



For Information

Title: CEO Report

Prepared by: Grant Moir, Chief Executive

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. Woodland expansion

The Park Authority's response to the Forest Grant Scheme consultation highlighted opportunities for revision that more directly supported partners and land managers in delivering the National Park Partnership Plan woodland targets for native woodland, natural regeneration, no planting on in-bye land and minimising fencing.

Since March, Scottish Forestry have approved 11ha of riparian planting in Glen Muick. CNPA have commented on 15 woodland schemes. Four of these were Long Term Forest Plans, 5 were felling permissions and 6 were woodland creation schemes. The woodland creation schemes totalled some 1600ha of natural regeneration, which is either enclosed or partially enclosed by deer fencing, and some 700ha of new planting which is deer fenced.

3. Peatland restoration:

15 projects were completed in 2022/23, comprising an estimated 1080ha of peatland brought into restoration. This exceeds the target of 905ha and the achievement of 1000ha+ is a notable milestone for CNPA. There are 14 projects in the pipeline for 2023/24. If they are all delivered, the area brought into restoration will exceed the 2023/24 target of 1300ha.

Contractor capacity is significantly improved in both the number, diversity and skills of operators. Multi-year contracts and the new entrants' scheme have strongly



supported this growth. Future areas for development include facilitating access to contracts for smaller operators; and increasing capacity in project design and management, leading to more 'agent-led' projects.

4. Freshwater restoration:

CNPA recently convened a meeting of key agencies, River Dee Fishery Board and Trust and the Catchment Partnership to agree the principles for collaboration in delivering common objectives around flood risk management, nature-based solutions and river restoration.

Park Authority staff attended the launch of the Spey Catchment Initiative (SCI) as a charitable organisation (SCIO), sharing the stage with celebrated guest Feargal Sharkey. CNPA funding has enabled SCI to scale-up operations and provide a vehicle for matching public monies with private investors. Increased capacity and resilience within the organisation will greatly help delivery of NPPP freshwater restoration objectives at speed and scale.

5. Cairngorms Nature Index:

The CNI will establish indices for six major ecosystems within the CNP based on indicator species, species assemblages and abiotic factors. The freshwater pilot is now complete and has been reviewed by a scientific Advisory Group. The next step is to take this out to stakeholders for comment and establish expert working groups for the remaining five ecosystems. These groups will identify indicators and establish reference condition based on best available data.

6. Species recovery:

Capercaillie: Analysis of the genetic diversity of the capercaillie population in the National Park shows that whilst there is no evidence that the levels of genetic diversity in Scotland have declined during the 20th century, the contemporary population in Scotland has the lowest genetic diversity of any of the Northern lineage from which it is derived.

The report contains advice that steps are taken to increase the genetic diversity of the Scottish population by identifying suitable source populations in mainland Europe. Based on experience of attempts elsewhere, reinforcement would be a highly complex, potentially very expensive piece of work with a high risk of failure. CNPA has convened a workshop of partners to discuss further.



Beaver: The informal engagement through 'beaver blethers' has been very successful. Three potential release sites have been identified in the Upper Spey catchment. The six-week formal engagement on these sites will start on 31 July, with specific focus on events for local communities, land managers and fisheries. The engagement will be supported by a range of partners including Nature Scot, the Beaver Trust, the Spey Catchment Initiative and NFUS.

Raptors: A Raptor Conservation officer has been recruited and starts in post on 1 September. Isla Graham has a strong background in wildlife conflict management and experience of working with land managers. CNPA continue to work closely with the Raptor Study Groups in the Park, land managers and modelling experts to establish the number of potential, occupied and productive golden eagle, hen harrier the peregrine territories.

7. Cairngorms Nature Festival:

The festival was a huge success with over 160 activities across 10 days delivered by over 60 partner event providers including environmental NGOs, community groups, inclusion groups and land managers.

Highlight events include Deer management on Balmoral estate, Nature 4 Health for refugees; Mountain Bothy film festival and the Kentish Glory Moth Trap and Egg Hunt' event in Aviemore. The moth event led to the formation of a local moth group, demonstrating the value of the festival in fostering ongoing engagement and involvement in conservation and land management in the Park.

