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP), noting it was fitting to hold the meeting in Ballater as this is a village still living with a sense of dread when there is a forecast of prolonged, torrential rain in the hills, following on from Storm Frank which led to the flooding of hundreds of homes and many businesses. The NPPP will be more than just a document to the village, it will be seen as a critical commitment to build on all the excellent work already underway, to mitigate against the growing threats from floods and droughts. To speed up and scale up landscape level work to hold more water in the upper catchment. It was highlighted the Park Authority are still in the early stages of developing the Plan, however, are committed to continuing to work closely with all our partners, especially land managers who have a vital role to play in delivering results, in all areas across the National Park. Board Convener explained Communities are looking to the Park Authority to show the same ambition and vision that was demonstrated in tackling the threat of wildfires. The Park Authority will be consulting all communities and other partners later this year on the draft NPPP, aiming to address some of the biggest challenges facing people and nature across the National Park.

Approval of previous minutes

4. The minutes from the Formal Board meeting on 27 March 2026 were approved with no amendments.

Matters arising not covered elsewhere

5. There were not matters arising.

Action	Status
Action Points from meeting on 28 March 2025:	
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.	Complete
Update: On the Spey there are three barriers with projects for easement underway. Passage at the Spey Dam is currently being reassessed, and two small barriers remain on the Markie burn and Milton burn, although the latter does have a bypass channel. There are four obstructions on the Dee and two on the Don. One of the obstructions on the Dee is a fish trap where the River Dee Trust is in discussion with Marine Scotland on minimising any impacts on migration. The Park Authority works closely with and supports the river trusts, boards and initiatives in removing barriers. This is a core part of staff operational activities.	
Action Points from meeting on 28 November 2025:	
Paper 1 - CEO Report	
At para 8 i. CEO to seek an update on the development of a Cairngorms National Park app and circulate this to the Board.	Complete
Update: The scoping / creation of a new visitor welcome app for the National Park was predicated on it being delivered in partnership with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) and VisitScotland (for budget reasons). Unfortunately, the LLTNPA website project has been delayed on two occasions, with a new delivery date in October. Once this is up and running, we will resume discussions on a potential National Park visitor app. Separately, discussions have taken place with Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust (AGCT) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) about creating an app for the Aviemore corridor as a proof of concept for the Cairngorms app, developed on the same platform. AGCT	

have submitted an expression of interest to HIE to explore if funding is possible and the Park Authority have brokered a conversation between our developers and the Trust.	
Paper 3 - Active Cairngorms	
At para 16 i. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel to keep the Board abreast with developments with Transport Scotland on installing signage on their train carriages and at train stations.	Complete
Update: National Park welcome signage already exists in all stations within the Park. Any other non-rail service-related signage is considered as advertising and is sold on Scotrail's behalf by a commercial advertising sales company. This is not considered a viable approach for longer term signs but is being considered as part of the campaign messaging around the new fire byelaw.	
Action Points from meeting on 27 March 2026:	
Paper 1 – CEO Report	
At Para 6 i. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel to review the remaining unimproved section of the path between Inveruglass and Inch, assess whether further improvements are required, and report back on whether additional work should be considered. ii. CEO to circulate the link to the Land Management Guidance in respect of the fire bylaw to the member (Paul Gibb). iii. Director of Nature and Climate Change to circulate the data captured in NatureScot's 10-year review of Capercaillie SPA's when available.	Complete Complete Complete
Update: i. The section of path concerned was one where the local group Insh Community Holdings owned most of the land and were initially proposing to carry out improvements themselves. However, due to some of the constraints that had to be overcome it was agreed that the Park Authority would take on managing the project. The sections either side were not in such poor condition and weren't highlighted as a priority by the community and, as they involve multiple landowners if negotiations were to take place to extend the project it was considered likely that this would be unable to be concluded in time for the project to proceed during the financial year in	

