



## For Information

**Title:** CEO Report and Convener Update

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

### 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.

### Nature and Climate Change

2. **Peatland restoration** – The Peatland team have worked on 17 projects across the Park in 2024 - 25. Four of these are now complete and work on the ground is currently on-going on eight projects. A further five projects are at various stages of preparation but may start this year. At this point in time, we hope to exceed our annual target of 1500 hectares which will be the largest number of hectares per year achieved to date.
3. **Cairngorms Agricultural Advisory Group (CAAG)** - Focussed on the Cairngorms 2030 Future Farming programme at the meeting on 31 October. Discussions focussed on some of the techniques being trialled, opportunities to measure carbon sequestration as well as emissions, collating biodiversity data at a regional scale, and using the learnings from the programme to highlight the effectiveness of Agri-Environment and Climate Scheme (AECS) schemes in delivering climate resilience and biodiversity gain in the Cairngorms.
4. **Deer management** – The West Grampian Deer Management Group (DMG) which includes much of the south of the Park, has recently agreed a hind cull plan which, if delivered, will produce a significant deer reduction particularly in the area east of Glen Tilt. This cull plan has evolved from the Strategic Land Use Planning process which was part of the C2030 Development Phase. Estates across the Group will likely qualify for the Cairngorms Venison Subsidy Scheme.



5. **Beaver** – Three of the four 2024 / 25 proposed beaver releases have taken place, two on Wildland Ltd and one on a private landholding between Kingussie and Aviemore. Loch Morlich will be progressed in the coming weeks. The flood bank surveys to establish baseline condition are almost complete. The Upper Spey Beaver Management and Mitigation Group met in October. Two seasonal rangers have been appointed as Beaver Rangers for three months (November - January) to support with monitoring.

## **Visitor Services and Active Travel**

6. **Paths and long-distance routes** – Directional signage on the Speyside Way between Aviemore and the Park boundary is currently being updated and will upgrade the remainder of the dated brown posts to new green posts in line with the rest of the trail. The works are expected to be completed by the end of 2024. A tendering exercise is being undertaken to remove, modify or replace a number of gates along the same section that currently act as a barrier to access. A contract to realign a section of the route near Kincaig that is very steep has been with work programmed during November. The Charter Chest path linking Braemar and Keiloch is now complete and was officially opened on 01 November 2024.
7. **Ranger services** – Ranger patrols continued until the end of October which also marked the end of season for the seasonal rangers. While there were some spikes in visitor activity most of the late summer / autumn period saw relatively few issues reported. More details on ranger activity are included as part of the end of season report being presented at the Board meeting.
8. **Visitor infrastructure** – Grant offers were made to a number of partners who had bid for Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme funding towards infrastructure improvements and all offers have now been agreed. In one case – a replacement bridge on Mar Lodge Estate has already been completed. With the exception of a project in Glen Clova which is at the design stage all other projects are under way.
9. **Volunteering and health walks** – Health walk referral numbers continue to rise with 13 new referrals since beginning of August 2024, 10 of whom are actively participating. Promotional materials and welcome packs have been developed to raise awareness locally and direct contact has also been made with various Health and Social Care teams. A drop-in information event is being arranged for December at Aviemore Hospital.



**10. Active and sustainable transport** – Following survey work undertaken in the spring contracts are in the process of being let for a series of small-scale improvements to the Old Logging Way to improve safety. Further preparations including awarding contracts for topographical and ecological surveys are under way for the section of the route between Inverdrue and Coylumbridge with a view to a project to provide improved cycle provision. This section previously formed part of the National Cycle Network (NCN) but was recently declassified as it no longer meets the national standard for NCN routes but this work, being proposed jointly with Sustrans is intended to bring the section up to the required standard.

Invitation to tender documents have been produced for detailed design work for Active Travel Infrastructure in Boat of Garten and Dulnain Bridge and should be published prior to the date of the Board meeting. These will be the first two transport projects to reach this stage through the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) programme and are proving to be a valuable introduction to an area of more technical contracting than has previously been undertaken by the Park Authority. A contract has been let to a local social enterprise to deliver elements of the Cairngorms 2030 behaviour change and cycle friendly Cairngorms projects including confidence building activities, cycle maintenance skills and work with young people in schools.

