



For Discuss

Title: Communications update

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Purpose

This paper presents an update of current communications activity, plus outlines a number of key priorities for the next quarter.

Recommendations

The Governance Committee is asked to:

- a) Review activity across a range of communications channels in the past three months and discuss the identified priorities for Q2 of 2024.

Key comms deliverables / achievements

1. Websites

- a) The project to develop the new website for the Cairngorms National Park is progressing well with our developers Whereverly. The initial research phase has been completed, including around 60 user interviews across a range of audience types, an online survey for existing users and initial 'tree testing' (in which real world users are asked to find specific items within our proposed new menu structure).
- b) Feedback from this engagement has been integral in the creation of an overarching site map for the site, which will be essential if the new site is to adapt to changes over time. Whereverly have also created a series of 'wireframes' to determine how the finished site will work in practice and, once agreed, these will form the basis of the final design.
- c) The next phase of the project will include concept designs and the development of a series of 'modules' (eg alerts, wildlife, projects, consultations, maps etc) to standardise content across the site and make it easier to find.
- d) We have pulled together a dedicated Web Working Group with representatives from across the organisation. The group have begun auditing the website to get an idea of what content can be retained, what needs to be edited and what needs to be created from scratch.



- e) To mark the 200th anniversary of the Lonach Highland and Friendly Society, we spoke to the Gordon family, who have been involved with the Society since it began, to find out more about the Lonach Games and what it means to them. [Click here to read the full interview.](#)
- f) In another Cairngorms Voices piece, Conservation Officer, Sally Mackenzie, explores [how the Allt Lorgy has become a celebrated example of river restoration](#) in the National Park thanks to the Spey Catchment Initiative and Seafield Estate. We also published [a blog from Grant Moir](#) responding to recent farming protests in the National Park.

2. Social media and blogs

- a) In January 2023 we changed our approach to analytics and began collecting monthly figures rather than by campaign. This better allows us to measure overall progress in audience engagement as well as measuring fluctuations in season, to enable better planning. The below provides a snapshot of where we are as of January 2024 across all social media platforms, compared to the previous year:
 - 230,421 impressions (up 70,992, or 45%)
 - Reach of 184,480 (up 107,922, or 141%)
 - 11,938 engagements (up 7,140, or 149%)
 - 13,841 video views (up 8,748, or 172%)
 - 4,994 likes / reactions (up 3,354, or 205%)
- b) Early January saw the release of consultations on fire management and the draft third edition of the Gaelic Language Plan, with comms plans in place to support the ongoing promotion of these consultations throughout the periods that they are live. At the time of writing, both consultations are reaching or have surpassed 150 responses in little over a week (versus a total response of 36 people during the six-week Gaelic consultation five years ago).
- c) We are trialling a new approach to Gaelic on social media, leading with posts in Gaelic followed a few days later by English translations, interspersed with some bilingual posts. Early insights from Gaelic-first posts would appear to show that this has been beneficial in facilitating community discussions, without compromising on reach and impressions, but this is something that we will continue to test and learn from.
- d) From December we embarked on two separate volunteer recruitment campaigns, trialling new methods of targeting by geography in areas under-represented in our current volunteer base. This was a resounding success, to the extent we had



to end promotion early as demand was so high. In total, the campaigns reached 35,841 people (63,585 impressions), 1,900 engagements, 752 likes / reactions and 466 link clicks. We will take learnings from this approach into future recruitment campaigns for volunteers, staff and board positions.

- e) Over the winter we launched our first #RangerRambles video series on social media, featuring rangers from the Park Authority and family of ranger services. The series was designed to share more about the breadth of work our rangers undertake, demonstrate their passion and inform our audiences about how best to support the rangers in the National Park. Overall the 21 posts reached 63,924 people (79,480 impressions), 41,302 video views and 1,852 likes / reactions.
- f) Engagement looking at the special landscape qualities of the Cairngorms National Park began at the start of February. People were invited to share their views on areas of the National Park that hold particular significance to them through an [interactive online map](#), with the chance to win a £100 voucher. Insight collected here will help us understand better what qualities are important to people that live in, visit or value the National Park and, ultimately, inform decisions on future landscape change.
- g) For the second consecutive year, we worked with the Cairngorms Business Partnership on a winter marketing campaign entitled 'where winter comes to life'. The campaign was based on a 2021 research project by Team Consulting, which suggested that the Cairngorms has an opportunity to claim the territory of 'UK capital of winter' due to its mixture of spectacular, snow-filled landscapes and cosy, indoors retreats. This is in line with our [Partnership Plan objective \(C5\)](#) to focus visitor growth on the off-season.
- h) Targeting previous summer visitors across the Central Belt, Aberdeen and North East England via Google, social media and Spotify ads, we have so far reached 472,283 people and generated over 5,000 click-throughs to the VisitCairngorms landing page. The campaign also provided marketing resources for local businesses to tie into the campaign, and 15 businesses featured in a dedicated short film called '[The longest shortest day](#)'. Cairngorm Business Partnership will organise a business workshop towards the end of the campaign to gather feedback on how they feel it has performed.
- i) Work has begun on revising our organisational social media policy, following feedback from staff at our away day last year on the need for greater clarity and guidance around personal use of social media. We anticipate the policy being finalised before the busy visitor season.

