
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: CEO REPORT AND CONVENER UPDATE

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Purpose

1. To highlight to Board Members the main strategic areas of work that are being directed by Management Team. These are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver with partners the aspirations of the National Park Partnership Plan.

Conservation

2. **Cairngorms Nature:** Current Nature Recovery Fund projects totaling £196,000 of investment are on track for delivery this financial year. In light of Scottish Government's recent announcement for a further £55 million Nature Restoration Fund over the next 5 years, CNPA is working closely with Cairngorms Nature partners to identify and develop projects for future rounds of funding. These will be based on the priorities and actions in the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan.
3. **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project:** Communities of interest and place are at various stages of developing and delivering their own Capercaillie action plans. These include a strategic plan for mountain biking in Badenoch and Strathspey, an action plan for businesses, an online survey for Deeside residents and visitors and a report on the findings from visitor research in Glenmore and Abernethy.
4. The Genetic diversity research report will be published in May 2022. The current focus for communications is on ensuring the scope of the project is clearly communicated in the context of wider work for Capercaillie. The NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee sub group report is expected early 2022.
5. **Woodland Creation:** Previously reported proposals for woodland expansion at Muckrach, Kinrara, Glen Tromie and Mar Lodge continue to be worked up and/or progressed. We have been consulted about a native woodland creation proposal at Ralia, which is still at an early stage. We have also been informed that there is interest in native woodland creation on the Ben Alder estate.
6. **Peatland Restoration:** The progress of Peatland Action was reported in detail to the Performance Committee in October. The programme is on course to deliver slightly more than the targeted 557ha of peatland restoration management for 2021

subject to weather and contractor constraints. Contractor capacity remains the biggest risk to targets but is being tackled by a new entrant scheme and the development of a contractor framework agreement.

7. **Moorland Management:** Nature Scot are taking forward plans to develop a licensing system for grouse moor management and for muirburn. They are taking a holistic approach to licensing and are developing new licences in the context of climate change and biodiversity crises. A programme board has been set up to oversee development and CNPA are represented on that board.
8. **Deer Management:** Working with South Deeside and North Angus DMG, South Grampian DMG and West Grampian DMG to complete the development phase of Strategic Land Management Plans by March 2023 following procedures set down by NLHF. NatureScot plan a helicopter count across East Grampian area (SDNA DMG, SGDMG) sometime between Jan-March 2022.

Visitor Experience

9. **Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum:** met on 10 November. The key agenda items discussed were; NPPP4 consultation, RSPB Abernethy Visitor Management Plan, Nature Scotland time limited waterborne access restrictions at Loch Kinord, and Network Rail closure of the 'pedestrian crossing' at Dalwhinnie. NatureScot will return to CLOAF in Feb to agree summer 2022 access criteria at Loch Kinord. CLOAF are contacting Network Rail to reiterate the need for a safe crossing to be found quickly & offer support in agreeing the most effective and safe crossing. CLOAF were also updated on the work across CNP managing for visitors.
10. **Tread Lightly in the Park:** After more than a decade of CNPA using 'Tread Lightly' to encourage responsible outdoor access it is pleasing to see it being used nationally by Visit Scotland; [Step forward and tread lightly. Scotland is Calling. - YouTube](#) A new mobile phone app has been developed to share the community path information, and leaflets are being redesigned for Kingussie, Aviemore, Grantown and Braemar, with a brand new leaflet for Kincaig. These will be printed & ready for spring 2022.
11. **Long Distance Routes:** Work continues on upgrading sections of the **Speyside Way** between Kincaig and Kingussie that were not part of the 'new build'. Design for realignment in Anagach Woods, Grantown-on-Spey, and Kincaig, are being submitted for Improving Public Access funding. Moray Council is currently managing an upgrade to the Speyside Way from Carron to Cragganmore to make it more suitable for cyclists, walkers and horse riders. A six mile upgrade from Craigellachie to Carron was completed in the autumn of 2019. Formal opening of the extension in Cairngorms is scheduled for March 2022. Planning consent for a potential extension to **Deeside Way** (Invercauld to Braemar) has been extended until September 2022 and CNPA are in discussion with partners over funding to start construction in spring 2022. Sustrans are at the start of reviewing the national cycle network looking at possible improvements to **NCN7** and **NCN195** (Deeside Way) in Cairngorms. Transport Scotland have set out the preferred route for the Non-Motorized User path (**NMU**) from Aviemore to Carrbridge. Dulnain Bridge Community Development Trust has

submitted an application to Sustrans to fund a NMU route alongside **A95** from Grantown to Dulnain Bridge that links with the new distillery and has their support.