## **Planning and Rural Development**

**11. Local Development Plan** - Work continues on building the evidence base for the next Local Development Plan, with ongoing engagement on evidence topic papers and staff attending public engagement sessions and local events ([Have Your Say Today - Cairngorms Local Development Plan - Commonplace](#)). Recent consultation on topic papers covering digital infrastructure, tourism, and land use, soils and resources. A youth engagement session has been undertaken with S1 pupils at Kingussie High School, and the school has requested further sessions with other age groups following the success of this. An annual update to the Development Plan Scheme, which sets out the timetable for producing the next Local Development Plan, is presented to this Board meeting for approval under separate cover.

**12. Planning casework** - The Planning Committee has met twice since the last Board meeting on 13 September. The Committee has approved the Park Authority's consultation response to the Scottish Government's Energy Consents and Deployment Unit on amended proposals for the Rothes III windfarm. It has also received reports for information on a Proposal of Application Notice for an upcoming planning application for 35 homes near Lettoch Road in Nethy Bridge, and the



outcome of a recent appeal against an enforcement notice issued by the Park Authority for a site at Tolquhonie Woods near Carrbridge. The Park Authority has recently called-in planning applications for the development of 14 affordable homes at Morlich Court, Aviemore, and four homes at Deshar Court, Boat of Garten.

- 13. Visitor and residents' surveys** - Promotion continues on both surveys, with over 1,000 responses received to date on the visitor survey (a mixture of in-person interviews and online responses) and over 600 resident attitudes survey responses received so far. Promotion of these has been impacted by ongoing budget restrictions but we will continue with organic activity over the next few months.

## **Communications and Engagement**

- 14. Community and stakeholder engagement** – On 29 October the final Cairngorms 2030 roadshow of the year was hosted in Kingussie, with excellent turn out of over 100 community members, including a number of board members. It featured the Local Development Plan consultation, nature restoration, nature-friendly farming and peatland projects, the resident and visitor surveys, and family-friendly nature activities. A full report is in progress, but feedback so far has been positive, with a real buzz in the room.

The second agricultural newsletter was sent out in early November. It included items on the latest Cairngorms Agricultural Advisory Group (CAAG) meeting, grassland workshops, the Cairngorms Future Farming project and a call for farmers and land managers to consider planting aspen on their land.

- 15. Corporate communications** – News stories over the period included the launch of the [capercaillie emergency plan](#), statistics on [winter tourism](#), the latest on [beavers](#), and a call for applications for next year's [artists in residence project](#) in Glen Tanar. The Wee Whittler, who received a Cairngorms Youth Action Fund grant last year, was among those featured in [Cairngorms Voices](#) to encourage applications to this year's fund. Other updates included a seasonal ranger round-up, the opening of the Charter Chest Path at Braemar, the Cairngorm Nature Action Plan and the latest on the freshwater pearl mussel restoration project.

The [capercaillie emergency plan](#) was picked up by a mix of local and national news outlets, including Sky News, BBC News, Scottish Field and the Strathspey Herald. September's Park Talk column in the Strathspey Herald focused on the success of



the Your Future Here careers fair, and a segment on the event aired on Landward on BBC Scotland on 14 November and BBC One Scotland on 15 November.

**16. Website and social media** – The website project continues to progress, albeit with some delays to the creation and editing of content (nearly 400 pages in total are currently in production). The team are working collaboratively with the rest of the organisation to generate, create, edit, review and amalgamate content prior to migration. A prototype of the content finder - our advanced search mechanism with multiple filter options that allows audiences to find their desired content quickly and easily - has been built and finessed, alongside continued design and development.

We've managed a busy programme of social media content throughout this period, with highlights including Your Future Here, which received more than 186,000 impressions and 22,000 engagements alone, the fire management consultation and the residents' survey.

As part of continued work to celebrate voices from across the National Park, we marked Fèis Week by spending time with local young people, [sharing a piece on the importance of cultural heritage](#) and Gaelic arts in an interview with Mairi Brown, chair of Fèis Spè, alongside nature rich content like our regular [beaver blog, updates on peatland restoration](#) as part of C2030, and [out on the ground updates](#) with partner rangers in the Angus Glens.

Between 30 July and 29 September – thanks to a combination of paid-for and organic content – we reached over 1.6 million impressions (up 174% on 2023), 66,105 engagements (up 179% on 2023), 246,104 video views (up 580% on 2023) and an engagement rate of 4% (up 1.8% on 2023). Our total audience grew to 60,084 (up 2,171). Facebook was our highest performing channel in terms of engagement, which is home to our biggest resident audience. Since April 2024, we have seen our resident audience (defined as being within the National Park and the surrounding cities, towns and villages) increase from 17% to 20.3%, a positive indication that our content on Facebook is resonating with local audiences.

