
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at the Panmuir Arms Hotel, Edzell on 12 September 2003 at 10.30am

Present:

Peter Argyle
Eric Baird
Duncan Bryden
Stuart Black
Sally Dowden
Basil Dunlop
Douglas Glass
Angus Gordon
Lucy Grant
David Green
Bruce Luffman
Eleanor Mackintosh

Alastair MacLennan
Anne Maclean
Gregor Rimell
David Selfridge
Robert Severn
Joyce Simpson
Sheena Slimon
Richard Stroud
Andrew Thin
Susan Walker
Bob Wilson

In Attendance:

Jane Hope, Interim Chief Executive, CNPA
Nick Halfhide, Policy & Projects, CNPA

Apologies:

Andrew Rafferty
Willie Mackenna

Welcome and Introduction

1. David Selfridge welcomed the Board to Edzell, and its first meeting in Angus. Following the Board meeting, there would be a visit to Glen Esk to see The Retreat and discuss issues facing remote rural communities.

Minutes of Last Meeting

2. Agreed.

Matters Arising

3. The Convener reported on a number of matters arising:
 - a) Paragraph 3(b): Scottish Ministers had since confirmed the CNPA's budget for 2003/04 as £2m, as requested by the Board.
 - b) Paragraph 3(d): The Aberdeenshire Local Plan would be dealt with in the Planning Committee immediately following the Board meeting.
 - c) Paragraph 3(g): An agriculture briefing was arranged for 26 September.
 - d) Paragraph 3(h): A consultation was to take place in due course on an Integrated Fire Risk Management Plan, and the future of Auxiliary Fire Units would be decided in light of that.

Action Points:

- e) Paragraph 7: The Staffing and Recruitment Committee had met to progress recruitment of senior posts; the Planning Committee was established as a Committee of the whole Board and would also deal with Call-In decisions (so there would be no Call-In group); the first meetings of the Finance and the Audit Committees had not been arranged due to pressure of other work, and were intended to be arranged shortly.
- f) Paragraph 11: Further discussions and a redraft of the paper on Advisory Groups had taken place, and a revised paper was being considered under item 5.
- g) Paragraph 15: The Staffing and Recruitment Committee had met and recruitment of senior posts was in hand.
- h) Paragraph 19: Denis Munro had written to Highland Council and to the Scottish Executive.

Advisory Groups and Working Groups (paper 1)

4. Jane Hope introduced the paper, which reflected the outcome of discussion on an earlier paper brought to the Board meeting on 27 June. It sought agreement to a number of advisory and working groups, as well as a number of other supporting measures, to ensure that the Board had mechanisms for engaging and communicating with stakeholders in the Park.

5. The point was made in introducing the paper that a number of project groups were already in existence (for those projects inherited from the Cairngorms Partnership), and the existing arrangements would be on-going – there was no intention (as might be construed from the paper) to change the chairmanship and other arrangements for these project groups.
6. The point was also made that a substantial number of advisory and working groups were proposed. Work could start quickly on identifying chairs and members, but this would take some time to complete, and the groups would not all be up and running immediately.
7. In discussion, the following points were made:
 - a) The proposed Food Marketing Working Group was initially focused on food products, but clearly the issue of marketing of Park produce potentially applied much more widely, and the possibility of widening the remit of this group should be kept in mind as work progressed.
 - b) For the semi-autonomous groups it would be essential that the CNPA put in place agreements that made clear what each group was expected to deliver in return for the financial (or in-kind) support from the CNPA.
 - c) The existing Health and Fitness project group needed to have its remit extended to cover the whole National Park area.
 - d) It would be helpful to have a representative from the Scottish Executive attending meetings of the advisory group on Joined Up Government. This group needed to consider not just what public agencies were looking for from the CNPA, but what the nation expected.
 - e) The possibility of “integrated government” rather than “joined up government” as the title of the first Advisory Group was discussed. It was concluded that the group itself should be allowed to decide on the preferred name.
 - f) The Gateways group could be construed as focusing on roads; it was important that it considered wider issues such as rail, air and cyclists. It would also be important to consider membership from outside the Park.
 - g) The use of seminars for keeping in touch with a wider audience than those on CNPA advisory or working groups was welcomed. In addition to these, it was suggested that there should be an annual open meeting (repeated at several venues throughout the Park) to enable the Board to update people on what the CNPA was doing, what it had achieved, and its plans for the future.
 - h) Board members should be more accessible as individuals to the public, by phone, post or e-mail.
 - i) The transport project group should include a member(s) who understands the challenges for the disabled of using public transport to gain access to the Park.
 - j) Some Board members may already be on semi-autonomous groups, in which case it would need to be clear in what capacity they were sitting on such groups.
 - k) There might usefully be a group devoted to identifying funding opportunities. However, it was intended that there should be a member of staff with precisely that remit, and the usefulness of a group would be kept under review in light of how this post developed.
 - l) Terms of reference for the various groups could be agreed by the groups themselves, but should be signed off by the Board in view of their responsibility

for the activities of the CNPA and hence any budgetary implications of the activities of the groups

