
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING held at The Community Hall, Boat of Garten on Friday 15th May 2009 at 11.30am

PRESENT

Peter Argyle
Eric Baird
Stuart Black
Geva Blackett
Duncan Bryden
Dave Fallows
Lucy Grant
David Green
Drew Hendry
Bob Kinnaird

Willie McKenna
Eleanor Mackintosh
Ian MacKintosh
Anne MacLean
Alastair MacLennan
Mary McCafferty
Fiona Murdoch
Andrew Rafferty
Gregor Rimell
Susan Walker

In Attendance:

Karen Archer
David Cameron
Fiona Chalmers
Andrew Harper
Matthew Hawkins

Jane Hope
Gordon McConachie
Gavin Miles
Hamish Trench
Zoe Taylor

Apologies:

Jaci Douglas
Marcus Humphrey
Richard Stroud

Welcome and Introduction

1. The Convener welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly those members of staff attending for the first time or returning after a period of absence.

Minutes of Last Meeting – Approval

2. Minutes of the last meeting on the 20th March 2009 were approved subject to the correction of two minor errors.

Matters Arising

3. In respect of Paragraph 22f it was noted that the Woodfuel Fair was being opened by Danny Alexander MP on the 27th May.

Declarations of Interests

4. None.

Annual Review of National Park Plan Delivery (Paper 1)

5. Gavin Miles introduced the paper which reviewed progress in delivering the Cairngorms National Park Plan over its first two years and identified key challenges that were likely to affect its future delivery and the achievement of the five year outcomes for each Priority for Action. A mid-term health check was being conducted with partners to assess the prospects for delivery of the Park Plan over the remaining three years of its life and this would be reported back to the Board. Without prejudice to the conclusions of that process, the current assessment made by the CNPA officers of progress in delivering the Park Plan's actions and achieving the five year outcomes were set out at Paragraph 12. These were summarised as:
 - a) The delivery partners have been successful in delivering many of the actions in the Park Plan during its first 2 years of implementation;
 - b) Nearly half of the Park Plan's 5-year outcomes are on track to be achieved by 2012 but half are considered likely to require more effort/action or resource than was anticipated when the Park Plan was prepared;
 - c) The mid-term health-check will allow the CNPA and partners to review the effectiveness of current programmed actions and allow future work to be as focussed as possible on achieving the agreed outcomes.
 - d) The operation of SRDP and the economic slowdown have created considerable challenges to achieving some outcomes of the National Park Plan that were not envisaged when it was prepared. These parts of the Plan and the challenges require re-examination by all relevant partners to identify appropriate and realistic responses over the remaining years of this Park Plan.
6. The recommendation was that the Board request the Strategy Group, which would be meeting shortly, to collectively address the issues surrounding the delivery of the outcomes for the remaining three years of the Park Plan. (The Strategy Group comprised Chairs and Chief Executives and Conveners of public sector partners.) The paper also recommended that certain changes be made to the format of Advisory Forums. These appeared to no longer be working effectively and attendance was low,

and the proposal was to change their focus more to that required by stakeholders than by the Park Authority.