Our community management plan and rota are now in place and has resulted in increased quality of engagement and interaction. This has achieved the substantive aim of generating more positive interactions; however, the exact nature of our approach remains under review in terms of capacity implications.



**17. Branding and publications** – The winter edition of *Cairn* has gone to print, and residents can expect to receive it through their letterboxes at the end of November. This issue includes key reminders for people to take part in the fire byelaws and local development plan consultations, as well as the new resident attitudes survey. *Cairn* also includes features articles on the first year of Cairngorms 2030, a look back at the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project and a range of nature and community news.

Other print projects during the period include a Strathdon path leaflet; however, due to an ongoing budget freeze a number of projects – including the Dalwhinnie path leaflet and multiple interpretation panels – have had to be put on hold.

## **Organisational Development**

**18. Staffing update** - Since September, the following staff changes took place:

- a) Staff leaving the organisation:
  - i. All seasonal rangers left at the end of October, with the exception of Rhona Garry and Emily Alford whose contracts were extended to the end of January 2025, to support work in the Beaver team. All departing rangers were invited to apply for the contract extensions which were appointed following an interview process
- b) New staff joining the organisation:
  - i. There were no new joiners in the reporting period.
- c) Staff appointments following a robust internal recruitment process:
  - i. Dot Harris was appointed to the Planning Assistant role
- d) Live external recruitment:
  - i. We are currently recruiting a Graduate Planner, and Agricultural Adviser. Both posts generated significant interest, with interviews scheduled for the end of November

**19. Youth employment -**

- a) The Human Resources (HR) team hosted a Park Authority stand at the Your Future Here - Careers in the Cairngorms National Park conference. Staff from several areas of the organisation were in attendance to talk to young people about their own career journeys. Through this event we held an open recruitment process to support two, two-week-long work experience opportunities. Both opportunities were successfully appointed
- b) The HR team has been invited to and attended several secondary school careers events, including at Grantown Grammar School and Aboyne Academy. The team is hosting a group of young people from Inverness Royal Academy, as well as a



group of Black Professionals UK sponsored students. These events focus on roles employed by the Park Authority, potential school subject choices, and higher / further education courses that may support careers in those roles.

- c) The Park Authority is hosting a Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) intern for eight weeks, working alongside our Conservation Officers
- d) We are also hosting a local young person to be in the office one day per week working alongside the admin team, to build skills and confidence in the workplace.

## **20. Equalities -**

- a) The Park Authority adopted two new policies, following staff consultation. These were the Menstrual Health and Endometriosis Support Policy, and the Fertility Treatment Policy.
- b) The Dignity at Work Policy was revised following the recent changes to the Equality Act 2010 - Introduction of Worker Protection Act 2023, which states that with effect from 26 October 2024, employers must take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of workers in the course of their employment. Additional staff training on sexual harassment has been launched and risk assessments are being updated where appropriate.
- c) We are in the process of developing a new set of Equality Outcomes (2025 - 2029), as per our responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. We aim to present these outcomes to the board early in 2025.

## **21. Procurement -**

- a) Progress is being made in the delivery of the Procurement Action Plan with monthly updates to the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee. The recruitment of the new procurement officer has made a significant difference for the Park Authority.

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**05 November 2024**  
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**Title:** Convener's update  
**Prepared by:** Sandy Bremner, Board Convener

## **Purpose**

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

1. **Scottish Government** – Had individual discussions with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on a range of issues including proposals to improve the supply of affordable housing, and progress achieved in meeting ministerial objectives.
2. **Cabinet Secretary** – Met with Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands to discuss issues including opportunities to support people who live and work in the National Park, the development of proposals for Fire Management byelaws, the Capercaillie Emergency Plan and related predation issues, future funding, and progress in meeting Ministerial objectives in the National Park Partnership Plan.
3. **Agriculture Minister** – Met with Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity to discuss the Capercaillie Emergency Plan, issues around current and future predation control, and delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan.
4. **Careers** - Opened and spent the day meeting attendees and employers at the Your Futures Here careers fair at Aviemore, welcoming hundreds of young people from across the National Park. This was the first event of its kind.
5. **UK National Parks** – Attended the UK National Parks 2024 conference. This included discussion of how Parks can best serve the needs of those who live and work in them, and visit, and spoke at the closing session of the conference, looking ahead to 2026 when Cairngorms National Park Authority is due to host the event.
6. **Housing Summit** – Attended all-day Housing Challenge Summit, hosted by Highland Council, and discussed directly with the Housing Minister the opportunities to improve supply at a time of significant challenges.





