



## For discussion

**Title:** National Park Partnership Plan Annual Update

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### Purpose

1. 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 second year of delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan.

### Recommendations

2. The Board is asked to:
  - a) Note the progress summarised in the paper and associated Annex 1.

### Strategic context

3. 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 2024, after two years of delivery current National Park Partnership Plan and identifies the areas of significant progress or of significant challenge.
4. The indicators are made up of a 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.
5. In early 2024, The Cairngorms National park Authority was awarded £10.7 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund to deliver [Cairngorms 2030](#), a multi partner programme that will inspire people and communities in the National Park to take action and



tackle the climate and nature crisis. That programme is at an early stage, but kick starts and accelerates action that the National Park Partnership Plan could not do itself. The Cairngorms 2030 programme is reported regularly to the [Park Authority Performance Committee](#).

## Strategic policy consideration

6. 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 Chief Executive Officer (CEO) updates to Board. At year two 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

7. There are no significant new implications in terms of delivery, strategic policy or resources at this point in time. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting that much of the work reported relies on the contribution of public sector funding to support activity or stimulate other investment and that public sector finances are expected to be constrained in future years. It is too early to know in what areas or to what extent National Park Partnership Plan delivery will be affected but clearly, constrained public spending is likely to lead to slower progress in areas that rely heavily on it.

## Summary of progress to August 2024

8. 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

9. The long-term outcome for People is a carbon negative and biodiversity rich National Park with better functioning, better connected and more resilient ecosystems.
10. At the second year of delivery of long term and landscape-scale actions that will help reach the long-term outcome and objectives for Nature, there has been steady progress in the main programmes of work that support the National Park become net zero, with woodland creation and peatland restoration each exceeding the areas needed to meet 2045 targets. Work is well underway on some of the longer-term



monitoring projects around the Cairngorms Nature Index and identifying Nature Networks and new landscape-scale projects have been established in the Angus Glens and around the Dee Resilience Strategy to link established projects such as Cairngorms Connect and the Spey Catchment. Work to reduce the likelihood of and potential damage of wildfires is being progressed through development on an Integrated Wildfire Management Plan and exploration of byelaws to limit recreational fires.

11. Highlights under the Nature theme over the past year include:

- a) 2658 hectares of woodland creation in the National Park was approved, of which 1211 hectares will be through natural regeneration. This exceeds the rate needed to meet the 2045 target.
- b) 1145 hectares of peatland was brought under restoration, continuing to exceed the rate needed to meet 2035 target.
- c) The first-year deer culling targets within the Caenlochan Section seven agreement to reduce deer numbers for habitat management were exceeded during the first of three years of focussed activity.
- d) Work to develop an Integrated Wildfire Management Plan and to explore byelaws to control fires was started.
- e) Around 60 farms across the National Park are now delivering Nature Friendly Farming Projects to deliver Cairngorms Nature Action Plan objectives.
- f) Almost £3.5 million has been secured by river catchment partnerships to support river restoration.
- g) The area of the National Park managed principally for ecosystem restoration has increased from 23% to 27%.
- h) [Beaver reintroduction programme](#) successfully started.

## People

12. The long-term outcome for People is a wellbeing economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms.

13. There has been good progress under the people theme, with the Green Health referrals scheme now established, taking referral and embedded in medical practices in Badenoch and Strathspey. The Cairngorms Business Partnership's Business Barometer for the final quarter of 2023 indicates that many more business in the National Park pay at least the real living wage that are accredited as official Real Living Wage employers. Hospitality skills training in Deeside continued and the MacDonald Aviemore Highland Resort are investigating a hospitality academy on



part of their site. The 'Your Future Here' skills training and employment event held on 12 September 2024 coordinated by Countryside Learning Scotland brings together multiple training and education organisations with employers and is targeted at people starting their careers or changing careers in sectors that are relevant to National Park. The number of assets in community ownership or management has increased substantially since the baseline established in 2021.

14. Highlights under the People theme over the past year include:
- a) Work on next [Local Development Plan](#) for National Park began.
  - b) Cairngorms Business Partnership [Business Barometer](#) survey for quarter four of 2023 indicated the 67% of responding businesses paid staff at least the real living wage.
  - c) Countryside Learning Scotland coordinating multiple partners in a skills, training and employment event [Your Future Here](#) for 12 September 2024.
  - d) The number of assets in community ownership or management increased to 99 by end of March 2024, a 39% increase on the 2021 baseline.
  - e) £460,000 of grant awards made by Cairngorms Trust from Scottish Government's Community-led Vision fund and other sources.
  - f) Green Health Referrals programme started and received 24 referrals to March 2024, with all medical practices in Badenoch and Strathspey now involved.
  - g) Volunteering work with third sector saw 180 people from four groups including refugees and asylum seekers from Europe, Asia and Africa experience the National Park in 2023 / 24.
  - h) Maintained a total of 64 active volunteer rangers through recruitment of 25 further volunteers over winter 2023 / 24.

## Place

15. The long-term outcome for Place is a place that people want to live in, work in and visit that works for all.
16. The past year has seen the full implementation of the National Short Term Let Licensing scheme and the implementation of Highland Council's Short Term Let Control Area. The delivery of affordable and mid-market rent housing continued at sites in Carrbridge, Dulnain Bridge and Kingussie via Highland Council's affordable housing delivery programme. The coordinated winter marketing campaign with Cairngorms Business Partnership aimed to encourage a more even spread of visitors in the quieter winter months and appears to correlate with an increase in visitors in those target months. The National Park was also awarded the European Charter for



Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas again in October 2023, establishing the Park as an exemplar for sustainable tourism for the 4th time since it first gained it in 2005.

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

- a) Work on next [Local Development Plan](#) for National Park began.
- b) Highland Council's Short term let control area covering Badenoch and Strathspey came into effect in March 2024.
- c) Highland Council's affordable housing delivery programme continued on sites in Kingussie, Kincaig, Carrbridge and Dulnain Bridge.
- d) Visitor numbers estimated through Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) suggest that a coordinated winter marketing campaign delivered in partnership with Cairngorms Business Partnership and partner businesses successfully increased numbers of visitors during the quieter months of the year.
- e) Cairngorms National Park was rewarded the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas in October 2023.
- f) Cairngorms 2030 active travel projects continued to be investigated in communities.
- g) More than one kilometre of path improvements was undertaken on the Speyside Way and Aviemore Orbital route north of Aviemore and contract was awarded to extend a path from Keiloch towards Braemar.
- h) £200,000 of grant aid was provided to partners to deliver visitor infrastructure improvements including to public toilets and for motorhome waste facilities.

## Next steps

18. All partners will continue to deliver their work and coordinate their work through the relevant partnerships or operational structures they have in place to support it. Monitoring of the plan and collation of data to assess progress will continue as part of that. With two years of data now available for many indicators, the [National Park Partnership Plan microsite](#) will start to build a dashboard to show progress and support targeted promotion to the right audiences.

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