

Our National Park Boards' sense of purpose

Description



Extract from Glasgow Airport magazine, High Flyer, September 2017. Often the LLTNPA appears to be more a tourist agency – we have Visit Scotland to do that – than National Park, with a marketing team to match. Yes, Loch Lomond is very close to Glasgow airport, but can you get there easily by public transport? Yes, the National Park is great for camping – but why not mention the camping ban then?

Looking at the papers for the Cairngorms National Park Board meeting which took place last Friday ([see here](#)), I was struck by the significant differences between the way it and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority operate.

While many (mostly retiring?) members of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority have lost sight of what they might contribute to the National Park ([see here](#)), Cairngorms National Park Authority Board Members are involved in a large number of initiatives. Here is an extract on current CNPA involvement in Groups (27 in all):

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	Group/Committee	Current Representative
		Gordon Ridd Dave Fallows Chair of Finance
8	Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS)	Janet Hunter
9	Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group	Judith Webb
10	Active Cairngorms Delivery Partnership	Rebecca Badger
11	Cairngorms Tourism Partnership	Paul Easton
12	Cairngorm and Glenmore Partnership	Willie McKenna
13	Cairngorm LEADER Action Group (CLAG) Trust	Brian Wood
14	Highland Community Planning Partnership	Peter Argyle (Convenor)
15	National Parks UK	Peter Argyle
16	Farmer & Land Management	Eleanor Mackenzie

While attending meetings and events of course does not necessarily make Board Members effective – and the CNPA has in my view always struggled to engage with recreational interests – this wide network of groups does influence how the Cairngorms National Park operates. The CNPA has a raft of strategies and plans compared to the LLTNPA and there are direct links between these groups, the existence of strategies and the National Park Partnership Plan.

For example, the Cairngorms Economic Forum (one of the Group above) links to the Cairngorms Economic Strategy 2015-18 and the fact that the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan considers economic issues, include low pay in the National Park. While they are far from developing an alternative economic strategy, based on sustainable development and use (should that be re-use?) of natural resources, they do have a framework for considering the issues. There is no equivalent in the LLTNPA. As a consequence their draft National Park Partnership plan is much weaker on these issues and is little more than a set of aspirations (which its very hard for anyone to disagree with) without content.

While some networking does go on on the LLTNPA – you can see that locally elected members and councillors do attend community council meetings from the minutes of those meetings – what their Board Members are involved in is very difficult to ascertain as there is no public network of groups as with the CNPA. Indeed groups which used to exist, like the east Loch Lomond and 5 Lochs Visitor Management Groups appear effectively to have been shut down. Moreover, the public have no easy way to contact LLTNPA members, whereas go to the section of the CNPA website on Board Members, click on their name and there is an email. So, if you are interested in social inclusion or Broadband in the Cairngorms National Park, you can work out who best to speak to and contact them. I would suggest that is worth a lot.

The differences go further. The CNPA has a Planning Committee, on which all Board Members sit, and an Audit and Risk Committee but it also has a Finance and Delivery and Staffing and Delivery Committees. ALL meet in public. Contrast this with what the LLTNPA say on their website:

“By law, we have two committees that are required to meet:

- *Our [Planning & Access Committee](#) meets monthly to consider certain planning applications, enforcement actions, policy papers, legal agreements and access matters.*
- *And our [Audit Committee](#) meets up to four times a year to support the Accountable Officer (our CEO) in their responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance and associated assurance through a process of constructive challenge.”*

The LLTNPA operate with the minimum number of Committees possible, just as they publish the minimum amount of information they are legally obliged to (two years).

The LLTNPA model has, I believe, been based on neo-liberal corporate ideology that the best way to run organisations is by slimline management, which in effect means small groups of people endorsing decisions taken by the leader. The few know best and Park structures have been designed to prevent anything getting in the way of centralised decision-making. No wonder their Board Members no longer saw a role for themselves and proposed their own abolition.

Thankfully there are signs of change at the LLTNPA. Their new convener appears to be a genuine team player, more like the captain than the manager, and the Chair of the Park’s Delivery Group, Colin Bayes, has been trying to make more public what that group does. The logical next step is to create a finance and delivery committee which, like the CNPA, meets in public. Having a staffing committee also says something about the preparedness of an organisation to be open – for staff should be the most important resource our National Parks have.

The two National Park Boards have arranged to meet in November – its been an action point for the LLTNPA for over two years – and I think that provides an ideal opportunity for LLTNPA members to rediscover a role for themselves.

Structures are only the start

The species for which the Park is most important are in better conservation status	Active conservation for LBAP priority species	T C a
	Estates participating in Wildlife Estates Initiative	7

Extract from report on last CNPA National Park Partnership Plan progress

Networking, listening, being more open is however only a start. Having discovered a role for

themselves, Board Members need to help ensure our National Parks deliver far more than they do at present and where things are not working to help change direction and come up with new solutions. The above extract illustrates the challenges facing the CNPA. The Wildlife Estates Initiative was dominated by landowners and hunting interests and was supposed to show how the National Park would work in partnership with estates to promote wildlife in the National Park (and reduce wildlife persecution). What the extract above shows is that even this weak initiative has failed and it provides strong evidence that the voluntary measures to promote wildlife in the new National Park Partnership Plan won't work either. The landed estates basically don't care how they appear to the public. The challenge for CNPA Board Members is to start to assert the right of the National Park to take action on these issues where voluntary measures have failed.

Ironically, the LLTNPA did take firm action in one area – the camping byelaws – though I think it is significant that this is the ONLY area of work where it has been prepared to stick its neck out. The problem has been that the LLTNPA focussed on the wrong issue – camping management rather than visitor management – and has bulldozed through the wrong solution with disastrous consequences. I am in favour of our National Park Boards taking a stronger line but, just like when landowners fail to co-operate, they also need to recognise when they have got it wrong. Its these type of issues where public debate should be promoted by our National Park Boards, rather than the manipulated Your Park consultation on the byelaws or the relative silence of the CNPA on fundamental issues of land-use such as whether grouse moor management is compatible with the aims of the National Park. Neither of our National Parks have been very good at leading such debates to date.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs
3. National Parks

Tags

1. CNPA
2. Governance
3. LLTNPA
4. secrecy

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