7. **Housing Partnership** – Met with a representative of the Cairngorms Housing Partnership, reviewing obstacles to the development of affordable housing and potential next steps.
8. **Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI)** – Attended the October meeting of COHI and spoke about barriers to the delivery of affordable housing and specific opportunities to increase supply through Scottish Government / public-private sector collaborations, and the potential for flexibility in the application of rent controls. In another session on digital connectivity, I urged the Scottish Government to intensify discussions with UK counterparts to avoid inappropriate planning applications for masts in the rollout of the Shared Rural Network in some of our most sensitive landscapes, with no significant benefit to people who live and work in the Park, and those who visit, so avoiding waste of public money.
9. **King's Foundation** – Co-hosted with the King's Foundation an all-day event for landowners and managers from across the National Park, exploring issues around land management and the supply of affordable housing. The exercise was aimed at looking at how the current National Park Partnership Plan is delivered, what the barriers might be, and what could be done to aid delivery.
10. **Fire Management** – Met with a representative of a major sporting estate, discussing the opportunities to re-purpose existing resources to tackle wildfires across the National Park.
11. **Sponsors Team** – Met with Sponsor Team manager regarding Cairngorms National Park Authority / Scottish Government / stakeholder liaison.
12. **Business** – Met with the Chair and Chief Executive of the Cairngorms Business Partnership, and senior Park managers, discussing strategic collaborations, work with partners and stakeholders, opportunities for future joint working, and the potential of the proposed Tourism Levy.
13. **Tourism** – Met VisitScotland's Director of Business and Events, discussing issues around proposals for a Tourism Levy.
14. **Crofting** – Met Chief Executive and Convener of the Crofting Commission, to discuss common issues including the supply of affordable housing.



15. **Crown Estate** – Met the Chair and Chief Executive of Crown Estate Scotland, discussing funding issues and work to meet the goals of the Park Authority's National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP).
16. **Dee Resilience** – Attended the Park Authority's-convened River Dee Resilience Strategy Group and underlined the urgency with which the National Park wants to see progress in mitigating against the impact of major floods and serious droughts which have been affecting homes, businesses and natural heritage in the catchment. All partners agreed to a statement of intent as a step towards hastening the delivery of objectives.
17. **Dee District Salmon Fishery Board (DDSF)** – Updated the public session of the DDSFB Annual General Meeting on progress at the River Dee Resilience Strategy Group.
18. **Fresh Water Pearl Mussels (FWPM)** – Met Audrey Nicoll MSP, Scottish Parliament species champion for FWPM, reviewing work in the National Park to safeguard the species in the face of multiple climate impacts.
19. **National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)** – Attended launch of a NLHF initiative to mark 30 years of the fund, and the significant contribution of the Park Authority in meeting heritage objectives.
20. **Media** – Fulfilled a series of media commitments including columns for local newspapers and interviews for national media including The Sun newspaper on the range of projects being delivered as part of the Cairngorms 2030 programme with NLHF funding.
21. **Finance** - Attended Scottish Government Environment and Forestry Division meeting to discuss an update on the Scottish Government budget position in the current financial year and in development of next year's budget. Underlined the importance of maintaining multi-year funding for projects key to meeting NPPP targets.
22. **Kingussie** – Attended community consultation on the development and delivery of Cairngorms 2030 projects, and initial stages in preparation of the Local Development Plan.



23. **Braemar** – Met with Chair of Braemar Community Council as the organisation prepares to develop its Community Action Plan on the themes of visitor experience, sustainability, traffic management, climate change and housing.
24. **Mar Floodplain** – Attended the final stage of public consultation on the Mar Floodplain restoration, at Braemar Village Hall, and met with community and landowner representatives.
25. **Deeside Way** – Opened the Charters Chest (Braemar to Old Bridge of Dee) section of the Deeside way, in conjunction with local member Geva Blackett and representatives of the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland and Braemar Community. I re-confirmed the National Park's commitment to working to complete the Deeside Way, as outlined in the NPPP.
26. **Auditors** – Met with our auditors as part of a routine governance review of Cairngorms 2030 delivery.
27. **Tourism** – Attended North East Tourism Conference, an all-day event in Aberdeen.
28. **National Park Partnership (NPP)** – Attended NPP annual general meeting online.
29. **Cairngorms National Park Authority Liaison** – Attended weekly liaison meetings with the Park Authority's Deputy Convener, CEO and Deputy CEO.
30. **National Park Conveners** – Met regularly with Convener of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park to discuss issues of mutual interest.
31. All meetings were in addition to individual meetings and discussions with Board members on a wide range of subjects.

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