



## For Discussion

**Title: Cairngorms Peatland ACTION Programme**

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### Purpose

1. This paper presents an update on the delivery of the Park Authority's Peatland ACTION programme in 2024/25 and presents early-stage plans for the 2025/26 pipeline of activity.

### Recommendations

2. The Performance Committee is asked to:
  - a) Note the progress against programme targets for 2024/25
  - b) Note the plans for 2025/26

### Strategic policy consideration

3. The Peatland ACTION programme will deliver National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) targets for a minimum of 38,000 hectares (ha) of peatland under restoration by 2045, 80% of all drains restored by 2035, and all erosion features restored by 2050. Peatland Action funding is a significant component of the match funding for the Cairngorms 2030 Programme. As one of the five Peatland ACTION delivery partners, the restoration work delivered by the Park Authority plays an important part in reaching the Scottish Government's target of 250,000ha of peatland being restored by 2030.



## Performance dashboard

Performance Measure for 2024/25	Rating	Commentary
Finance: maximise use of £4.09 million capital finance and £580,000 resource finance available in 2024/25 for peatland restoration	Amber	On 28 February forecasted spend on grants is £3,072,000. We will accrue £290,408. Non grant expenditure will total £109,000. Currently we estimate an underspend of some £500,000 but these figures are subject to change. The resource budget of £580,000 is likely to be fully spent.
Finance: impact on the Park Authority's budget management	Green	No wider unplanned demands currently made by programme on financial resources.
Restoration target 2024/25: 1500ha Restoration Area	Green	1866ha brought under restoration to date, with a further 262 ha expected to be accounted for in March, totalling 2128ha brought under restoration in 2024/25.
Pipeline for 2025/26:	Green	Demand for peatland restoration projects remains high and there are currently 15 projects under consideration for 2025/26, totalling approximately 1700ha.
Programme risk profile	Amber	A number of projects are currently the subject of discussion with landowners. Risks to delivery include Peatland Code, access issues and potential conflict with other estate activities. It is normal for some projects to be uncertain at this time of year. NatureScot have a significantly increased budget and corresponding pipeline of projects in 2025/26. This may increase competition for contractors and create contractor capacity issues. Two Park Authority Peatland ACTION staff have been recruited into the private peatland sector in 2024/25. There is a risk an expanding private sector will continue to attract public sector staff.



<b>Performance Measure for 2024/25</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
Future funding profile	Green	Peatland ACTION funding has benefited from an additional one-off addition of £8 million of capital funding from ScotWind. The Park Authority has secured an uplift in funding to £3.98 million capital and £0.65 million resource.
Future delivery profile	Green	Landowners remain engaged with Peatland ACTION, and we are confident of developing a substantial potential pipeline of projects for 2025/26.  Increased capital funding for 2025/26 will be channelled into preparing multi-year plans in collaboration with several large estates to secure a pipeline for several years.

### Delivery against strategic outcomes

4. Since 2022 approx. 5,000ha of peatland has been brought under restoration, and approximately 1,700ha are planned for 2025/26. The programme therefore remains on track to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan action for 6,500ha under restoration by 2027 and the target of a minimum of 38,000 ha of peatland under restoration management by 2045.
5. An estimated 2100ha of peatland has been brought under restoration in 2024/25 which significantly exceeds target and represents a considerable achievement. Fewer projects and a reduction in projected hectares brought under restoration in 2025/26, compared to 2024/25, will not negatively impact on overall restoration targets.
6. Increased effort in planning future large scale multi-year projects could facilitate more 'investment ready' projects suitable for attracting private investment and support more skills development and employment in green jobs.



## Strategic risks under management

7. Staffing and resourcing: vacancies in the peatland team during 2024/25 have been filled and recruitment is underway for a Research and Monitoring Officer. Additional capacity in the team will enable future pipeline planning and a multi-year approach. Increased Geographic Information Systems (GIS) resource within the Park Authority is allocated in part to supporting the peatland team. Significant over achievement in relation to hectare targets over recent years has allowed for fewer projects in the 2025/26 pipeline, alleviating some pressure on capacity in the team. However, the Peatland team contains considerable experience and expertise, and it is possible other staff will be attracted into the private sector in the future.
8. Contractor capacity: The focus in 2025/26 on planning future pipelines and creating multi-year plans will facilitate early engagement with contractors and third-party agents, avoiding concentrated tendering processes at particular points in the annual cycle. The Park Authority continues to invest in developing and supporting new entrants and increasing capacity in estates and third-party agents.
9. Funding: The significant uplift in Peatland ACTION budget in 2025/26 may not be repeated in future years, particularly as national restoration figures become more aligned with targets. The direction of travel remains towards a blended model of public and private finance. In 2024/25 15% of projects received private contributions. In 2025/26 Expressions of Interest from land managers were required to include an indication of private finance available and the Park Authority is taking this into account as a means of prioritising grant allocations.

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