	which funds had been set aside for these path improvements. This doesn't preclude further improvement projects in this area being considered in future and these would be assessed against other path investments required across the Park when work plans are being developed. ii. Completed. iii. Page 5 onwards of the [Capercaillie-Lek-Count-Report-2026_final.pdf] data captured in NatureScot's 10-year review of Capercaillie SPA's when available. This has been emailed to Board Members	
Action		**Status**
Paper 2 - Cairngorms National Park Authority 2026/27 budget		
At Para 11 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. ii. Board Convener and CEO to engage with Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) to improve coordination and communication of available external business support, and to explore clearer signposting tailored to different business sizes and sectors.		In hand Complete
Update: i. No significant variances as yet.		
Paper 3 - Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund – risk register		
At Para 16 i. Officers to update the risk register to strengthen mitigations on transparency, communication and panel retention, including process trust and facilitation dynamics. ii. Officers to reflect the Authority's risk appetite for participatory democracy explicitly in future Board reporting.		Completed Completed
Update: Both actions completed and reflected in paper to Board meeting 26 June 2026		

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 NPPP.

Steve Micklewright joined the meeting at 10.12am

8. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
   a) Board Convener congratulated all staff involved with the communications effort on the fire byelaws, highlighting the exceptional work on the campaign.
   b) A Board Member noted the increased number of male Capercaillie, questioning what has caused the success. CEO explained this is a result of a complex number of improvements such as large-scale diversionary feeding, habitat work, fence removal etc, not one single solution. Data will continue to be monitored and if there is a continued steady increase, this is evidence that these improvements coordinated through the Capercaillie Emergency Plan are successful.
   c) A question was raised regarding the recent announcement of a ban on social media for young people and what impact this would have on the communications strategy. CEO commented that this has not yet been considered, however this will be something to look into going forward. It was noted that the age group concerned with the ban is not the Park Authority's target audience.
   d) A Board Member questioned if there was evidence from diversionary feeding to review if predators are being drawn in to these areas. CEO explained there is lots of monitoring and cameras to collect this data and peer reviewed papers available. It was highlighted that diversionary feeding happens during the breeding season, not year-round, therefore will not have long term impacts on predator numbers.

e) A question was raised regarding artificial intelligence (AI) affecting traffic to the website and if there was analysis carried out on the AI revolution and people getting the correct information. CEO explained AI is used on the Park Authority website to summarise documents as part of our work to support access to useful, accurate information.

f) A Board Member questioned if there had been any fines under the fire byelaw and what the communications have been between Rangers and Police. CEO explained the Police have been excellent and very helpful. There has been training provided for Rangers across the Park and the feedback from this has been helpful. So far, the police are involved with two cases within the National Park.

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

10. Action Points Arising: None.

Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund (Paper 2)

11. Eilidh Todd, Communities and Rural Development Manager, and Bridget Trussell, Community Grants Manager introduced the paper which updates board members on the progress of a £1 million Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Communities Fund, which was co-designed by a wide range of community members of the Cairngorms, and to review the project risk register as the panel nears the end of the design phase, having met for the first time at the end of March.

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

a) Board Members congratulated the team for the huge amount of work gone into the Communities Fund in such a short space of time.

b) A Board Member asked for more detail on risk number 18 on the register, following up remunerated opportunities for evaluation that the panel members may wish to apply for. Communities and Rural Development Manager explained the co-design panel would be given the option of various forms of input, limited to five hours remunerated. It is understood not all member will take this opportunity.

c) A question was raised relating to risk 17, asking if Involve will continue thought the entirety of the delivery phase, given the timeline approaching. Communities and Development Manger explained that Involve's specific expertise is not in fund delivery, that is handled in house with the Grants team. Involve have their own evaluation phase which will be ongoing.

d) Clarity was sought on how Community Champions were identified. Community Grants Manager explained this has not been fully decided yet, the current panel will be consulted to consider if some of them would be interested in taking this forward. Communities Development Manger highlighted they have also legally secured the contact data for those who showed interested in the panel but were unsuccessful which can be reviewed for a base line.

e) Discussions were had around the decision-making panel and if panel members will have expertise in the core themes, eg land management skills. Highlighting that panel members need to be aware they will be the face of the grant. Communities and Development Manager clarified they will use a similar recruitment method as was established with the codesign panel. As the numbers are lower than the co-design panel, each individual will be required to do more heavy lifting in terms of their demographics and geography covering targeted representative elements. Panel members will not be recruited for expertise itself but also retain the ability to bring expertise and advice if the panel felt it was lacking.