Visitor Services and Active Travel

8. Active Cairngorms Action Plan: Park Authority staff are working on the new Action Plan, consulting with key stakeholders including partner Ranger Services, the Equalities Advisory Panel, Local Outdoor Access Forum and Managing for Visitors Group. The new Action Plan, which is to be considered at the Board meeting in November, will provide an opportunity to refresh our approach to a number of very topical issues including the management of visitors.

9. Paths and Long-distance Routes:

a) Cairngorms Mountain Path Project- A good deal of Upland Path work has been achieved within Cairngorms National Park over the years in partnership with the



Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS), the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and land owners. Achieved through large multi-partner lottery and EU funded grant schemes including £2.6m for the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project (2002-6), £2.3m for the Cairngorms Mountain Heritage Project (2011-14) and most recently the £5.6m The Mountains and The People Project (2015-20). With these major capital investments in the upland path network within the Cairngorms National Park now complete the focus has shifted to ensuring upkeep. The Park Authority is supporting OATS on a new mountain paths project that will focus on:

- Path Maintenance Volunteering in collaboration with Volunteer Cairngorms:
- Paid Contractor Maintenance:
- Adopt A Path scheme:
- Development of new path building techniques to address new visitor pressures including e-bikes- with a focus on the Meall a' Bhuachaille:
- Review of the Cairngorms Upland Path Audit.

10. Ranger Services: The second group of seasonal Rangers started in mid-April bringing the total number of CNPA Seasonal Rangers to 11. A further 4 Trainee Rangers started in early June and will accompany existing Rangers over the summer months which helps to create a pathway into Ranger related careers. We now have 47 FTE Rangers working across the Park, most of which are grant-aided by CNPA – special funding, training and support has also been provided. We are increasing the presence of Rangers in the Cairngorm and Glenmore area and the patrols in evening and weekends. We are working with Police Scotland to provide guaranteed cover at key weekends.

11. Tourism Infrastructure: New welcome signage to alert travellers to the fact they are in the National Park has been installed at all the Highland Main Line stations in the Park. This uses the new National Park branding. Regular meetings with Forestry & Land Scotland and the Highland Council continue with plans for temporary overflow parking and expansion of the capacity at the beach and Hayfield car parks in Glenmore as the main focus. CNPA provided grant aid towards a new car park that was launched by John Swinney at Beinn a Ghlo to provide parking for 60 cars. Proceeds from the charging system will help fund maintenance of paths in the Park through a partnership with Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland.

12. Volunteering and Health Walks: Following the recruitment and training of the 30 new volunteers over the winter they have been out “on the ground” since early spring. This also seems to have reinvigorated some of the existing volunteers who



are becoming more active again. A staff volunteering day was held in early May to tie in with the national volunteer activity being held in conjunction with the King's coronation. To manage the higher numbers of volunteers and continue building towards the NPPP4 target of 200 volunteers an additional volunteer manager post starts at the beginning of July.

- 13. Youth Action Team:** The Cairngorms Youth Action Team have entered a quiet period where their availability for events and activity is curtailed by exam and study requirements. Despite this we have had a number of online planning sessions to organise the Cairngorms Youth Climate Camp that will take place at Badaguish on 6-11 August. There will be participants from EUROPARC Youth+ Groups, NPUK Youth Voice, Scottish based Youth LAGS as well as local young people. The focus of the camp will be on climate, biodiversity, nature connection and youth action. There will also be a celebration of the work done by the Cairngorms Youth LAG in distributing the Cairngorms Youth Fund in partnership with the Cairngorms Trust.
- 14. Active Travel:** A series of engagement sessions and meetings with key stakeholders were held in Aviemore, Braemar and Ballater to seek local views on the proposals that had emerged from last years engagement events. Following the Aviemore event, the final report for Aviemore has now been received while Aecom who are developing the Active Travel and Sustainable transport plan for Deeside will deliver their final report during June. All these reports form part of the Heritage Horizons bid.

