



## For Information

**Title:** CEO Report and Convener Update

**Prepared by:** Grant Moir, Chief Executive Officer

### Purpose

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.

### Nature and Climate Change

- 1. Climate Adaptation Fund** - £370,000 was awarded to 18 projects helping land managers, communities and businesses mitigate for and adapt to climate change. They included nature-based solutions to reduce the impacts of flooding and droughts, equipment and training to deal with wildfire, and solar panels, battery storage and insulation to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions. A full list of the projects is on the Park Authority [website](#).
- 2. Peatland restoration** – Progress is on target to bring approximately 1500 hectares (ha) of peatland into restoration in 2024 / 25. Work is completed on two projects and underway on a further 13. These include two new entrant projects and contractor capacity for peatland work continues to expand. Private investment is contributing to the costs of five projects this year and we will seek to encourage further private investment in the future. Matt Watson left as Peatland Programme Manager to return to private sector peatland projects. He has been replaced by Daisy Whytock who will take up her new role in September.
- 3. Capercaillie** – The [Cairngorms Capercaillie project](#) has concluded. The project has marked or removed over 13 kilometres of fencing, pioneered new methods of monitoring sensitive species, created the UK's first community-led action plan for capercaillie, reduced disturbance in over 450ha of high quality habitat by re-aligning mountain bike trails, created Lek it Be champions safeguarding leks, and brought together a diverse partnership of over 25 organisations, groups and volunteers who have donated over 4,000 hours of their time to capercaillie conservation. Achievements are more fully documented in [Project Overview](#).



- 4. Deer management** - the Common Ground Forum is a national initiative that aims to improve relations amongst all stakeholders in the deer sector. A recent event at Fealar Estate attracted around 90 stalkers from all over Scotland, including from 11 estates within the National Park. The Park Authority part funded the event, the CEO took part in a panel discussion, and Park Authority staff sit on both the Steering Group and the Stalker's Group which organised the event.

In 2024 / 25 the Park Authority will run a scheme to incentivise higher hind culls across the National Park through a payment which increases the price for each carcass culled above certain thresholds. This scheme has been developed and well publicised through Deer Management Groups and will be open to all estates from October.

- 5. Beaver** – The six families or pairs released at three sites in 2023 / 24 have moved around exploring their territories, before establishing themselves on or near the release sites. The comprehensive monitoring programme of cameras, patrols, sightings, reports from land managers, and river surveys is working well. Two potential issues were reported to the Park Authority and the management and mitigation plan was successfully implemented, to the satisfaction of all concerned, on both occasions. The flood bank survey is due to be completed by the end of September.

Plans are nearly finalised for the September 2024 – March 2025 release season. Surveys, assessments and land manager liaison are underway on a potential four new release sites within the licence area.

- 6. Nature Networks** – In partnership with Trees for Life the Park Authority has appointed a Cairngorms Aspen Officer (hosted by Trees for Life). This role is developing a spatial plan for delivery of an aspen network across the National Park. Identifying priority sites, management requirements and planting opportunities to increase the connectivity and resilience of the aspen and its reliant priority species.

## **Visitor Services and Active Travel**

- 7. Paths and long-distance routes** – A contract has been let to replace signage on the section of Speyside Way north of Aviemore to the National Park boundary, to bring signage up to the same standards used for newer section of the route towards Newtonmore. A contract to improve one short section of Speyside Way with steep



gradients has been let and will improve accessibility. Another contract has been let to assess and identify Improvement options for people accessing the river Spey.

Work on the Charters Chest (Braemar – Keiloch) path commenced in spring with phase two due to be completed in late August and phase three from Old Brig o' Dee to the Keiloch junction due for completion by the end of September.

Funding has been provided to the Outdoor Access Trust Scotland for path works on Meall a Bhuachaille which will involve trialling new techniques that better cater for increased use by mountain bikes and e-bikes. A new GIS based record of all Core paths continues to be created with 200 of the 265 low ground paths (75%) surveyed by mid-August.

