



# Draft minutes of the Formal Board meeting

**Held at Cairngorms National Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey**

**In person**

**28 March 2025 at 10.00am**

## **Present in person**

Sandy Bremner (Convener)

Geva Blackett

Peter Cosgrove

Paul Gibb

John Kirk

Fiona McLean

Duncan Miller

Eleanor Mackintosh (Deputy Convener)

Jackie Brierton

Kenny Deans

Russell Jones

Bill Lobban

Steve Micklewright

Derek Ross

## **In attendance**

Grant Moir, Chief Executive Officer

David Cameron, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Director of Corporate Services

Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place

Dan Harris, Planning Manager (Forward Planning and Service Improvement)

David Berry, Head of Planning and Chief Planning Officer

Jeff Pyrah, Senior Planning Officer

Heather Trench, Sustainable Tourism Officer

Kate Christie Head of Organisational Development

Louise Allen, Head of Finance and Corporate Operations

Mariaan Pita, Executive Support Manager

Alix Harkness, Clerk to the Board

## **Apologies**

Chris Beattie

Lauren MacCallum

Hannah Grist

Ann Ross



Michael Williamson

## Welcome and introduction

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

## Approval of minutes of previous meetings

2. The draft minutes of the meeting held on the 22 November 2024 were approved with no amendments.
3. The draft minutes of the last meeting held on 14 February 2025 were approved with no amendments.

## Matters arising not covered elsewhere

4. There were no matters arising.

Action	Status
<b>Action Points from meeting on 22 March 2024:</b>	
<b>Paper 1 CEO report</b>	
At para 7	
i. CEO, to prepare a briefing note on farming activity and statistics within the Cairngorms National Park and distribute to the Board.	In hand
<b>Update:</b> Preliminary data received, staff capacity to progress is limited by vacancy in Agricultural Officer post. Recruitment for that post is about to begin.	

Action	Status
<b>Action Points from meeting on 13 September 2024:</b>	
<b>Paper 1 – CEO Report</b>	
At para 9	
i. Board session to be scheduled to allow members to reflect, consider and adopt the organisational values.	In hand
<b>Update:</b> CEO, Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services, and Head of Organisational Development to discuss.	



<b>Paper 2 – National Park Partnership Plan</b>	
At para 13 i. Future report on carbon footprint to be circulated to the Board and published on the web ii. Future updates to include more detailed traffic light ratings to clearly show activities at risk of being delivered.	In hand
<b>Update:</b>	

Action	Status
<b>Action Points from meeting on 22 November 2024:</b>	
<b>Paper 1 - CEO Report</b>	
At para 6b i. Review the Planning call-in protocol and discuss at a future planning committee.	In hand
At para 6c ii. Give an update on Brand use at a future meeting.	Completed
<b>Update:</b> <b>Call-in protocol - This will be brought to the board in a future Board Business Session.</b>  <b>Brand use -</b> Over 200 businesses across the Cairngorms National Park are now signed up to our brand charter scheme, which gives partners access to a range of free promotional materials (including the use of a 'proud to be part of' logo). The scheme was refreshed as part of the brand work in 2022 and has been promoted extensively since then, including a workshop at the CBP conference in November and a series of videos for businesses (eg <a href="https://vimeo.com/943246696/3c29150f94?su_via=got&amp;login=true#_=">https://vimeo.com/943246696/3c29150f94?su_via=got&amp;login=true#_ =</a> ) promoted through VisitCairngorms channels. We are partnering with CBP over the coming months to promote the charter further, including a specific workshop with local producers to explore the use of a 'made in' brand stamp for products made in the Cairngorms. The findings from this workshop will be brought to the board for further discussion ahead of any scheme being rolled out.	
<b>Paper 3 - Local Development Plan - Development Plan Scheme</b>	
At para 15a	