12. **Volunteering and Health Walks:** Just over half the **volunteer rangers** are now regularly involved, giving over 1000 hours this year. In addition to continuing to support partner and CNPA Rangers they have begun trialling the patrol of community routes including on the Speyside Way between Boat of Garten and Aviemore. We have supported over 20 opportunities for members of the public to volunteer with ourselves or partners and have seen significantly higher rates of sign-up compared to pre-pandemic, reflected in the growing Volunteer Cairngorms mailing list of almost 800 subscribers. Heath Walks continue to support 12 groups meeting weekly around the National Park following COVID safe protocols. Eleven individuals (inc four rangers) recently participated in Walk Leader training. Wee Walks Week in October promoted short, local walks and the benefits of walking for physical and mental health with social media engagement reaching 80,153 accounts and with the Ranger videos were the most popular form of content from the week.
13. **Education and Learning and Inclusion:** The **Cairngorms Youth Action Team** continue to be involved in a number of online events. A consultant has been engaged to work with CYAT to develop and deliver a youth led grant scheme in partnership with Cairngorms Trust, funding has come through the Scottish Government. This project will run from November 2021 to March 2022. **John Muir Award** activity is slowly beginning to return to pre Covid levels but still considerably lower than previous years. **Junior Ranger** taster events are being organised for over the winter months to begin to re-establish the programme. The secondary schools have been contacted with a view to getting involved in the programme in the summer of 2022. Some 113 people enjoyed the activities laid on by Cairngorms Ranger Services and other partners at the **Outdoor Festival for All** at Glenmore on 30th October. Participants were new Scots recently arrived to Aberdeen and Dundee. The event was part of the ongoing 'Our Natural Heritage Project' run by **Backbone** funded by CNPA and NatureScot.

Rural Development

14. **Planning Guidance:** The consultation period on planning guidance covering Design and Placemaking, Developer Obligations and Housing closed on 19 November. There were relatively few formal responses to the consultations but a number of discussions with partners, individuals and through the Developers Forum. The responses are now being analysed and a staff expect to bring a formal report on changes to the guidance on Design and Placemaking and Developer Obligations to the Planning Committee in January 2022. The Housing supplementary guidance will require more substantial change and we expect to have an informal discussion with the Planning Committee on potential changes in January.
15. **Planning Casework:** The Planning Committee approved a range of small scale developments in September and November, including affordable housing in Boat of Garten and Kingussie. The Planning Committee will be asked to determine applications for improved visitor facilities at the Highland Wildlife Park, rural business units near Braemar and small-scale visitor accommodation in Glen Tromie.