8. **Ranger services** - We continued to recruit seasonal rangers until July to replace three seasonal rangers who moved on to other roles. This means we currently have five permanent, 11 seasonal and three trainee rangers in post. We participated in a partnership training session with Police Scotland in Deeside on responsible countryside access and dealing with challenging behaviour. The generally poor weather in comparison to recent summers appears to have reduced levels of poor behaviour although visitor numbers remain high with some notable spikes.
9. **Visitor infrastructure** – £250,000 of grant aid has been provided to partners to deliver infrastructure projects with a further £100,000 to be spent directly including on improvements to the Old Logging Way.
10. **Volunteering and health walks** – Volunteer rangers, including those that completed training in spring 2024 have been out on the ground welcoming visitors and feeding back information on any issues arising so these can be addressed. Four volunteering events with third sector partners have been held since April providing opportunities for 146 people. Green Health referrals continue to be made by GPs with 41 now referred and four having now completed their Nature Prescription. A Badenoch and Strathspey Green Health Network gathering has been organised for the end of August
11. **Active and sustainable transport** – Applications to Sustrans Places for Everyone Fund were submitted in early 2024 for funding to take forward the next stages of design work for a number of communities. Transport Scotland funding constraints mean these have yet to be awarded any funding despite being deemed acceptable.



Work is however continuing on the tender specifications so that this work can be contracted once funding is secured. Work has continued on the design of the cycle friendly Cairngorms and behaviour change projects. Progress includes completion of cycle leader training for the behaviour change officer, cycle hub design work under way and the first contract for delivery of schemes such as shared bikes and maintenance and skills workshops is being tendered during September.

## **Planning and Rural Development**

12. **Local Development Plan** - Work continues on building the evidence base for the next Local Development Plan ([Have Your Say Today - Cairngorms Local Development Plan - Commonplace](#)), with engagement on evidence topic papers and staff attending public engagement sessions and local events.
13. **Planning casework** - The Planning Committee have only met once, on [9 August](#), since the last Board meeting on 28 June, and approved a number of applications including four retrospective applications, changes to established housing projects and visitor Infrastructure at Cairngorm Mountain. A planning application for a new telecoms mast in Glenmore was recently withdrawn and another for a new mast near Ryvoan bothy has generated significant public interest, with more than 520 objections received.
14. **Wellbeing economy** - The ['Your Future Here'](#) event rural careers event was held on 12 September 2024 trying to give people interested careers in the area insight and opportunity to access the diverse rural career opportunities available in the National Park and wider region.
15. **Cairngorms Business Barometer** – The [Cairngorms Business Barometer](#) has now been running for 15 years and the Cairngorms Business Partnership are hosting an [online event](#) on 18 September 2024 that looks back at the trends over that period as well as sharing the most recent results analysed by 56 Degree Insight, the contractors currently undertaking the survey.
16. **Visitor and residents' surveys** - Both visitor survey and the first National Park [residents survey](#) have started. Early analysis of responses will start in the autumn.
17. **Community Led Local Development** – The Cairngorms Trust, supported by the Park Authority, has committed its initial allocation of £260,000 in funding for community led local development activities and grant awards over the 2024 / 25 financial year.



## Communications and Engagement

**18. Active Cairngorms** – We've overseen a busy media and social media schedule over the past few months, including a refined visitor management campaign, a celebration of our peatland work for World Peatlands Day, Inverness Pride and an update on local green health initiatives.

More substantive updates include an update on [tick and lyme disease awareness](#), [an update on an Afford Academy community garden project](#) featuring interviews with young people as part of Cairngorms 2030, and [the screening of Six Inches of Soil](#), reflecting the ongoing engagement work being undertaken with farmers and crofters.

**19. Cairngorms Nature** – In mid-May we [launched a new £370,000 Climate Adaptation Fund](#), with [successful applicants revealed](#) at the end of July in a news release featuring a quote from Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon. The story was covered by the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald, AngusWorld, Farmers' Guardian and BBC Scotland.