8. The paper was agreed.

9. **Action:**

- a) **The remit and terms of the groups outlined in the paper to be defined more tightly and clearly, for consideration by the groups themselves, and then agreement by the Board;**
- b) **Informal discussions between members and the Convener to be used to establish Chairmanship and membership of groups (except for the project groups referred to in paragraph 5).**

Project Approval Process and Update (Paper 2)

10. Nick Halfhide introduced the paper which had three elements. First, it proposed a process for delegating authority for approval of projects, bearing in mind that a balance needed to be struck between the Board being accountable and yet being required to take a strategic overview rather than get swamped with detail. Other factors also had been taken into account, such as the Scottish Executive's requirement though the Financial Memorandum to give prior approval for certain expenditure. Secondly, the paper indicated a number of commitments made recently with the approval of the Convener/Deputy Convener. Thirdly, a raft of new project proposals were outlined, with the suggestion that these be worked up and submitted for approval under the new system.

11. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) The new process needed to be underpinned by an information system that kept members regularly updated on progress with projects. This would be discussed further under item 9.
- b) The reference in paragraph 23 to "Senior Feis" was to a festival. The proposal was that a group of young musicians that emerged from the Junior Feis movement should be helped to develop by follow-on tuition and performance.
- c) The dangers of "cherry picking" applications needed to be avoided, and decisions needed to be made within the context of a strategy. Nevertheless, it was early days for the CNPA, and while a strategic approach was undoubtedly needed, it would take time to develop. In the meantime when projects arose which clearly helped to deliver the Park aims, it was important these were developed rather than lose the opportunity. The proposed new projects at paragraph 23 of the paper had not been cherry picked – many projects which had been applied for had been directed towards LEADER + funding. No applications had been rejected. What was important in the paper under discussion was the proposed system for approving projects in the future, and that would operate within the framework set by the corporate and National Park Plans as these developed. The informal board

discussions earlier in the year, and the Convener's launch-day speech, had already started the process of articulating that strategic approach.

- d) The decisions made to fund/not fund projects, even small ones, could have PR ramifications, and the involvement of the press/PR adviser would be crucial.
- e) In respect of paragraph 15 (monitoring of spending on individual projects), virement of money between projects was not precluded. The allocation of funds between projects was an internal matter for the CNPA
- f) The Land Based Business Training project (paragraph 19) was not an apprenticeship scheme. The project planned for 2004 will assist land-based businesses to train their staff to improve the competitiveness of their business; and provide funds to train those working on the land to help deliver the public benefits of the Park.
- g) The principle of delegating decisions on allocating funds to projects below a certain threshold was right, but it was important that all Members then knew about those decisions. This reinforced the need for a system for communicating project decisions.
- h) All decisions on project allocations were being made in accordance with the need to deliver the aims of the National Park. Contracts stated clearly what projects were expected to deliver. The intention was not to set up a new grant scheme to duplicate what already existed.
- i) It would be important to ensure that where work was undertaken for the CNPA by an external contractor, the CNPA's role was duly acknowledged. This was particularly important while the CNPA was a new organisation and needed to raise its profile.

12. The paper and its recommendations were agreed.

13. Action:

- a) Officials to work up more detailed specifications for the proposed projects at paragraph 23, for approval under the proposed new system.**
- b) Regular summaries of project progress to be circulated to the Board (as suggested under item 9).**

National Park Plan – Discussion Paper (paper 3)

- 14. Nick Halfhide introduced the paper which considered the statutory duty on the CNPA to prepare a National Park Plan, what that Plan might comprise, and the process for preparation. The process had to be inclusive, which inevitably implied that it would also take several years. The indicative timetable suggested April 2005 for submission of the Plan to Scottish Ministers.
- 15. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) It would be helpful to include a definition of terms used in the Plan to avoid misinterpretation.