16. **Community-led Housing Delivery:** CNPA gave presentation at the Housing Summit hosted by Cairngorms Business Partnership in Aviemore on 22 Nov, attended by Kate Forbes MSP and Shona Robison MSP (Cab Sec. for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government). Recent business survey has shown that 68% of businesses indicated that a lack of affordable housing inhibited their ability to recruit; 39% indicated it was having a major impact; over half of the businesses (59%) expected the issues to worsen if no action was taken. There are currently 180 vacancies in Badenoch and Strathspey listed on relevant website and around 50 of these will not be filled due to a shortage of suitable homes. Plans are being developed for establishment of a trust to encourage business collaboration on delivery of housing for local workers. The Communities Housing Trust (CHT) have been commissioned to develop a site agnostic development proposal that delivers c.80 homes that range from transient worker accommodation through to homes to rent and self-build plots where the target rate for homes that are held for local people in perpetuity is 80%.
17. **Economic Action Plan:** The Economic Steering Group met in November to discuss the NP Partnership Plan and development staff from Skills Development Scotland led excellent discussion on skills and training challenges and the opportunities from the Plan. This has led to developmental work on tourism hospitality training and coordination the work undertaken by local authorities across the Park on skills issues. New project officer from Countryside Learning Scotland, Bryony Dowson, is now in post and developing links between schools and estates. Work being undertaken by Growbiz on developing a rurally focused approach to enterprise support has been extended. Rural Development Officer Tania Alliod continues to work with the Highland Good Food Partnership and develop economic opportunities across the Park.
18. **Tourism Action Plan:** The Cairngorms Response Group has continued to meet around monthly and full meeting of Tourism Partnership is planned in January. As part of COP26, CNPA and the Cairngorms Business Partnership became signatories and launch partners of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism and participated in and our role as sustainable destination was highlighted through participation in international panel on “Catalysing a Decade of Climate Action in Global Travel and Tourism”. New market research has been commissioned with CBP which will be built into development of the next Tourism Action Plan.
19. **Tourism and Business Data:** CNPA commission annual analysis of visitor numbers and the economic value of tourism to the Cairngorms through a STEAM report. We now have data available for 2020 which shows a 73% drop in visitor numbers when compared with 2019 figures, though we consider that the methodology used has under-estimated the number of post-lockdown visitors to key countryside locations, so will treat the data with a degree of caution. More positively, Q3 of the Cairngorms Business Barometer has recently been published showing business confidence rebounding to higher levels than the long term average. Accommodation occupancy levels were also higher than the long-term average, though concerns remain around staff availability and supplier costs.

20. **Badenoch Great Place Project:** The partnership Project has now formally finished with very positive final evaluation report and comments by major funding partner National Heritage Lottery Fund. A paper with lessons learnt been discussed with CNPA Performance Committee. Legacy Plan is in place and Legacy Board is meeting in early December. As part of that work, VisitScotland recently promoted excellent piece on the area in National Geographic Magazine:
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/paid-content-scotlands-storylands-explore-the-living-landscapes-of-badenoch>

Stakeholder Engagement

21. **COP26:** CNPA staff were present for a variety of events across the two weeks. Park staff engaged with hundreds of delegates as part of an Environment and Economies Leaders' Group stand, which was located right outside the main plenary rooms (where the main discussions were taking place). The Chief Executive was invited to deliver a speech on the impacts of climate change on snow levels in the Park at the Cryosphere Pavilion, and also took part in a panel event with other UK National Parks, showcasing our Net Zero with Nature work with Palladium. The Director of Planning and Rural Development participated in a VisitScotland event about Climate Change and Tourism, and Janet Hunter attended their 'Destination Net Zero' event in her role as Chair of the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership. CNPA signed up to the Glasgow Declaration (an offshoot of the Tourism Declares initiative) as part of these activities.
22. **National Park Partnership Plan:** The formal phase of the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan consultation launched on Thursday 23 September, with the draft plan made available via a dedicated [Commonplace website](#), [long-format pdf](#), print and [screen reader-friendly](#) versions. At the time of writing, nearly 800 responses had been received through the Commonplace platform alone.
23. The plan has been promoted extensively both on and offline over the past few months, with dedicated press releases and videos created, including a partnership with the Press and Journal and Inverness Courier, and paid advertising in the Deeside and Donside Piper, Strathspey Herald and the Dundee Courier. This was accompanied by a paid social media advertising campaign, targeting a range of audiences including local residents, workers and visitors to the Park.
24. A [toolkit](#) with resources for e-newsletters, social media and print publications was circulated to hundreds of partner organisations, posters and flyers were distributed to communities and businesses across the Park, and a leaflet was sent to every household in the area, explaining how people could get involved. Face to face sessions have been delivered with specific community groups, schools, farmers and other land managers, local businesses and so on, with a series of 1:1 interviews taking place with harder to reach audiences (including ethnic minority groups and audiences with accessibility needs). These activities will continue until the consultation closes on Friday 17 December.