In July we partnered with 14 national parks across the UK to announce our [commitment to the UN-backed Race to Zero initiative](#), aiming to halve our collective carbon emissions by 2030 and become significant net carbon sinks by 2050. The piece was covered in The Herald, The National, BBC Scotland and in various business-facing publications such as Business Green.

Andy Ford [took part in a podcast discussion](#) with the James Hutton Institute in July, centring around the impacts of climate change on the National Park.

**20. Public and stakeholder engagement** – Scottish Government [announced in July](#) that Galloway has been confirmed as the proposed location for a new National Park. The story was covered extensively across print, online and broadcast media, including Sky News, BBC, The Guardian, The Independent, The Sun, The National and Scottish Field. We were approached by various outlets, including The Times, for comment, and [issued our own update](#) on the news across social media.

The [Your Future Here careers' fair](#) took up a significant amount of both the Communications and Engagement teams' time over the summer, working closely



with Countryside Learning Scotland. Due to take place on 12 September 2024 at Aviemore Highland Resort, the event will feature practical workshops and demonstrations from over 30 partners, breakout spaces for one-to-one chats, as well as live job and training opportunities. At the time of writing, nearly 200 young people had signed up to join us on the day.

With the full Cairngorms 2030 engagement team now in place, we have been busy delivering summer events across the National Park. The events – including Tomintoul and Newtonmore Highland Games, the Grantown Show and a Carrbridge roadshow – were well attended (around 500 people across all events), with members of the public staying on the stands for a concerted period of time, eg around 30-40 minutes in the case of Carrbridge. Once the summer programme is completed, the team will review all our activities – and resident feedback – to ensure our engagement is as effective as possible going forward.

The first issue of a [new agricultural newsletter](#) was published in mid-May, featuring the Six Inches of Soil film screening, details of the Climate Adaptation Fund, information on farm machinery and equipment hire, and an update on the goose management trial. The next edition is likely to go out in September.

To coincide with the rollout of our usual visitor survey process, we launched a [new residents' survey](#) this July, which will gather residents' views on a range of subjects relevant to the National Park, as well as helping us better understand the experiences and perspectives of people living and working in the Cairngorms. We will publish results of both this and the visitor survey in full on our website once they are available.

**21. Corporate communications** – News stories over the period included a [fire management update](#) following the last board meeting; the announcement of our [Your Future Here](#) rural skills careers' fair; the start of the [Local Development Plan consultation](#); comms around the [100 rangers we have on the ground](#) this summer; an update on [peatland restoration progress](#) for World Peatlands Day; and a piece on the [nature prescriptions](#) project as part of Cairngorms 2030.

**22. Website and social media** – The website development project is progressing according to schedule, with the design phase now complete and a working prototype now up and running. We are exploring the application of AI to help categorise and



search pdf-based content, making the site more accessible eg to screen reader users. The next stage of the process is content creation, and a dedicated Website Working Group has been created, with representatives from across the organisation to help populate the site.

Between 01 May and 29 July, we reached over one million impressions on social media (up 11% on 2023), 46,721 engagements (up 96.9%), 54,302 video views (up 35%) and an engagement rate of 4.6% (up 76% on 12 months ago). Our total audience grew 384% to 57,771, with LinkedIn being our fastest growing platform.

The team has also been trialling more direct engagement / interaction with specific posts on our social media feeds (both positive and negative). Whilst it is early days, this has definitely contributed to the growth in engagement across platforms, albeit it remains resource intensive, and we will need to be selective on when and where we engage.

**23. Branding and publications** – The summer edition of *Cairn* magazine hit doorsteps week commencing 15 July. This issue includes features on National Park-wide ranger activity and our rural skills conference coming up in September, plus articles on farming support, pearl mussel conservation, fire byelaws and information on our new residents' survey.

Three large-scale interpretation projects have recently concluded: the launch of the new wildlife discovery centre at the Highland Wildlife Park (which we grant aided £90,000 to and provided substantive feedback on); an interior refresh of the visitor centre at Blair Atholl and the launch of a new Beaver Trail at Rothiemurchus.

## Organisational Development

**24. Workforce Management** - Recruitment of the Cairngorms 2030 posts, seasonal rangers and existing new and vacant posts has been very busy since January but is coming to an end with all posts successfully recruited.