f) A Board Member commented on risk 13, noting it would be beneficial to keep this as decision making is underway, therefore there may still be dominant voices on the panel who share opinions. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services agreed and explained this could be transferred to the risk register covering the delivery phase, therefore still recognised.

g) Discussions were had around the funding and if there was an overlap with funding streams. Communities and Development Manager explained this fund was set up under the four themes of C2030, noting there are no other large-scale funds from C2030 available for these themes. It was noted there could be match funding available through other grants, of which the Grants team have oversight. It was highlighted that Cairngorms Trust could potentially be a source of continuation funding.

h) A Board Member raised a question regarding applications from outside the National Park and how far outside the Park would be considered. Community

Grants Manager explained that they accept applications outwith the Park, however the project would need to be delivered within the National Park and benefit the communities of the National Park.

i) A question was raised that future panellists can apply for funding, and if they would need to declare an interest. It was confirmed that yes, panellists involved in decision making would need to declare an interest, and act in line with the policy carried forward to this panel, similar that of the Cairngorms Trust.

j) A Board Member sought clarity on the number of meetings the panel attend to discuss different sized grants. It was explained that the panel meets five times to consider medium grants and meets two times to consider large grants. There is a cap on small grants (under £5,000) of 50 grants per year (150 total throughout the programme). If an application for a small grant meets the eligibility and deliverability criteria then there is a presumption towards approving the application. If a project is assessed to be undeliverable, then will then be moved to the following meeting to be discussed.

k) Clarity was sought on how the panel say no to small grants. It was explained this was part of the training from the Community Grants Manager and the Grants team, and the panel are aware that saying no to applications is part of the process.

l) A Board Member questioned if groups or individuals were the preferred applicant for this fund. Community Grants Manager explained the fund accepted applications from individuals, and groups including non-constituted groups, as there is a risk appetite to allow people who don't not have constitution in place to still move forward. It was agreed this was beneficial as it would be a shame if small groups were disqualified going through the panel.

m) A query was raised if this fund was opened to businesses as well as groups and individuals. Community Grants Manager explained this fund is opened to all, including small businesses, e.g. farmers, and other sole traders or Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs); but that the criteria retained community benefit from the project as a core element.

n) A Board Member questioned if the cost of the panel was inclusive in the £1 million pot, or if there was separate budget for this. Communities and Development Manager explained that the panel is within the engagement budget separate from the £1 million fund. The panel is within spend and will remain within spend as they had overestimated the cost of the panel, travel and remuneration for dependent care.

o) A Board Member noted that the £1 million pot seemed to be overcommitted with a possible 150 £5,000 small grants, plus numbers of £50,000 medium grants and £100,000 large grants. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate services thanked the Board Member for raising this explaining that figures indicated award limits and budget control would be exercised over the live period of the fund. It was noted the Grants team have a lot of experience of running multiyear grant programmes within grant fund budgets, and will be looking closely at the uptake and applications and continue to monitor the applications and values. There are only two years to deploy the available funding and grant award levels will continue to be reviewed to ensure there is no overspend.

p) A Board Member questioned how to reach those groups for the small grants as barriers for entry can be difficult. Communities and Development Manager explained a key part of the success of the panel is to reach communities to highlight this is to them. To do this, there is visible social media, partnership work developed, Community Champions, and more. The Team are also working alongside the C2030 projects to ensure communities and individuals are aware of the opportunities.

q) A Board Member raised concern about staff capacity to deliver. Communities and Development Manager explained that the Engagement Team are a key part of delivering, specifically at events, ensuring there is an ability to apply at the event. The Grants Team also have a lot of experience in this field. Community Grants Manager noted that the Grants team strive to have a positive destination to all applicants, and direct toward other funding opportunities when needed. Working alongside the Engagement team allows them to inform the public early on how to progress applications.

r) A question was raised if there was going to be an evaluation of the success of delivery of the projects, querying how this grant will be a bigger success than other grants that are currently on offer. Community Grants Manager explained the process to measure success will be based on measuring the money made available for communities, their journeys taken, success at the end of the process and learning from this will be used in the future. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services noted that the operation of this fund will be compared to that of Cairngorms Trust and this will be used to evaluate both grant schemes while each learn from each other, always adapting and improving on what works well for communities.