7. In discussion, the following points were made:
- a) The Strategy Group on the 3rd of July would be essential in reviewing the level of commitment by partners to the delivery of the National Park Plan. It had always been acknowledged that it was easy to agree to putting plans in place, but much less easy to deliver the agreed outcomes, especially in times of an economic downturn.
 - b) There was extensive discussion about the proposal in respect of Advisory Forums. The key role for these forums was seen to be to try and facilitate an integrated approach which would be particularly important in respect of the next National Park Plan. Advisory Forums had been very useful and well attended when there was a specific job to do in constructing the first National Park Plan; without that obvious output the Forums had tended to lack direction and purpose. It was also noted that the term “Advisory Forum” might give the wrong impression. In reality the Forums needed to be two-way, they had to be useful for the participants themselves, but also be a useful forum that the CNPA could then approach for views on relevant issues.
 - c) There was some discussion about the respective roles of the delivery teams as noted at paragraph 31, and the forums as proposed in the recommendations. There was a feeling that a Land Management Forum (wider than just farmers) could be useful to land managers as well as the CNPA, and should be giving advice to the Delivery Teams or at least influencing the Delivery Teams, rather than advising the CNPA Board direct. Importantly any such forum should be demand led and not be just a talking shop. The point was also made that forums were best when inclusive; their value came from farmers and others putting forward their views and these being tested and discussed by others not part of the industry. It was essential to avoid these groupings becoming too bunkered. The Delivery Teams appeared to be functioning quite well, and comprised of people very directly involved in delivering the actions in the National Park Plan. Nevertheless, there were clearly others who wished to be able to influence the delivery of the National Park Plan, even if not in the front line of delivery themselves. There was also clearly a demand from interested parties to come together to discuss common issues, not just in respect of the National Park Plan, but issues that went wider, for example policy issues such as SRDP reform. Alongside this there also appeared to be a desire for more ground level discussions and sharing of views for example amongst farmers.
 - d) Part of the difficulty was that existing forums did not always see the product of their discussions being implemented. Much better links between the Advisory Forums and the Delivery Teams was probably needed. This ought to be possible through appropriate scheduling of the relevant meetings, as well as clarifying on the agendas of meetings the provision of feedback from one group to the other.
 - e) While it was important to support useful groupings might there be a danger of a plethora of these all requiring support. This was felt to be unlikely as current indications suggested the number with sufficient interest to get themselves together in active groupings would be manageable. Clearly if groupings wished to get together this was a matter for them; the issue for the CNPA was which of these needed the CNPA support. The example of the Cairngorms Deer Advisory Group was mentioned as an extremely vibrant and effective grouping; it

had been supported by the CNPA but now had its own momentum and was useful to all of those taking part.

- f) The suggestion was made that these Forums could be issue/topic based, and therefore time limited and focused. These should be cross sectoral and not just limited to specific interest groups.
- g) It was important to have the right people on Advisory Forums if they were to be effective. Housing was an interesting example where to be effective a grouping needed to include the Scottish Government and possibly the banking sector as well as the usual partners. The important thing was to concentrate on how such a grouping could influence the decision makers. People needed a sense of being able to change things or to know why they had not been able to change things.
- h) The re-appraisal of the Advisory Forums was welcomed as was the suggestion to have a forum focused on Sustainable Tourism.
- i) Forums and other groupings were not just about being able to change things but also about learning.
- j) It was noted that at paragraph 9 of the paper, just over 50% of the outcomes would require more work and/or resources to be achieved by 2012. It was not possible to quantify how much more work was needed; that was the purpose of the health check with partners.

8. The Convener summed up as follows:

- a) Good progress was being made with delivery of the National Park Plan and it was important not to lose sight of this alongside the need to address those elements of the Plan that were not making progress. It would be important to enthuse and excite partners about the Plan and its importance and relevance for all of us and its role in helping delivery of Scottish Government outcomes.
- b) Forums needed to be issue driven and not just meetings for the sake of it. There needed to be better linkages and more explicit feedback between the Advisory Forums and the Delivery Teams.
- c) Membership of such Forums was important and needed to contain the people that could influence those policies that were important to the National Park.

9. **The Board approved the recommendations of the paper as follows:**

- a) **The Board requested the CNP Strategy Group to collectively address the issues of delivery of outcomes for the remaining three years of this Park Plan;**
- b) **Agreed to change the format of Advisory Forums as proposed in the paper.**

Joint Working with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority (Paper 2)

10. David Cameron introduced the paper which considered outline proposals for future joint working between the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authorities. This area of work had been prompted by two separate developments. First, the Scottish Government's Strategic Review of National Parks had recommended closer working of the two National Park Authorities in respect of sharing services. Secondly, around a year ago Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority had requested support on Corporate Services as the new Chief Executive took up post in the absence of their own Head of Corporate Services. The approach to shared

services as set out in the paper was driven by the need to show benefit to both organisations, and would be underpinned with some form of partnership agreement.

11. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) While the Finance Committee was proposed as the forum for agreeing the partnership agreement, there was also a role for the Staffing and Recruitment Committee in keeping an oversight of any proposed changes on HR policies which would be central to any shared approach to employer arrangements, ensuring that these respected the different cultures of the two organisations. Equally the Audit Committee may have a role if there were any implications for governance.
- b) It was acknowledged that joint working and sharing of services would not be limited to working with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, and the CNPA was already in the process of working with other NDPBs on areas of mutual advantage. In the same way, when it came to pay and conditions it might be sensible rather than generate yet another set of terms and conditions for the two Park Authorities together, to see if it was possible to piggyback on the arrangements of an existing organisation.

12. **The Board agreed the recommendations of the papers as follows:**

- a) **Approved the outline plan of joint activity with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority (as summarised in Annex I to the paper);**
- b) **Approved the principles underpinning the joint working initiative:**
 - i. **Development in areas of policy or service provision where National Park Authorities can help each other to mutual advantage;**
 - ii. **Development of more robust services, better able to withstand fluctuations in workloads and staffing;**
 - iii. **Consistency in approach where this makes sense, with local variation whenever circumstances require;**
 - iv. **The joint development and agreement of policy in specific areas gives the potential to establish a louder voice on core National Park messages.**
 - v. **Each National Park must retain its own identity and culture;**
 - vi. **There are no plans for mergers of organisations or for integration into single service structures.**
- c) **Agreed that a Memorandum of Understanding, or some alternate form of partnership agreement, should be drawn up to underpin the agreed programme of activity and principles for joint working, and that the agreement of this document should be delegated to the Finance Committee.**

Delivery of the Scotland Rural Development Programme in the National Park – Update and Review (Paper 3)

13. Fiona Chalmers and Hamish Trench introduced the paper, supported by Zoe Taylor and Gordon McConachie. The paper updated the Board on the delivery of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) in the National Park to date and considered its effectiveness in contributing to delivery of the National Park Plan. As recorded in paper

I, the Park Plan's outcomes for ***Integrating Public Support for Land Management*** rely heavily on the operation of the SRDP in the National Park, and these outcomes were at considerable risk of not being delivered during the lifetime of the National Park Plan. The current paper (paper 3) proposed a number of options for improving delivery on which the Board's steer was sought.

14. Prior to a discussion on these proposals, a brief overview was given of the operation of the SRDP in the Cairngorms National Park. The work of the Cairngorms National Park Land Management Support Officers (LMSOs) was focused in three areas:
 - a) Raising awareness and promoting the SRDP. The two LMSOs had attended 34 events in total including the CNPA's own road shows. In addition a regular email update service on the SRDP in the National Park had been implemented.
 - b) Providing a support service for land managers. This comprised advice on what to do, how to go about an application, and how to navigate the complex SRDP website. Help was also provided in identifying options that would fit with the applicant's proposed project.
 - c) Targeting and encouraging applications that will help to deliver actions in the National Park Plan.

15. It was emphasised that the role of the LMSOs was quite different from that of agents and case officers. Agents (generally operating on a commercial basis) worked with the applicant to prepare and submit an application on their behalf. Case officers (drawn from SNH, SFC, or RPID) processed applications by scoring them and making recommendations.

16. The LMSOs had received contacts from 84 customers (46% of which were farmers). Of these, 25 went on to make applications to the Rural Priorities Section of SRDP. In the second year of the LMSOs the intention was to focus on three further areas of work: making contact with and advising farmers coming out of schemes such as ESAs and RSS; setting up farmer discussion groups; working with the Dee Catchment Project.