- b) The timetable at paragraph 29 suggested October 2004 – January 2005 as a period for consultation on the draft Plan, and a further 2-3 months to accommodate comments. This was brief by comparison with a local plan. However, the analogy with a local plan was not necessarily a close one. Further, the timetable was only indicative at this stage, and would be refined as the process became clearer. It was suggested that the way in which the consultation was conducted was probably more important than the time taken. In the light of consultation fatigue having developed as a result of numerous consultations in recent years, some careful thought needed to be given to how the consultation was to be conducted.
- c) There might be merit in looking at the costed service plans of local authorities for areas of the National Park and assessing the degree to which they delivered Park aims
- d) The process of preparing the Plan would involve continuous discussion and dialogue with all interested parties. The discussions between now and December 2003 were intended principally as a scoping exercise to see what ideas other people, and in particular other organisations, had at an early stage of the process. Seminars for staff might be one way of bringing out these ideas.
- e) It would be crucial to get the local plan in place as soon as possible in Badenoch and Strathspey. The intention was to take forward the preparation of the Local Plan, National Park Plan, and the Core Path Network as soon as possible, but to avoid having three separate consultations. For internal efficiency, and to provide a better service to our customers it would be sensible to have “integrated” consultation meetings to avoid the consultation fatigue already referred to.
- f) The possibility of having a rolling update of plans should be considered, as opposed to a major revision every 5-10 years. In that way plans would remain reasonably up to date.
- g) In letting consultancies for work associated with the National Park Plan, the CNPA was required to demonstrate best value. A policy of only letting contracts to people who lived in the Park was not consistent with this, but efforts could (and were) made to invite applications/bids from within the Park.
- h) The costs of consultancy could be high, but the costs could be minimised over time by making sure that the large amounts of data that were generated by such work were made readily accessible and available, so that repeat work could build on existing data. The Local Biodiversity Plan (LBAP) project was a good example of a project which had been well consulted and had generated much good information.
- i) The National Park Plan was a major piece of work for the CNPA, and it was vital that it was done well. Given that around £180 million was spent by public agencies within the Park area, if the National Park Plan could ensure that this was spent more effectively and efficiently, it would be making a major contribution.

16. **The paper was agreed.**

17. **Action:**

- a) **Officials to start work as set out in paragraph 29 by commissioning two pieces of research, and initiating discussions with stakeholders on the process and the main issues.**

Celebrating the First Anniversary of the Park (paper 4)

18. Nick Halfhide introduced the paper which invited discussion on a programme of activities in the first year of the Park. The Board had decided when they were established in April that while the opening of the Park on 1 September should be a celebration involving all the communities, there was insufficient time available to organise such events. The suggestion had therefore been made that a programme of community-based events/initiatives during the first year of the Park would be appropriate as a means of marking the arrival of the National Park, and celebrating the importance of the communities within the Park.
19. In discussion the following points were made:
 - a) The CNPA should be wary of taking on the organisation of events itself, given the staffing implications. However, making use of events organised by other bodies was likely to make it difficult for a consistent message to emerge, given that the events would have been initiated primarily for other purposes.
 - b) The youth and the schools of the Park should be involved.
 - c) It would be important that the CNPA was able to demonstrate it had made a difference in its first year and that celebrations were able to focus on that.
 - d) The term “celebration” could be misunderstood. The intention was not to create a series of parties for the first anniversary of the Park. Nevertheless, it was perfectly legitimate to celebrate, in the sense of recognising, the role of the communities in the Park, and to engage them directly in activities which promoted the four Park aims.
 - e) Bearing in mind the short time available to prepare for the launch of the National Park, it was perfectly reasonable to celebrate the first year of the Park with appropriate events.
20. **The paper was agreed.**
21. **Action:**
 - a) **A sub group of two Members and two officials be set up to develop ideas further, with a view to bringing firm proposals to a future Board meeting.**
 - b) **Members interested in sitting on the sub group to approach Jane Hope.**

Update on Operational Matters (Oral report)

22. Jane Hope explained that in order to keep Members updated on a range of operational, policy and project matters which did not in themselves warrant a formal paper to the Board, a system was being tried in which a monthly update memo would be sent to all Members, with any other information papers/leaflets etc attached. An example was handed to all Members for them to consider.
23. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) The idea of monthly written information updates was welcomed. Ideally these should be a week in advance of a board meeting to allow any questions to be raised then.
- b) The progress table for projects would be more helpful if the projects were grouped under the headings of the four aims of the Park, and noted any projects at risk.
- c) The projects table emphasised just how much work was in hand. It was important to convey that message to a wider audience.
- d) In addition to the written information update, it might be useful to have presentations to the board by Group Heads giving an overview of developments in their areas. (note: This would need to await appointment to these senior management team posts later in the year.)
- e) The information systems for keeping Members updated should be kept under constant review, and ideas from Members would be welcome.
- f) The update should be posted as well as e-mailed.

AOCB

- 24. None. Jane Hope agreed to consider with the local authority possibilities for lodging Board papers at venues in the Park.

Date of Next Meeting

- 25. Friday 10 October, at Tomintoul.