s) Concern was raised around the large grants going to public consultation feeling this was a high risk to the Park Authority. Communities Development Manager explained limiting decision making to 11 people would be a risk as not every town and village in the National Park is represented, therefore opening up to the wider public is important. The decision to acknowledge this input within final decisions is down to the panel. It was acknowledged that this could be considered as high risk, and detailed consideration of the design of this element of the process together with risk mitigation will be undertaken over the next few months.

t) Discussions were had around how public consultation will work. Communities Development Manager explained this will be carried out potentially during road shows, allowing public to provide their input in person, or they can share their input online. Further design work is yet to be undertaken.

u) Discussions were had around panels being paid with a member feeling uncomfortable with this approach. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services appreciated the feedback, explaining the aim was not to evolve to a situation where every member of every panel is being paid for participating. However, offering payment to this panel encouraged new community participation from members of the public who have not been involved in projects like this before, or unable to afford to offer time for free due to childcare costs etc and feedback from the panel was that it was critical to several panel members involvement. This aspect of the project will represent a key aspect of evaluation and learning around the potential merit of recompensing time given to such activities and when such approaches may best be used within scarce resources.

v) A Board Member questioned what the plans for the co-design panel were going forward. Communities Development Manager explained the panel have delivered their task, going forward they have shown signs of further interest in communities and have been offered various communications opportunities. An example was given of an older participant who expressed that the experience has been beneficial to their health and allowed them to feel useful while learning new skills and leaving a legacy.

w) A Board Member questioned if the fund would be offered equally across the whole of the National Park, noting the East does not benefit from HIE and Scottish Enterprise in the same way as the west of the Park. Community Grants Manager explained areas the fund is being allocated to is at the forefront of the mind with a view to balance impacts. It was noted that other geographical funding is outwith the control of the Park Authority.

x) A Board Member highlight it would be beneficial to have more information about the fund available in the local newsletters noting the deadlines to make the public aware.

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

a) Review the risk register, identify any gaps and agree the overall approach to this piece of work.

14. Action Points Arising:

i. Risk 13 - transferred the risk to the delivery phase.

ii. Public consultation to be considered as a high risk.

The meeting paused for a comfort break 11.20am – 11.28am

Strategic Tourism Infrastructure (Paper 3)

15. Colin Simpson, Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel introduced the paper highlighting that the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan is one of a series of plans that sit alongside the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP). Along with the Sustainable Tourism and Active Cairngorms Action Plans, these plans collectively describe the Park Authority and partners' work in relation to tourism, visitor facilities and services and the management of visitor impacts on the Park. This report gives Board members oversight of progress towards the plan's objectives and is being presented to the Board now in 2026 as roughly the mid-point for the current plan, and as current progress towards these objectives has implications for the content of the next NPPP.

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

a) A Board Member questioned if there would be secure bike shelters built at train / bus stations. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel explained plans for this is underway, however that will be delivered through the C2030 transport projects.

b) A Board Member raised concern relating to discussions on the Ballater transport hub and parking East of the village linked to bus stop to be moved, asking if the Park Authority are managing expectations of delivery. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel explained this is being led by Aberdeenshire Council but is related to C2030 projects. It was noted this project is also waiting on other infrastructure as this will require a change of coach parking, drop off points, toilets, walking paths etc which will require further funding.

c) A Board Member questioned if the plan, objectives and deliverability of this is tied in with the Local Development Plan (LDP) and if amendments can be made. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel explained that they work closely with the LDP Team, Planning Team, and this plan will be revised and amended where needed in the next NPPP.

d) Discussions were had around traffic management, noting parking around Balmoral is particularly difficult, with public not using the paid car park, instead blocking roads and causing issues to drivers / deliveries. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel explained there was a limited amount the Park Authority could do in terms of traffic management; however, the paths can be improved to encourage more walking making it more accessible, improving the sign posting and descriptions.

e) A Board Member queried if the Park Authority are working alongside Community Council in Ballater regarding moving a bus stop. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel explained the Park Authority are not working on this, Nestrans and Aberdeenshire Council are leading on the public transport, the Park Authority are assisting with the cycle parking.

f) A Board Member asked if the Park Authority had liaised with MConnect in Moray regarding the government on demand bus services to improve tourism. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel explained this plan relates only to capital infrastructure and not operating services, so they have not liaised with them, however work is being done under the C2030 relating to this matter.