**25. Staffing update** - Since June 2024

a) Staff leaving the organisation were:

- i. Tony Seivwright. Seasonal Ranger, new job.
- ii. Amber Beange, Content Creation Intern, end of short-term contract.
- iii. Lewis Pate, Farmland Conservation Officer, new job.



- iv. Sarah Fletcher, Planning Officer (Development Planning and Environmental Advice), new job.
- v. Karen Aldridge, Planning Officer, new job.
- b) Staff joining the organisation were:
  - i. Eilidh Todd joined the Park Authority on secondment from South of Scotland Enterprise. Eilidh has been appointed to the Rural Development and Communities Manager (Maternity Cover) post.
  - ii. Mikko Saari joined us in the new post of Procurement Officer.
  - iii. David Berry, Head of Planning. David previously worked for the Park Authority as Planning Manager (Forward Planning). He left in 2019 to work for Aberdeen City Council's planning department to expand his skills.
  - iv. Kaye Nicolson, Media Communications Manager, new post developed from vacancy created when the press officer left.
  - v. Seasonal Rangers appointed later in the season due to posts becoming vacant were Mhairi Hume, Sarah Stevens and Heather Palomino (who has previously volunteered for the Park Authority as a Volunteer Ranger)
- c) Staff appointments, following a robust Internal recruitment process, were:
  - i. Danny O'Brien, appointed to the role of Volunteering Manager (Maternity Cover). Danny has worked for the Park Authority as a Seasonal Ranger for the past three seasons, having originally joined us in 2021 as a Trainee Ranger.
  - ii. Sarah Lawther, appointed to the role of Outdoor Access Officer filling a career break vacancy. Sarah has worked for the Park Authority as a Seasonal Ranger since 2023.
  - iii. Daisy Whytock was appointed to the Peatland Action Programme Manager post, replacing Matt Watson. Previously, Daisy was a Peatland Officer.
- d) Other staff changes:
  - i. Fiona McNally (Rural Development and Communities Manager) and Becky Wilson (Volunteering Manager) both went on maternity leave.

## **26. Youth employment**

- a) Four Trainee Rangers were appointed as follows: Jade McDiarmid, Jayne Brown, Mike Ramsay and Sorcha Scott
- b) Beth Ogilvy joined the Park Authority on a four-month internship as Access Infrastructure Intern. Our aspiration in terms of the Youth Employment Strategy is to support the equivalent of one full time equivalent internship over the course of the year.





- c) The Park Authority hosted a stand at the "Your Future Here" Careers Fair and showcased a number of roles within the Authority and career paths to achieve these roles. We also developed two week-long work experience opportunities within the organisation which were promoted and recruited via this careers fair.

**27. Equalities** - The Park Authority has revised and updated the Dignity at Work and Equal Opportunities Policies. We are also in the process of consulting with staff on a new Menstrual Health and Endometriosis Support Policy, and a Fertility Treatment Policy, which will be part of our suite of health, wellbeing and inclusion policies.

**28. Organisational Development** - The Organisational Development and People Strategy has now been adopted, following consultation with staff and Resources Committee. Aligned to this strategy was the revision of our organisational values. The Park Authority contracted an external facilitator to support this work, and we have now launched the new Principles, which are replacing the values. These principles are Passion and Dedication, Community, Pioneering and Inspiring Leadership. The next stage of the process is to work with staff to identify and promote the behaviours that underlie these principles.

**29. Finance** – Commitment of the budget has been proceeding well across the first four months of the year. A full review of commitments and forecasts is underway in response to the Scottish Government's request for assistance in addressing national funding constraints.

**Grant Moir,**  
**Chief Executive Officer**



**Title: Convener's update**

**Prepared by: Sandy Bremner, Board Convener**

## **Purpose**

To highlight to board members and Senior Management Team (SMT) and staff the meetings and events the Board Convener has been attending since the last Formal Board meeting.