Planning and Rural Development

- 15. Planning Casework:** There have only been two Planning Committee meetings since the March Board meeting. At the April the Planning Committee meeting an application for the relocation of the Snow Factory and its associated infrastructure at Cairngorm Mountain was approved and two applications were refused; the construction of a forestry track, passing places and a replacement bridge on the Pitmain and Glen Banchor Estates and the erection of 3 houses at Lynwilg outside Aviemore. Both proposals were clearly contrary to the Development Plan policies. At the 09 June meeting, the Committee approved a small remix of housing on an existing development site at Bynack More, Aviemore, housing at Dulicht Court in Grantown-on-Spey and a gallery extension to the House of Bruar near Blair Atholl.



The teams are in the process of filling a vacancy in the development management team.

- 16. Housing Delivery:** CNPA are continuing to support CBP, and staff are liaising with key communities who are developing community-led housing projects. Strathdon Community Development Company recently held a community meeting to discuss suitable sites for affordable housing development and will be supported to carry out a land audit to aid progress. The CNPA will host a Cairngorms Community Housing group later this month, where communities who are developing community housing projects can share experience and be given signposting to further help.
- 17. Wellbeing Economy and Rural Development:** As part of our aim to reach residents and wider audiences throughout the National Park, we have committed to attending 3 Highland Games during 2023 in Blair Atholl, Strathdon (Lonach Games) and Grantown to listen to local voices, and to share information of recent and upcoming projects within each area. The first of these was the Atholl Gathering, on the 28 May, where a selection of teams including rangers, communications, nature-based solutions and rural development staff attended to share work on conservation projects, new infrastructure projects, previous funding to communities and to run family friendly activities. We were busy throughout the day listening and engaging with the public.
- 18. Community Led Local Development:** The Cairngorms Trust, working with the Park Authority as Accountable Body, has secured an initial allocation of £225,000 for 2023/24 financial year from the Scottish Government's Community Led Vision Funds. This is somewhat reduced from the total allocation of £320,000 secured in the previous financial year, as a consequence of total funds being spread more widely with more rural Local Action Groups having reformed and recommenced activities. We hope to secure further funding allocations as the year progresses. The call for community led project applications is now open. The Cairngorms Trust also continues to work in partnership with the Park Authority's teams in supporting development of Heritage Horizons proposals for a Community Led Climate Action Grant Project within the Cairngorms 2030 Programme.
- 19. Sustainable Tourism Action Plan:** The Sustainable Tourism Action Plan was submitted to Europarc in December 2022 in reapplication for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. As the next stage of the application process, we hosted a verification visit in early May. Rolands Auzins from Latvia



visited over a 3-day period, meeting partners and travelling around Park to see delivery on the ground. He will now be writing up a verification report, with recommendations for future action, and an assessment of whether or not we should be re-awarded the Charter. In the meantime, the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership have discussed plans for delivery of the Action Plan and agreed lead partners for each action.

20. Business & Visitor Data

The latest edition of the [Cairngorms Business Barometer](#) has just been published, continuing to show a mixed picture in terms of business confidence. While profitability continues to be affected by rising prices, bureaucracy and recruitment issues, customer numbers and turnover are generally increasing. That is echoed by the recent Spring wave of the [Scottish Tourism Index](#) which shows that, while economic issues are still a concern for many, demand for domestic holidays is holding up, even as international outbound travel recovers.

21. Support to Business and Communities: Community Action Planning events, known as 'big conversations' have taken place in Blair Atholl on 1 June and Dalwhinnie on 15 June facilitated by Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey. Further Community Action plans are scheduled for later in Summer and Autumn, and will be reported on in due course.

Communications

22. Active Cairngorms: Park Authority staff in collaboration with Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and NatureScot as well as the Managing for Visitors Group have published a Campfire and barbecue advice leaflet. In line with the priorities in the National Park Partnership Plan, Managing for Visitors Plan and advice from the LOAF, this campfires and barbecues leaflet is for use by Ranger Services on the ground in conjunction with Tread Lightly in the Park materials. The leaflet is in response to concerns about disposable barbecues and consistency of messaging around campfires. This advice compliments the national messaging line, namely "use a stove".