i. Share report from Kingussie High School.	Completed
<b>Update:</b> Reports for local development plan engagement with pupils at Kingussie High School. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Kingussie-High-School-School-S1-Geography-Students-Place-Standard-Tool-Engagement-2024.pdf">https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Kingussie-High-School-School-S1-Geography-Students-Place-Standard-Tool-Engagement-2024.pdf</a></li><li>• <a href="https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Kingussie-High-School-School-S3-Geography-Students-Place-Standard-Tool-Engagement-2024.pdf">https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Kingussie-High-School-School-S3-Geography-Students-Place-Standard-Tool-Engagement-2024.pdf</a></li><li>• <a href="https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Kingussie-High-School-School-Higher-Criminology-Students-Place-Standard-Tool-Engagement-2024.pdf">https://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Kingussie-High-School-School-Higher-Criminology-Students-Place-Standard-Tool-Engagement-2024.pdf</a></li></ul>	
<b>Paper 4 - Review of Board Standing Orders</b>	
At para 19a ii. Remove point 53b in annex 1	Complete
At para 19b iii. Add in the additional wording to allow flexibility to allow phone calls if this is the only possibility.	Complete
At para 19b iv. At paragraph 32 amend telephone link to video call to for continuity in the paper.	Complete
<b>Update:</b> All amendments made and Standing Orders issued.	
<b>Paper 5 - Active Cairngorms and end of season visitor report</b>	
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
At para 23d iii. Share finalised report on water access guidance.	Completed
<b>Update:</b>	

## Declarations of interest

5. The Standards Commission have agreed a dispensation for all members covering Item 7, Paper 3.



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 a discussion took place around the following:
  - a) CEO confirmed that local businesses had been given the opportunity to bid on the Cairngorms 2030 projects through open public procurement. Depending on the project's size, different procurement routes were followed, as outlined in the internal Procurement Guidance approved by the Audit and Risk Committee last summer.
  - b) Request made for the list of Cairngorms 2030 projects that have recently gone through procurement processes to be circulated to the Board. This was agreed.
9. The Board noted the paper. The Convener thanked the CEO and all staff on behalf of the Board.
10. Action Point Arising:
  - i. List of Cairngorms 2030 projects currently going through procurement processes to be circulated to the Board.

## **Cairngorms National Park Authority 2025/26 budget and operational plan (Paper 2)**

11. Louise Allen, Head of Finance and Corporate Operations introduced the paper, which sets out the Park Authority's proposed budget for the 2025/26 financial year, providing the Board with the opportunity to consider the overall budget position, together with the impact of any key assumptions made in establishing budget estimates. The paper also presents the proposed operational plan for 2025/26 (Annex 4) to allow members to scrutinise, and take assurance on, the allocation of available resources, both financial and staff resources. The budget allocations seek to provide a balanced approach to delivery of the Park Authority's agreed strategic



objectives, as set out in the approved National Park Partnership Plan and Corporate Plan.

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

- a) Resounding praise for the remarkable figures and clear, well explained paper.
- b) The CEO explained that the funding allocation for the upcoming financial year is very positive, although we await final confirmation from Scottish Government. With the Scottish Parliamentary election next year, there is a degree of uncertainty over future budget allocations, and it is increasingly important for the staff to focus on securing additional funding from other sources.
- c) The discussion focused on the organisational changes made to deliver the Cairngorms 2030 programme and concerns about management of staff and staffing levels, including the loss of project staff once the programme ends. The CEO noted that the changes had been positive, modernising processes and systems. David Cameron, Deputy CEO, mentioned that the workforce management strategy was being updated and would be presented to the Resources Committee in the next six months. This would take a long-term approach seeking to establish approaches to handle staffing at the end point of the Cairngorms 2030 programme. He also explained that recruitment for roles is now typically on three-year fixed-term contracts, potentially allowing permanent Cairngorms 2030 staff to transition into positions when the programme concludes.
- d) A discussion on operational plan allocations focused on freshwater ecological restoration, primarily through riparian planting and large woody structures. It was noted that removing barriers on rivers was a key restoration strategy, and there was interest in tracking how many ecological barriers are being removed in various catchments. Marine Scotland had assessed all catchments and partners are working toward implementation. CEO agreed to consider integrating this into a forward work program and will update the Board at the next meeting.
- e) Comment was made on expectations that National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) would be keen to see projects continuing even after current NHLF funding for Cairngorms 2030 had ceased, and members would welcome the Park Authority thinking ahead on that. CEO provided reassurance that the



staff were looking at possible funding sources available to deliver the next National Park Partnership Plan. He added that with regard to the legacy from the Cairngorms 2030 programme, projects the Authority is doing in the Cairngorms are being repeated elsewhere; he gave the example of the Alzheimer's centre at Badaguish, and the second centre that has opened recently south of Edinburgh, therefore benefiting Scotland as a whole as an early legacy impact from Cairngorms 2030.