17. Looking at the Rural Priorities Schemes of the SRDP in the Cairngorms National Park, 71 applications had been made of which 58 had been successful in getting funding. Of these 58, the LMSOs had been involved with 24. The 58 successful applications had been split between the three RPACs as follows: 27 projects in Highland (just over £3million); 28 successful projects in Grampian (just over £1million); 3 successful projects in Tayside (£640,000). It was noted that the figures for Highland included one project worth around £1.8million. These 58 successful applications represented £4.86million coming into the Cairngorms National Park from the Rural Priorities section of the SRDP over the next few years. 45% of the projects were focused on biodiversity and 39% on forestry. The proportion of applications involving biodiversity was similar to that for the whole of Scotland.

18. The experience of the Cairngorms National Park LMSOs had flagged up three barriers to the SRDP effectiveness in the National Park:
 - a) Getting access to data from other organisations so that early contact could be made with land managers;
 - b) Anecdotal evidence that incentives being offered through SRDP were not sufficient to make the cost of applying worthwhile;
 - c) Lack of interest in SRDP.

19. In summary, there had been a degree of success in implementing the SRDP in the Cairngorms National Park with 1% of the Rural Priorities budget coming to the National Park. There was currently a review of the SRDP being undertaken and while there was some debate as to how fundamental a change could be made to the scheme prior to 2013, it seemed that the greatest chances of success lay in working within the existing scheme for the moment, while noting that there had to be a separate debate about the follow-on scheme in 2013. With this in mind the paper proposed three possible improvements in the interim to the existing SRDP, and a steer sought from the Board in how these could be taken forward. Further details were set out in the paper, but in brief the three proposals were:

- a) An enhanced case officer role: the mechanics would be for further discussion with partners;
- b) Discretionary funding to support management planning and feasibility studies (as a way of helping applicants overcome the cost involved in making a complex application);
- c) Ring-fenced or regionalised funding for RDC – RPs within the National Park.

20. In discussion the following points were made:

- a) It was suggested that one of the drawbacks of the current arrangements was that an applicant needed a big scheme in order to amass enough points to be successful. A number of farms currently leaving schemes such as the RSS and the ESA Scheme were simply too small to get into the SRDP Schemes. If this were the case then capping the amounts payable could be helpful. It was difficult to prove that this was the case as we did not have access to the complete data; those data that were published demonstrated that there were some smaller schemes being successful. What was clear was that because of the complexities of the application and approval process, an application was more likely to get sufficient points if the applicant had help – hence the idea of the enhanced case officer role.
- b) There were arguments both for and against capping and/or ring-fenced or regionalised funding. Clearly a small number of very big applications or big land holdings could use up a significant amount of a ring-fenced budget. There was no evidence one way or the other to suggest that big or small applications were inherently better or worse, and accordingly there was no proposal to focus our efforts on the basis of size.
- c) The observation was made that there was currently a real problem with a lack of agents to help prepare applications. An enhanced LMSO/case officer role to facilitate applications could therefore be very helpful. While it was noted that the LMSO role could be modified, it was also noted that the original intention had been quite deliberate in avoiding competing with private sector agents.
- d) The cost of making a relatively complex application was a big issue for many people and the proposal to support feasibility studies was very sensible.
- e) The data sharing issue was a longstanding one and needed to be sorted out soon. It was noted that the CNPA had joined forces with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA to argue our case with the Scottish Government. As a result RPID had agreed to enter into a data sharing agreement with both National Park Authorities.
- f) The observation was made that the success rate of applications in Grampian appeared to be much higher than in other areas. The suggestion was made that

this area benefited from a very sophisticated and extensive network of agents; there was simply a good supply of consultants to help with applications in this area.

