



For Discussion

Title: National Park Partnership Plan Annual Update

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Purpose

This paper summarises the monitoring framework for the National Park Partnership Plan and identifies some of the key areas where indicators show progress or where officers expect progress to be demonstrated in future after the first year of delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Note the progress summarised in the paper and associated Annex 1

Strategic context

1. The [National Park Partnership Plan](#) identifies the long term objectives for the National Park that will support the delivery of the three long term outcomes for 2045 under the sections of Nature, People and Place. Each long term objective has an indicator identified to help assess progress to the long term objectives and outcomes. This paper summarises the data available for the indicators by August 2023, after one year of delivery current National Park Partnership Plan and identifies the areas of significant progress or of significant challenge.
2. The indicators are made up of range of data, some of which is collected annually or more frequently, some of which is only reviewed every few years, and some of which requires new work to identify in future. They are intended to be most effective over the full life of the National Park Partnership Plan and in showing progress or identifying problems towards the outcomes for 2045. Some are effective indicators at this early point in the delivery of the Partnership Plan. Others require more time to be effective so can be supplemented with other data or examples of work.



Strategic policy consideration

3. Delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan is at the core of the Board's role and this annual report provides a milestone from which to assess progress and identify any areas where change is required and will supplement other reports on work given through the regular CEO updates to Board. At only one year of delivery this report does not identify any areas of significant concern, but the monitoring framework summarised here is one of the tools used to identify any and to support the Board's strategic overview.

Implications

4. There are no significant new implications in terms of delivery, strategic policy or resources at this point in time.

Summary of progress to August 2023

5. The following three sections summarise progress under the Nature, People and Place themes in the first year of delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan.

Nature

6. The long-term outcome for Nature is: a carbon negative and biodiversity rich National park with better functioning, better connected and more resilient ecosystems.
7. At the first year of delivery of long term and landscape-scale actions that will help reach the long-term outcome and objectives for Nature, here has been steady progress in building on past partnerships and establishing new work. Peatland restoration projects, which have been scaling-up earlier years reached more than 1000ha restored between 2022 and 2023, accelerating at the rate needed to meet the 2045 target of 35000ha. The only target within the Nature theme that can be flagged as a slight concern was under woodland expansion, where 402ha of new woodland were created. That reflects a Scotland-wide drop in new woodland creation during the year but is expected to increase during 2023-2024 as woodland creation schemes that are being prepared gain approval.
8. Highlights under the Nature theme over the past year include:



- a) Established the timeline for the Cairngorms National Park to be net zero and target for becoming carbon negative. [Report finds Cairngorms National Park could reach net zero well ahead of target - Cairngorms National Park Authority;](#)
- b) 1080ha peatland brought under restoration between 2022 and 2023, exceeding the rate needed to meet 2035 target;
- c) Rare species reinforcement programmes underway for Scottish wildcat, pine hoverfly and dark bordered beauty moth [Historic milestone reached as first ever release of rare moth takes place in the Cairngorms National Park to boost threatened species | RZSS;](#)
- d) Cairngorms Beaver reintroduction project started [Beavers - Cairngorms National Park Authority;](#)
- e) Commissioned work to produce methodology for gamebird release data for National Park from 2023;
- f) Cairngorms 2030 low carbon farming pilot projects established. [Carbon audits and farm business reviews to go ahead in Cairngorms - FarmingUK News;](#)
- g) The freshwater model for the Cairngorms Nature Index has been developed and is being reviewed by an expert advisory group;
- h) Spey Catchment Initiative has become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation with increased capacity and organisational resilience to deliver landscape-scale projects;
- i) River Dee Trust has continued to deliver practical habitat improvement projects at a landscape scale in the upper Dee catchment. [Woodland restoration project makes progress with over 100,000 trees planted | River Dee.](#)
- j) Green finance trial established at Delnadamph demonstrating that a combination of public and private investment can secure peatland restoration and deliver 10% of the profits for community benefit.

People

- 9. The long term outcome for People is: a wellbeing economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms.
- 10. There has been good progress under the people theme, with the establishment of the Green Health Referrals and doubling of the Volunteer Cairngorms participants milestones in work. The work to develop hospitality training for young people on Deeside in partnership with schools and business has potential to create a model that could be applied elsewhere and support the local labour market, economy and help young people develop skills. Work to develop a Wellbeing Economy Action Plan has been slower than anticipated, partly because of Cairngorms National Park



Authority staff time supporting the Cairngorms 2030 Heritage Lottery Fund bid and an expectation that the development of cornerstone indicators for a wellbeing economy would provide further insights into what a wellbeing economy action plan might focus on. In reality that work has reinforced our view that the National Park Partnership Plan provides a sound framework for a wellbeing economy in the National Park and developing the Wellbeing Economy Action Plan will be a focus the remainder of 2023.