- f) Species management, specifically geese were mentioned, and questions were asked if continued funding would be available to extend the work further up the Spey into Badenoch. CEO advised that he investigate it.

13. Russell Jones, Convener of the Resources Committee thanked Louise Allen for her work throughout the year at the Resources Committee and Sandy Bremner, Board Convener endorsed those comments.

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

- a) Approve the Cairngorms National Park Authority's budget and operational plan for 2024/25 as set out in this paper.
- b) Consider the impact of the budget and operational plan on the strategic risk register and any amendments arising.

15. Action Points Arising:

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

*Louise Allen left the meeting at 10.30 am*

## **Consultation response to Highland Council Visitor Levy Proposal (Paper 3)**

16. Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place and Heather Trench, Sustainable Tourism Officer introduced the paper which allows the board to discuss and agree a response to the Highland Council Visitor Levy consultation. The Highland Council are the first



Local Authority within the Cairngorms National Park to bring forward a proposal under the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024.

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

- c) A Board member advised that no decision had yet been taken by the Highland Council on whether to progress with the visitor levy: it still had to be debated by the Highland Council.  
A Board member added that Aberdeenshire Council were not far behind however there was real concern around the impact of collecting the money would push businesses, particularly small businesses, over the value added tax (VAT) threshold and as a result may see a reduction in the availability of room numbers. Director of Planning and Place noted that the way the levy is recognised in tax terms was a common concern being raised by businesses and the business community. He added there were opportunities for councils to make exceptions for certain types or scales of business if they considered necessary.
- d) CEO advised that discussions were ongoing between Scottish Government and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) regarding the VAT implications in Scotland and the potential of bringing them in line with England. CEO agreed to keep the Board updated on any updates shared with the Park Authority on that front.
- e) Member commented that it was as good a response that could be made at this early stage, noting economic impact assessment work is still to be carried out and the structure provides disproportionate disadvantage to smaller accommodation providers.
- f) Clarity sought on the timeline, after Highland Council had discussed the consultation responses would it go out to a second consultation? Director of Planning and Place advised that it appeared likely that Highland Council would modify their proposals and re-consult and agreed to add in a sentence at the end of the response which says: If there are significant changes proposed by Highland council to the current scheme we would welcome further consultation with the Park Authority.
- g) A board member asked if the Cairngorms National Park Authority could consider the feedback from rural businesses as part of the national debate of the 5% level as opposed to the approach understood in England of a flat rate.





Director of Planning and Place advised that the legislation had established that visitor levy was calculated as a percentage rather than fixed sum and at the time that parliament had considered the legislation arguments had been made by various parties for and against both percentages and fixed rates. The Scottish Government was not consulting on any changes to the legislation at this stage. Local Authorities considering visitor levy proposals were required to consult on a percentage-based levy and the Park Authority was responding to a consultation from Highland Council on a proposed scheme. The Park Authority hadn't undertaken research into the pro and cons of each potential levy rate so wouldn't be in a strong position to comment on the benefits or disbenefits of percentages compared to fixed fees.

- a) A Board member felt strongly about not being supportive of implementing a visitor levy and proposed an amendment. There was no seconder to this amendment.

18. The Board agreed and approved the Cairngorms National Park Authority response to Highland Council's Visitor Levy consultation with the addition of the following sentence at the end of the response:

- a) If there are significant changes proposed by the Highland Council to the current scheme, we would welcome further consultation.

Paul Gibb's dissent to this position was noted.

19. Action Points Arising:

- i. Sentence to be added to end of consultation response as detailed in paragraph 18a.
- 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.

## **Local Development Plan 2021 – Delivery Programme (Paper 4)**

20. Jeff Pyrah, Senior Planning Officer and Dan Harris, Planning Manager introduced the paper which presents the Local Development Plan 2021 – Delivery Programme 2025. The Delivery Programme is an important project management tool. It is instrumental to achieving an outcomes-focused approach to development planning. All local planning authorities are required to publish a Delivery Programme by 31 March 2025.



21. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
- a) A member commented that it was an interesting report that was detailed and helpful.
  - b) Query around the financial contributions around community gain, with some very detailed and some not at all: why was this? Jeff Pyrah, Senior Planning Officer confirmed that this reflected the detail available.
22. The Board noted the Local Development Plan - Delivery Programme 2025 and approved its submission to Scottish Ministers.
23. Action Point Arising:                      None.