g) Discussions were had around parking at Glen More car park and the plan for temporary parking at peak times. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel noted this was separate to the strategic tourism infrastructure plan, but was discussed in the Managing for Visitors Group. It was explained Highland

Council manage the car park and dependant on weather react in terms of opening the overflow car park.

h) Discussions were had around risk 30 with a Board Member noting they felt it should be high due to double yellow lines in Aviemore forcing people in campervans out, asking where they are expected to go. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel explained the document reflected the position when written a couple of years ago, at which time the risk was lower. The Park Authority do not want to be seen to encouraging informal camping and will highlight to the public local campsite for motorhomes.

i) Discussions were had around electric vehicle (EV) charging points and if the Park Authority are involved in this. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel explained that Scottish Government have recently concluded that there is a commercial market for EV chargers and no further need for public funding for this. It was understood there are not as many EV chargers in rural areas, however there are charging points in most towns and villages across the National Park, and the Park Authority are working with communities to ensure every significant community has a charging point available. It was noted there needed to be promotional activity around this to alert people to the availabilities, especially tourists.

j) Discussions were had around lessons learned on projects that have and have not been delivered. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel noted that there are always lessons to be learned, the Park Authority are ambitious and have available funding to tap into if an unexpected project did arise. There is an awareness that things can change quickly, therefore a need to be adaptable, however it would be beneficial to have back up plans in place. CEO highlighted there needs to be clarity about projects and what visitor levies can be put towards, even for projects that still require funding.

k) A Board Member queried if the Park Authority had been involved with projects at Glenshee. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel confirmed the Park Authority worked with them to provide public toilets, however, there have been no transport or parking related projects.

l) A Board Member suggested the parking at Kincraig Bridge to be moved to a high priority as it is a core path and access to this can be difficult. Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel agreed, noting at the time of writing, the Park Authority believed parking would have been built, which may still be an option, however wider parking management element still needs to be added.

17. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
    a) Note the progress towards delivery of the objectives contained within the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan.

18. Action Points Arising:
    i. Parking at Kincraig Bridge to be made a high priority.

Election of Board Deputy Convener and Audit and Risk Committee Chair (Paper 4)

19. Mariaan Pita, Executive Support Manager introduced the paper which notifies the board that the Deputy Convener's term will come to an end 07 September 2026 and the term of the Audit and Risk Chair will conclude on 31 October 2026. In accordance with the Standing Orders, timetables for all elections must be established at least two months prior to the expiry of appointments. This paper fulfils that requirement.

20. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
    a) Agree election timetable for the Deputy Board Convener and Audit and Risk Chair.

21. Action Points Arising: None.

Committee Minutes (Paper 5)

22. Sandy Bremner, Board Convener introduced the paper which sets out the minutes from the Resources Committee on 13 February 2026 and Performance Committee on 23 March 2026

23. The Board noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
    a) Note the minutes of the Resources Committee and Performance Committee.

24. Action Points Arising: None.

AOCB

25. CEO updated Board Members that Oliver Davies, Head of Communications and Engagement is leaving the Park Authority for a different role at the end of August. Recruitment for a replacement has begun. CEO thanked Head of Communications and Engagement for everything over the past five years, highlighting the Park Authority communications and engagement is in a different place from where they were when he began in the role. Oliver will be missed, and CEO wished him all the best for his future career. Board Convener seconded this, noting he led the team exceptionally, especially through the monumental amount of work with Fire Byelaws.

Date of Next Meeting

26. The date of the next meeting is 25 September 2026 in person at Lonach Hall, Strathdon.

27. *The meeting concluded at 12.00pm*

Action	Status
Action Points from meeting on 27 March 2026:	
Action	**Status**
Paper 2 - Cairngorms National Park Authority 2026/27 budget	
At Para 11 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: i. No significant variances as yet.	
Action Points from meeting on 26 June 2026	
Paper 2 - Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund	

At Para 12 i. Risk 13 - transferred the risk to the delivery phase. ii. Public consultation to be considered as a high risk.	Complete
Paper 3 – Strategic Tourism Infrastructure	
At para 16 i. Parking at Kincraig Bridge to be made a high priority.	Complete