1. **Blair Atholl** – Mountainside meeting with Minister for Climate Change, Alasdair Allan MSP, and Atholl Estate owners, discussing Cairngorms National Park Authority delivery of peatland restoration work, the Park Authority's promotion of new entrants to the sector, and future opportunities to expand this work. Also discussed with the Minister initiatives to increase the supply of affordable rural housing, and measures to improve aspects of the existing stock.
2. **Convention of Highlands and Islands (COHI)** - Contributed to a national review of the functions, scope and future operations of the COHI, highlighting strengths and suggesting reforms to enhance its effectiveness.
3. **Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP) / Member of Parliament (MP) meetings** – Face-to-face discussions with a series of political representatives regarding the work and plans of the Park Authority, including Ariane Burgess MSP for Highlands and Islands, Audrey Nicoll MSP for Aberdeen South and North Kincardine, Fergus Ewing MSP for Inverness and Nairn, and Graham Leadbitter, MP for Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey. Issues included the urgent need for action to improve the supply of affordable housing, and a wide range of challenges and opportunities facing people who live, visit and work in the National Park.
4. **Scottish Land and Estates (SLE)** – Met the Chair and senior staff of SLE, exploring opportunities for further partnership working to achieve the Park Authority's goals, including support to highlight career opportunities for young people interested in working on the land.
5. **NatureScot** – Meeting with the Chair of Scotland's nature agency, discussing issues of mutual interest including the implementation of aspects of the Park Authority's National Park Partnership Plan.



6. **National Farmers' Union Scotland (NFUS)** – Informal discussions with regional staff and representatives of the NFUS, on a range of issues including further opportunities for closer collaboration with the Park Authority.
7. **National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)** – Participated in the NLHF publicity campaign to highlight the impact of 30 years of Lottery funding on people's lives and heritage.
8. **Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT)** – Met with representatives of the GWCT at a gathering of chairs and stakeholders.
9. **Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA)** – Discussed with representative of the SGA a range of issues including management of moorland habitats, predation control and future challenges.
10. **Carrbridge** – Attended day-long Cairngorms 2030 community engagement day, meeting local residents, business owners and other attendees, discussing capercaillie conservation, proposals for traffic management, river restoration and other initiatives.
11. **The King's Foundation** - Meeting with Trustee of the Kings Foundation to discuss plans for a day-long gathering of major landowners in the National Park, to discuss issues of mutual interest.
12. **Cairngorms Crofters and Farmers Group (CCFG)** – Had a series of informal discussions with leaders of the CCFG, exploring further opportunities for working with the National Park to deliver on common goals.
13. **Scone** – Attended Scottish Game Fair at Scone, meeting representatives of land management, sporting and related nature bodies.
14. **Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT)** – Attended on-site discussions at the Allt Lorgy river restoration project near Carrbridge, hosted by SWT, involving the Spey Catchment Initiative, other partners and political representatives regarding lessons learned from the award-winning project which has been supported by CNPA.



15. **Grantown** – Attended day-long activities at Grantown Show, meeting local residents and stakeholders.
16. **Braemar** – Met with the chair of Braemar Community Council for informal discussions about a range of issues affecting the village including continuing efforts to improve traffic management.
17. **Strathdon** – Attended Lonach Gathering at Strathdon, meeting local residents, workers and CNPA stakeholders.
18. **Gamekeepers Welfare Trust (GWT)** – Discussion with the chief executive of the GWT, an organisation supporting gamekeepers, stalkers and ghillies.
19. **Beaver Trail** – Attended the opening of the new Beaver Trail at Rothiemurchus, meeting some of those involved in its development, and families among the first to experience it.
20. **Galloway National Park Association (GNPA)** – Met the Chair of Trustees of the GNPA, addressing the accuracy of some claims regarding existing National Parks.
21. **Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park (LLTNP)** – Continued monthly meetings with the Convener of the LLTNP to discuss issues of mutual interest.

In addition to these meetings, I continued individual meetings with Cairngorms National Park Authority's Board members including appraisal discussions, meetings with staff, other partner organisations and stakeholders.

**Sandy Bremner,**  
**Board Convener**