- g) Comment was made on the lack of applications to SRDP from rural communities. While it was acknowledged that applications from communities probably got directed to LEADER funding, nevertheless there were potential benefits to be gained from rural communities linking up with land managers to make applications. There appeared to be no examples of this happening.
- h) If the first and second proposals were pursued successfully, it was noted that the third proposal (ring-fenced or regionalised funding) probably was not needed.
[Andrew Rafferty, Mary McCafferty departed the meeting]

- 21. Hamish Trench gave the meeting a brief update on the successful application by Rothiemurchus Estate. Rothiemurchus had been awarded an RDC Contract for sustainable forest management, involving a ten year programme of work focused on biodiversity management and access management. The contract was worth around £1.8million over ten years and was very welcome in securing long-term benefits for Rothiemurchus Forest and hence for the Cairngorms National Park. As a consequence, the interim agreement which the CNPA and partners had had with Rothiemurchus was superceded by this RDC Contract.
- 22. In conclusion it was noted that this paper was for discussion; Hamish Trench undertook to consider further the points which had been made in working up the proposals for further discussion with other partners. This work would focus particularly on the first and second proposals.

Election of Convener (Paper 4)
Cairngorms National Park Boundary Extension (Paper 5)
Corporate Plan Monitoring (Paper 6)

23. The above papers were all for information only, and were noted without further discussion.

AOCB

24. The Convener reminded everyone that the Royal Highland Show would be taking place as usual on Thursday 25th to Sunday 28th June. The CNPA was committed to a presence on the SEARS stand; Board Members were requested to indicate what days they could support.

25. The Convener noted that the policy on attendance at shows for the current year would be as agreed previously, notably that in addition to the Royal Highland Show, the CNPA would take a fully staffed tent at Grantown and Braemar. As far as other shows around the Park were concerned, Board Members were asked to consider if they wished to take a lead role in promoting the National Park at their local shows and if so to discuss further with the Communications Team. There may be opportunities to join forces with Partners, and take a corner of an existing tent. There were resource implications of attending shows throughout the summer.

26. The Convener reported briefly on some of his activities undertaken to raise the profile of the Cairngorms National Park including: visiting Glen Tanar; attending the RDDMO Board Meeting; meeting Commissioner Boel at which he had floated the idea of an agri-environment scheme for the Cairngorms National Park and received an interested hearing; hosted a visit from the Minister for the Environment at the Department for the Environment Northern Ireland, Sammy Wilson (including a visit to Alastair MacLennan's farm); opened the Burnie Path in Anogach Woods; met the new Minister, Roseanna Cunningham, at the Wildcat Project Launch at Kincaig, and the opening of the Gynack Bridge; attended the laying of the bricks ceremony for the building of the new school in Aviemore.

27. The Deputy Convener, Eric Baird, reported on his attendance at a meeting about community path leaflets; had attended the Ballater Bleather at which he noted a positive response towards the National Park; attended a public meeting about Biological Records Collection; and participated in a visit by an Icelandic group interested in how the Cairngorms National Park dealt with its economic, environmental and social aims.

28. Dave Fallows reported on his attendance at an SCDI (Scottish Council for Development and Industry) lunch at Inverness about overseas trade; his participation in the visit by Sammy Wilson from Northern Ireland; participation in a Tourism Workshop in Edinburgh hosted by Jim Mather, and at which Dave had managed to make a number of points about the role of the National Park in tourism; attended the opening of the Gynack Bridge.

29. Willie McKenna reported on his attendance at a meeting in Aviemore concerning the new recreation park. Sue Walker reported on a DCS site visit to Glenfeshie and noted that this was now a huge success story with the quality of the landscape and natural

heritage vastly improved as a result of the disciplined approach to management of the area over the past ten years. Geva Blackett reported on her attendance at the Ballater Bleather meeting.

30. Eleanor Mackintosh reported on the Finance Committee which had been held earlier in the day and noted that the Annual Accounts appeared to be concluding within £16,000 of the 2008/09 budget. The final Accounts would come to the Audit Committee for sign off on the 26th June.

Date of Next Meeting

31. Friday 10th July 2009 in the Village Hall, Braemar.