Communications

25. **Active Cairngorms:** Wee Walks Week took place from 25 – 31 October to celebrate the best short walks in the Cairngorms National Park, encouraging as many people as possible to get out there and enjoy a walk with family, friends and colleagues. Alongside press and social media activity, we also launched our new [community paths and trails online resource](#), which has seen over 100 short walks digitised and made available to search online for free. The plan is to gather audience feedback on this resource and add additional trails and routes to it over time.
26. **Cairngorms Nature:** In collaboration with RZSS, RSPB and FLS, we promoted the news that 3,000 larvae of the critically endangered [pine hoverfly were released](#) in three carefully chosen forests across the Park. The story was widely covered in outlets ranging from the BBC to the P&J. We also marked the start of COP26 with two stories on peatland restoration in the Park – one [introducing the brand new peatland team](#), the second majoring on our plans to [unlock contractor capacity](#) to deliver the scale of work required.
27. **Corporate communications:** Stakeholder engagement comms surrounding the Park Plan have dominated our comms activity over the past few months, with specifics covered in section 22 above. In addition to this, we showcased US Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland’s visit to Muir of Dinnet in November, and highlighted connections between activity at COP26 and work going on in the Park, including Heritage Horizons and NPPP4. Over the past 12 months we have also produced 59 posts across three separate social media channels celebrating Gaelic language and culture, with a recent focus on shinty and waterbodies in the Park.
28. **Website and social media:** An audit of the Park’s website has been conducted by web accessibility experts DAC over the past month or so, including direct feedback from users. We plan to work through the various actions identified in the report with our web developers over the coming months, and findings will influence the development of a new CNP website over the next 12-18 months, too.

Organisational Development

29. **Business Continuity Planning (BCP):** Following extensive consultation with management and staff, and taking into account the experiences, impacts and lessons learnt over the past 18 months of home working, we are moving towards a trial “hybrid” working approach, whereby staff may work 50% of their contractual hours from home and 50% from the office by agreement with line managers. Staff wishing to work more than 50% from home will have to apply formally. Aligned with this approach, the office has been reconfigured to facilitate additional meeting spaces, to support more collaborative working. Staff will be able to book desks and meeting spaces from the end of November. Following SG guidance, the office is still restricted by 1 metre distancing, and as a result we will not be able to formally commence the full trail hybrid approach until next year when these distancing restrictions are removed. In the meantime, the office reconfiguration does allow for increased staff numbers to access the office. We are also now able to support meetings of up to 12

people in the board room and SMT are meeting monthly on site (in addition to weekly virtual meetings).

30. Staffing update: Since September, staffing updates are as follows:

- a) Staff who left the organisation were:
 - i. The following Seasonal Rangers completed their fixed term contracts in October: - Harris Brooker, Anthony Seivwright, Scott Hastings, Craig Fraser, Blair Johnston, Vicky Inglis, Gillian Gibson, Louise Emslie, Tom Cole
- b) Internal promotions, following a competitive internal recruitment process were:
 - i. Adam Streeter-Smith has been seconded to the Recreation and Access Manager for 2 years, to replace David Clyne who moved into the Head of Heritage Horizons post.
 - ii. Scott Hastings who joined as one of our Kickstart Trainee Rangers was promoted to full-time Seasonal ranger, to replace Lianne Starbuck-Stephen who secured permanent employment elsewhere.
 - iii. Amy Mackenzie was appointed to the permanent Finance Officer post, replacing Diane Buchan who retired.
 - iv. Lynn Anderson was seconded to the fixed term Project Management Officer post to support the Heritage Horizons and other major projects lead by the CNPA
 - v. Dot Harris was seconded to the fixed term Peatland GIS Officer post.
 - vi. Liz Henderson was seconded to the fixed term Infrastructure Manager post.
 - vii. Two Heritage Horizon posts have been appointed internally: - Mike Woolvin to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Officer post, and Tania Alliod to the Learning and Engagement post. Both are fixed term posts for 18 months. The remaining posts- are now being recruited externally. These are the Sustainable Transport Officers (x 2 fte), the Nature Based Solutions Officers (x 2 fte), and the Green Health Ranger (1 fte)
 - viii. Sarah Henshall was promoted to the permanent Head of Conservation post, which will commence at the end of her maternity leave in January.

