

Another look at the Loch Lomond & Trossachs Board Meeting Thursday 24th October

Description



The venue for the Board Meeting was Kinlochard Village Hall. Photo credit Kinlochard Village Hall website.

[Ed note: for earlier post on this meeting ([see here](#))]

Under the Convenership of James Stuart it has become a feature of Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority Board Meetings that they are held in venues other than Park Headquarters â?? Callander Youth Project; Brig O Turk Village Hall; Balmaha Visitor Centre and most recently at Kinlochard Village Hall. These venues are often remote and only accessible via narrow, winding, hilly roads. One can only assume this is intended to discourage the regular attendees at Board meetings, namely Nick Kempe, Peter Jack and myself. Having said that, Peter and I were warmly welcomed by several Board Members who came to chat with us at our vehicle in the car park and also by a few NPA staff inside the hall. That gesture was much appreciated. It was also the only warmth we experienced there that day.

At the Board meeting held in Balmaha Visitor Centre, that of the Musical Chairs episode ([see here](#)) one Board member questioned the validity of using these venues. She was notable by her absence at Kinlochard!

A wise move on her part because the hall had no heating and was absolutely freezing. Such was the low temperature that between each Agenda Item there was a mass exodus by Board Members and NPA Staff to visit the â??facilitiesâ??. At least they had access to warming beverages of tea or coffee, unlike the three attendees mentioned above. So, a word of advice to any other member of the public attending any NPA Meetings like the aforementioned â?? take a flask of hot tea or coffee and a hot water bottle with you!!

Item 6 (Youth Committee) on the Agenda became Item 5. The youngsters spoke very eloquently under the tutelage of Charlotte Wallace (NPA). During the Q&A session Board Members and NPA staff were vociferous in their appeals to the youngsters to “hold public bodies to account” and “call the Board out”. Good luck to them. I hope they have more success than others who have tried and generally failed.

Throughout the whole meeting there were constant references to the importance of Consultations and Stakeholder engagement. I’m not sure if this was intended to impress the Speakers from the Government quango (Jo O’Hara CEO of Scottish Forestry and Scotland’s Chief Forester accompanied by Tom Davies). One only has to look at the NPA record of “consultations” and Stakeholder Groups. Several acquaintances have been involved and whilst they are listened to politely their ideas/views are subsequently ignored. A good example was the “Your Park” consultation on the camping byelaws.



Clearfell forestry, by Kinlochard, 24th October with unlawful signs “the “do not proceed” sign should be removed when work is not taking place. Forestry practices are little different in the National Park than anywhere else in Scotland. Photo Credit Nick Kempe.

The responses to the consultation on the Tree and Woodland Strategy were varied and interesting. Having read the Document I, like many others, was aware that there was no strategy. One dictionary gave the definition of a strategy as :- a plan of action to achieve a long term or overall aim and the Cambridge dictionary says it is "a detailed plan for achieving success". I came to the conclusion that the title was a misnomer. In my view it is a Vision. I was astounded to hear Simon Jones (Director of Conservation and Visitor Operations) say that the Tree and Woodland Strategy document "deliberately didn't give detail of how to achieve it".

I am no mathematician but Agenda Item 9 "Management Accounts June 2019" left me a bit perplexed with indications of serious problems but the total not apparently adding up.

Agenda Item 9 Management Accounts June 2019

1. Purpose 1.1. To present the management accounts for the 3 months ended 30 June 2019 (N.B almost irrelevant 4 months later).

2. Recommendations

2.1. To note the management accounts for the quarter and the areas of risk highlighted. The budget will be revised at the end of quarter 2, [which finished almost four weeks prior to the meeting] with a view to reflecting the updated forecast position and eliminating the budget deficit of £65k

3. Summary 3.1. The main areas to note are as follows: "Although operating income is broadly tracking budget, it is likely that income targets for the full year will not be achievable. These are being analysed and any necessary downward adjustments are being made as part of the Q2 budget review. The salary savings target of £200k is achievable, with £80k having been realised at the end of June as a result of vacant positions. Project expenditure was low at the end of June.

4. Operating and Project Analysis 4.1. Although income was £60k above the year to date budget as at the end of June, there are risks in relation to achieving the full year targets in certain categories, notably car park income and toilet income.

At this point Councillor Ellen Morton started to ask a question but was quickly interrupted by the Convener James Stuart saying that this was for the "CONFIDENTIAL" part of the meeting. On the agenda were Items 12. Confidential Minutes of Meeting held on 17th June 2019 and 13. Confidential Matters Arising of Meeting held on 17th June 2019).

4.2. Salary costs were £98k under budget at the end of the quarter and the budget has £40k year to date savings factored into the profile, therefore the savings target is on track.

4.3. Operating spend was in line with the year to date budget at £591k against a budget of £583k. There are some variances across categories.

4.4. Net project expenditure totalled £15k at the end of June, which is in line with profile [this is a tiny amount]. However, the spending plans are reviewed as part of the Q2 budget revision.

Repeatedly at Board meetings we are informed that the Finance team will "have to work hard to balance the books. The word "challenging" is one of their favourite words! Then:

5. Balance Sheet 5.1. There was Â£1.73m of cash in the bank at 30 June 2019 which included Â£813k of ringfenced funds in relation to the development at Cononish.

By my reckoning Â£1,730,000 - Â£813,000 = Â£937,000 cash in hand at the end of Quarter 2!!

Interesting times financially at LL&TNPA Headquarters. If the financial situation is as bad as claimed, this begs the question as to why funds were spent needlessly transporting Board Members, Staff and Youth Committee all the way to Kinlochard??

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs
2. Uncategorized

Tags

1. Forestry Commission Scotland
2. Governance
3. LLTNPA

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