- a) Development of cornerstone indicators for a wellbeing economy in the National Park;
- b) Development of hospitality training with schools in Upper Deeside and Badenoch;
- c) [Countryside Learning Scotland](#) are planning for a large rural / green skills event in September 2024 with training providers, employers, schools and further/higher education providers and training / job seekers;
- d) Establishment of the Green Health Referrals in the National Park and growth in number of Health Walks;
- e) Cairngorms Youth LAG and Youth Action Team hosted a climate change summer camp at Badaguish in August 2023;
- f) Volunteer Cairngorms participants doubled from 2022 to 2023 (30 to 64);
- g) The National Park hosted two visits by groups from Black Scottish Adventurers group [Black Scottish Adventurers – This is Living!](#), each with more than 90 participants, building awareness of and confidence in opportunities to visit and enjoy the Park.
- h) National Park Ranger Service increased patrolling during spring and summer months at key visitor locations, including with police in Glenmore and supported the [Lek it Be](#) campaign with capercaillie lek patrols during the spring.

Place

- 11. The long term outcome for Place is: a place that people want to live in, work in and visit that works for all.
- 12. Over the past year, a number of affordable housing developments have been completed or are in development following planning consents in earlier years. Highland Council's affordable housing delivery programme continues to deliver on the ground and Highland Housing Alliance have created midmarket rent properties in Aviemore and Kinraig in partnership with the Cairngorms Business partnership. Tomintoul and Glenlivet development Trust's affordable housing project in Tomintoul was completed in early 2023 and occupied soon after. Investment in visitor and access infrastructure continued and the opening of the new Beinn a' Ghlo carpark



and refreshment of the main Cairngorm Mountain car park at Coire Cas will be used by many people. The Speyside way was upgraded through Anagach Woods near Grantown-on-Spey, significantly increasing accessibility for many people in Grantown and improving the long distance route.

13. Highlights under the Place theme over the past year include:

- a) Early work on preparation of the next Local Development Plan for Cairngorms National Park with publication of [Development Plan Scheme \(cairngorms.co.uk\)](https://www.cairngorms.co.uk/development-plan-scheme) and initial engagement started [Have Your Say Today - Cairngorms Local Development Plan - Commonplace](#);
- b) Highland Council's affordable housing delivery programme continues on sites at project in Kingussie, Kincaig, Carrbridge & Dulnain Bridge;
- c) Cairngorms Business Partnership project with Highland Housing Alliance to rent-guarantee mid-market rent properties has expanded from Aviemore to Kincaig. [First homes dedicated to local business workers in Badenoch and Strathspey to be launched \(strathspey-herald.co.uk\)](https://www.strathspey-herald.co.uk/first-homes-dedicated-to-local-business-workers-in-badenoch-and-strathspey-to-be-launched);
- d) Tomintoul and Glenlivet Development Trust's community housing site at Tomintoul was completed [Tomintoul-poster-4.pdf \(tgdt.org.uk\)](https://www.tgdt.org.uk/tomintoul-poster-4.pdf);
- e) Cairngorms National Park Sustainable Tourism Action Plan was approved by the Cairngorms National Park Authority board and the National Park has reapplied for European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and expects to be re-accredited late 2023;
- f) The STEAM Tourism Economic Activity Monitor data for 2022 shows visitor numbers were down 16% on pre-pandemic levels but economic impact of visitors had increased by 2% overall.
- g) Cairngorms 2030 projects identifying active travel improvement projects within communities and between communities across National Park and exploring public transport improvements with transport authorities;
- h) New Beinn a' Ghlo car park opened [Outdoor Access Trust For Scotland | New Beinn a' Ghlo trailhead car park gives back to the mountains](#) near Blair Atholl to reduce car parking pressures and support path maintenance;
- i) New and upgraded paths completed the Anagach Woods as part of Speyside Way [Upgrading of Speyside Way at Grantown-on-Spey gets underway! - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#) and in Kincaig;
- j) Cateran Ecomuseum were awarded Heritage Lottery Fund money to support their museum of rapid transition project [Help Us Deliver The Next Phase Of Our Museum Of Rapid Transition programme - Cateran Ecomuseum](#).



Next steps

14. In a practical sense, all partners will continue to deliver their work and coordinate their work through the relevant partnerships or operational structures. Monitoring of the plan and collation of data to assess progress will continue as part of that.
15. Communicating progress and change more widely plays an important role in building support and understanding of the work within local communities and wider audiences. The monitoring information reported here will be added to the National Park Partnership Plan microsite ([Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan – Where people and nature thrive together](#)) in a simple and accessible way and will be supplemented with case study examples that can illustrate progress. That content will then be used to support the Park Authority's wider communications channels, targeting news and information to the right audiences in the most effective ways.