Recruitment is currently live for posts that have become vacant as a result of internal appointments.

- c) External appointments, following a competitive external recruitment process were as follows:
 - i. James Lee was appointed to the fixed term ICT Technician post.
 - ii. Louise Fenlon joined the Comms team as Communications Coordinator.
 - iii. Fiona Holmes was appointed to the fixed RLUP (Regional Land Use Partnership) & Agricultural Officer post
 - iv. Josie Slade was appointed to the fixed term Cairngorms Nature Engagement Officer post.

31. **Youth Employment:**
- a) **Internships:**
 - i. Bruce Macdonald completes his internship in December, supporting Gaelic work within the Communications team.
 - ii. Vanessa Altweck, Admin Intern, is in the process of revamping the Equalities Mainstreaming report which will be presented to Board in March.
 - b) **KickStart posts:** The 4 Kickstart posts were successful, with one of the trainee rangers, Scott Hastings having been promoted to Seasonal Ranger. The remaining 3 came to the end of their contrasts in November, but all reported that the experience was life changing for them. See full report in end of season review.
32. **Shared Services:** Continued work to provide HR and payroll support to the Scottish Land Commission.
33. **Organisational Development:** All staff have been invited to complete the Best Companies Staff Engagement Survey. Results are expected in late December. Results will inform the evolving Organisational Development Strategy.
34. **Cairngorms Equalities Forum:** Continues to meet monthly providing essential guidance and support to all our equalities work. An Internally focussed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advocacy group, comprising staff across teams, grades and minority groups, has been set up to enhance diversity and ensure that equalities is at the heart of all our internal policies and procedures.
35. **LEADER/Cairngorms Trust:** Our focus for LEADER has turned to effective and compliant closure of the current programme, which comes to an end on 31 December with final expenditure needed to be made by mid-December to be certain of eligibility and defrayal of expenditure from bank accounts prior to 31 December. An internal audit has been undertaken on our closure processes and reported through the Audit and Risk Committee, commenting on the well prepared systems while highlighting a small number of recommendations for improvement which will help ensure we close the programme as effectively as possible. There may be residual potential of external audit by the Scottish Government as the Managing Authority for the national programme and/or the European Commission as part of its overall programme closure.
36. Looking forward, we are fully engaged with Scottish Government and the UK Government across a number of policy development areas in consideration of the future shape of Community Led Local Development funding, with the main objective that allocation methodology for locally based community development funding continues to recognise and make use of national park boundaries in Scotland. This remains a key driver around the current draft National Park Partnership Plan.
37. **Cairngorms Trust: Charity activities and voluntary giving:** The Cairngorms Trust has secured £50,000 from Scottish Government's Testing Change funds which support existing Local Action Groups in trialling a range of activities which may help demonstrate the best way forward with future, domestically funded, community led

local development. The Trust is taking forward a Youth Local Action Group with the support of the Cairngorms Youth Action Team, with a funding allocation for young people to make grant awards for youth led projects. The Trust are also using some of the funds to make grant awards within a “Green Change Fund” which builds on the green recovery grants previously awarded in partnership with the Authority.

38. The Trust continues to have a focus on the development of voluntary giving. Trustees are planning an enhanced approach to this over 2022 within their business plans for the charity over the year ahead.

Grant Moir
November 2021

Board Convener Report – For Information

External Engagements (1st September 2021 – 30th November 2021)

In addition to scheduled Board meetings and internal meetings, I have attended the following external engagements in my capacity as Convener of the Board since our last Board meeting.

Date	Engagement	Venue
3/9	Meeting with Jamie Wilson MSP	Online
7/9	Highland Council/CNPA Joint Strategy meeting re Badenoch and Strathspey	Online
14/9	CNPA/CBP Chairs Meeting	Online
20/9	National Park Partnership AGM	Online
22/11	Housing Summit	Online
24/11	Standards Commission Chairs Workshop	Online

Xander McDade
Board Convener