3. Press and media



- a) The end of 2023 was dominated by press and wider comms activity surrounding the return of beavers to the Cairngorms for the first time in 400 years. In early December, NatureScot granted a licence for up to six families to be released in the upper Spey catchment in the first year and, in addition to [pulling together a partner media release](#), we arranged interviews with broadcasters including BBC Alba (for wider BBC News), STV and Scotland Out of Doors. The story itself was covered in outlets including The Herald, Sky News, The Independent, BBC News, Nature Magazine, Scottish Field, Scotland on Sunday, Scottish Farmer and The National.
- b) On 20 December, the [first beaver releases took place](#) at Rothiemurchus and on land owned by Wildland Cairngorms Ltd. Media interest in the event was significant and the story was covered by outlets including the BBC, Press and Journal, Sky News, The National, The Scotsman and The Times. The team also fulfilled interviews with BBC News, STV and various third-party news agencies.
- c) A protest outside the Park Authority offices in January by members of the Cairngorms Farmers' and Crofters' Group attracted significant media interest. We handled enquiries from outlets including the BBC, STV, The Herald, The Scotsman, Scottish Farmer and the Press and Journal, and [published a follow-up blog from Grant Moir a few days later](#), reflecting on the meeting and summarising the Park Authority's work with farmers to date. Follow up pieces were also included in the latest edition of *Cairn* residents' magazine.
- d) In February, First Minister Humza Yousaf and Minister Lorna Slater joined us and representatives from The National Lottery Heritage Fund at Mar Lodge Estate to [launch Cairngorms 2030](#), a five-year, £42.3m programme which will see the Cairngorms become the UK's first net zero national park. A huge amount of coordination went into briefing and planning for the event; interviews took place with the BBC and MFR on the day, and the story was covered by outlets including BBC News, Sky News, the Press and Journal, The Scotsman and The National.
- e) Other press stories during the period include the National Park receiving a [prestigious sustainable tourism award](#), a [new capercaillie lek experience at Balmoral](#), the [appointment of a new Planning Convener](#), and consultations on our [draft Gaelic Language Plan](#) and [fire management within the National Park](#).
- f) Karen Archer, our Press and Corporate Communications Officer, is due to leave the Park Authority on 20 March after nearly 20 years with the organisation. Karen has been instrumental in raising the profile of the National Park and championing the work of the Park Authority pretty much since its inception, and the whole team will miss her greatly. Karen is due to start her new role with Highlife Highland just after Easter.



4. Public and stakeholder engagement

- a) On 25 January we began a six-week consultation on the draft third edition of our Gaelic Language Plan, in line with our public sector Gaelic language duty and [objective B8 of our Partnership Plan](#). We have agreed a set of key priorities with Bòrd na Gàidhlig to increase the use of Gaelic, the learning of Gaelic and promote a positive image of Gaelic, and the plan sets out how we and partners intend to support the development of the language over the next five years. At the time of writing, we had received 129 responses in English and 18 in Gaelic. The consultation is due to close on 7 March, with an amended draft of the plan coming to the board in June.
- b) In early February we launched a [10-week fire management consultation](#), asking the public for their views on the possible introduction of fire byelaws in the Cairngorms National Park. Amongst other things, the campaign has included the creation of a [consultation webpage and survey](#), social media and press assets, a doordrop to all households in the National Park and an article in Cairn magazine. At the time of writing, we had received 175 responses to the consultation, with over eight weeks remaining. The consultation closes on 17 April.
- c) In December we released a poem written by Highland poet John Glenday commemorating 20 years of the Cairngorms National Park. Narrated by Amber Beange, who was raised in the National Park, the poem was inspired by the voices and landscapes of the place and featured characters from across the National Park. The video of the poem, shot and edited by local videographer Rupert Shanks, has been well received and shared by multiple partners, including a screening at a local community event. [You can view the poem here](#).
- d) We continue to deliver a programme of face-to-face events in communities across the National Park, with the latest event being the Ballater Winter Festival in late November. The event was well attended by local residents (especially families), and the free hot drinks, cookies and kids' crafts drew a good crowd to our stand next to the Park Authority office. Plans are currently being finalised for the coming year, but those in the frame include the Tomintoul Highland Games in July, and Newtonmore Highland Games, the Grantown Show and potentially the Tarland Show in August.
- e) Following the announcement of funding for Cairngorms 2030, recruitment has started in earnest for an in-house comms and engagement team to take forward the substantial amount of public engagement required across all 20 projects. Josie Slade – formerly the Cairngorms Nature Communications Officer – has taken up the role of Community Engagement Officer and will lead a team of two