### **Sustainable Tourism Action Plan update (Paper 5)**

24. Heather Trench, Sustainable Tourism Officer and Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place introduced the paper which sets out to update the Board on delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan 2022 - 27 and give wider context on associated policy developments.
25. The Board noted the progress in delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan 2022 - 27.
26. Action Point Arising:                      None.

*Kate Christie joined the meeting at 11.05am*

### **Public Sector Equality Duty Report (Paper 6)**

27. Kate Christie, Head of Organisational Development introduced the paper which explains that the Cairngorms National Park Authority is a listed public authority that is required to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty. There are a number of obligations under this duty, including a requirement to report on mainstreaming the equality duty. There is also a requirement to publish progress on delivery of a variety of responsibilities under that duty, including developing a set of equality outcomes every four years, and reporting on them every two years. The overarching report demonstrating what the Park Authority has been doing to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty is now due to be published in April 2025.



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

- a) A Board member praised the organisation's leadership in equalities work, noting that other public sector bodies look to them as a good example. She highlighted the consultative approach and the broad list of achievements in this area. She also commended the Cairngorms Equalities Advisory Panel for its role in guiding the process. It was noted that the panel is chaired by Board Member Hannah Grist who also advises the Scottish Government Equalities Panel. Resounding thanks were given to Kate Christie and Oliver Davies for the excellent report and making the Park Authority exemplar in the subject.
- b) A board member suggested holding workshops that other organisations could attend. Head of Organisational Development advised that they planned to do stories of the work that is being done and so other organisations can learn from these.

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

- a) Note the report and Annex 1.
- b) Note the achievements in our work on equalities.

30. Action Point Arising: None.

### **Board Committee's annual reports to the Board (Paper 7)**

31. Mariaan Pita introduced the paper which presents the annual report of the Governance Committee, Performance Committee and Resources Committee to Board members for comment.

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

- a) To note the Governance Committee annual report
- b) To note the Performance Committee annual report
- c) To note the Resources Committee annual report

33. Action Point Arising: None.

### **Board Committee Minutes (Paper 8)**

34. Sandy Bremner introduced the paper which presents the approved minutes and confidential minutes of the Performance Committee, 20 September and 13



December, Audit and Risk Committee, 27 September and Resources Committee, 04 October

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

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

36. Action Point Arising: None.

## AOCB

37. There were no items presented.

## Date of Next Meeting

38. The date of the next meeting is 27 June 2025 in person, in Ballater.

39. The meeting concluded at 11.17 am

Action	Status
Action Points from meeting on 22 March 2024:	
Paper 1 CEO report	
At para 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. CEO, to prepare a briefing note on farming activity and statistics within the Cairngorms National Park and distribute to the Board.</li></ul>	In hand
Update: Preliminary data received, staff capacity to progress is limited by vacancy in Agricultural Officer post. Recruitment for that post is about to begin.	

Action	Status
<b>Action Points from meeting on 13 September 2024:</b>	
<b>Paper 1 – CEO Report</b>	
At para 9	In hand





Action	Status
<b>Action Points from meeting on 13 September 2024:</b>	
<b>Paper 1 – CEO Report</b>	
At para 9	
vii. Board session to be scheduled to allow members to reflect, consider and adopt the organisational values.	In hand
<b>Update:</b> CEO, Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services, and Head of Organisational Development to discuss.	
<b>Paper 2 – National Park Partnership Plan</b>	
At para 13	
viii. Future report on carbon footprint to be circulated to the Board and published on the web	In hand
ix. Future updates to include more detailed traffic light ratings to clearly show activities at risk of being delivered.	
<b>Update:</b>	
Action	Status
<b>Action Points from meeting on 28 March 2025:</b>	
<b>Paper 1 - CEO Report</b>	
At para 10	
i. List of 80 Cairngorms 2030 projects currently going through procurement processes to be circulated to the Board.	In hand
<b>Paper 2 – 2025/26 Budget and Operational Plan</b>	
At para XX	
i. Information on the number of ecological barriers that are being removed on catchments to be sought and	



<p>circulated to the Board and thought to be given to putting this into a staff members forward work plan.</p> <p>ii. Scope of extending the work on species management specifically geese further up the Spey into Badenoch to be investigated.</p>	
<b>Paper 3 -Consultation response to Highland Council Visitor Levy Proposal</b>	
<p>i. Sentence to be added to end of consultation response as detailed in paragraph 18a.</p> <p>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.</p>	