Engagement Coordinators, with a particular emphasis on engaging hard-to-reach communities and co-designing our activities with the communities we serve. We are hoping to have the full team in place by the end of April.

- f) As part of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project, we will be trialling behavioural 'nudge' techniques with dogwalkers in the National Park. The project – delivered in partnership with Seafield Estate, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Scotland and the Cairngorms Business Partnership – will develop, test and learn from a 'pawprint' system that provides dog owners and commercial dog walkers with essential information to meet their needs and reduce species disturbance. The project builds on a successful pilot by the National Trust in England, where a series of graded routes were created (from 1 pawprint, requiring greatest vigilance, to 4 pawprints) to encourage dog walkers to avoid the most sensitive sites.

5. Publications and branding

- a) The [fifth edition of Cairn magazine](#) is due to hit doorsteps at the end of March. In addition to the usual mix of community and conservation news, the magazine featured articles about business support in the National Park, Cairngorms 2030 funding success, recent farming engagement, and an interview with peatland contractor Sean Williamson. A plain text version of the publication has also been created for screen reader users, in line with advice from our Equalities Advisory Panel.
- b) We continue to work closely with partners on a number of interpretation projects, including on a beaver trail at Rothiemurchus, the new wildlife discovery centre at the Highland Wildlife Park, and a refresh of the visitor information centre at Blair Atholl. Work has now been completed on a new set of interpretation templates in the National Park brand, and we are using them as a starting point for the design of new community panels. Panels in Anagach Woods – delivered in partnership with the Anagach Woods Trust – and the new virtual lek installation at Balmoral have both been installed.
- c) Alongside the development of new interpretation panel templates for communities, we have created a new template for community path leaflets too, incorporating the refreshed brand identity. Carrbridge is the first leaflet to benefit from this treatment, with a further three leaflets also in the works. Elsewhere, the draft Gaelic Language Plan and fire management byelaws consultation documents have both been published on our website, and we are preparing a postcard that will be mailed out to residents to encourage them to respond to the fire management consultation.



Priority comms activity over the next three months

6. A range of comms activities are planned over the next three months; these are summarised below. These projects will take place alongside a regular programme of Comms activity, coordinated through our centralised Content Working Group.
 - a) Pull together a first draft of a new five-year Comms and Engagement Strategy for the Park Authority, dovetailing with the National Park Partnership Plan, Corporate Plan and Cairngorms 2030 Activity Plan.
 - b) Recruit key posts for the Cairngorms 2030 comms and engagement team and begin to roll out a programme of activity for all 20 projects, with a particular emphasis on hard-to-reach audiences and co-design.
 - c) Deliver a programme of proactive comms around farming and land management in the Cairngorms National Park, highlighting ongoing support offered to the sector and encouraging two-way dialogue.
 - d) Work with RSPB Scotland to deliver comms and engagement activity around the release of beavers to Loch Insh.
 - e) Complete user testing on the proposed structure of the new website, agree wireframes and progress to building a range of modules for cairngorms.co.uk (including projects, wildlife, news, documents and maps).
 - f) Review responses to the Gaelic Language Plan consultation and prepare a final draft for the board and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to approve.
 - g) Agree plans for Park Authority attendance at various shows and games across the National Park in 2024, as well as running our own drop-in style events in communities three or four times a year.
 - h) Roll out new interpretation approach on projects including Atholl Visitor Centre, Rothiemurchus beaver trail, The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) Highland Wildlife Park, Castle Roy and several community-based initiatives.