The team worked closely with visitor management and ranger colleagues to share relevant messages ahead of Easter and the busier summer months, developing a bank of 'alert' style messages to improve the speed of our response when a relevant incident occurs in the National Park, eg a wildfire or flood. These messages will complement paid-for campaign activity being delivered by the Cairngorms Business



Partnership for the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project, with a suite of materials aimed at tackling visitor disturbance due to launch before the busy summer period.

For a third successive year the Park Authority has contributed to Ramblers Scotland's responsible access campaign for young people visiting the Scottish countryside. The campaign was co-created with a diverse panel of young people from across Scotland. Three films focusing on leaving no trace, avoiding fires and reducing wildlife disturbance have been produced, with the results shared across TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram throughout the summer. The campaign has already reached over 100,000 young people under the age of 25 across Scotland.

23. Cairngorms Nature: Promotion for the new Cairngorms Nature Festival geared up from February onwards, with a [new website](#) going live in early April showcasing over 160 Park Authority and partner events. The new site features filterable events listings, volunteer opportunities, toggles for key elements such as wheelchair access, toilet availability, family or dog friendly events, as well as an interactive map showing where all the events are located. A comprehensive digital campaign accompanied the launch (including substantive Gaelic elements), alongside a simple toolkit for partners to connect their events into the wider festival brand. The festival was also promoted via a dedicated breakfast show competition on MFR local radio, adverts on Northsound and Bauer, an online feature in the P&J, a takeover of the Inverness Courier homepage and advertorial / adverts in various other local newspapers.

24. Cairngorms 2030: At the end of April we presented our draft Cairngorms 2030 Activity Plan to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The plan outlines our overarching approach to community engagement, as well as summarising the results of nearly a year's worth of consultation effort as part of the development phase. An incredible 4,000 people engaged across nearly 150 different workshops, drop in sessions and other engagement strands. Lottery representatives commented on how ambitious and thorough the engagement process has been to date, with staff in almost every part of the organisation involved in some capacity. A revised version of the plan is currently being finalised as part of our delivery phase application in August.

Press activity to support the Cairngorms 2030 programme has been extensive, including working with the team at Alzheimer Scotland on the [launch of the UK's first outdoor dementia resource centre](#), which was covered by both the BBC and STV, as



well as the Press and Journal, The National, Aberdeen Live and the Badenoch and Strathspey Herald.

25. Corporate communications: Our elections activity concluded with a [video featuring a diverse selection of people from across the Cairngorms National Park](#) encouraging people to vote, together with simple infographics showing them how to do so. A live stream of the count – delivered in partnership with The Highland Council – was broadcast on YouTube and shared via the National Park website.

Media highlights during the period include the [launch of the Cairngorms Nature Festival](#), [results of the March board elections](#), promotion of a [series of 'Beaver Blethers'](#), [a twinflower conservation success story](#) involving members of the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership and the [approval of 20 commercial letting units at Knockgranish](#).

In light of the new National Park Partnership Plan and significant changes to our core staff and board team, we have organised a series of media training sessions over the summer. The four sessions will cover topics such as how the media works, interview techniques and developing key messages, as well as giving participants practical interview experience on camera.

Building on the success of face-to-face engagement for the Partnership Plan consultation and Cairngorms 2030, we will be trialling a range of in-person events this summer, both in terms of more informal 'drop-in' style conversations and attendance at larger-scale shows. We took a stall at the Atholl Gathering and will be present at the Lonach Gathering and Grantown Show to explore how to best staff these events, what format works best and what materials we need to support them. Depending on how these go, our plan is to rotate around various community events over the next few years.

26. Website and social media: A total of 50 agencies applied as part of the first 'single procurement document' round of our website development tender process. This list has been whittled down to a final shortlist of seven companies who have each receive a copy of the detailed tender document. The deadline for submissions is the end of June, with contracts awarded in early July. SPD responses were scored based on five main criteria: their approach to audience-centred design; their accessibility credentials; their design approach; project management and technical expertise.



Over the past few months we have been working with the University of Edinburgh to explore options for a Cairngorms visitor welcome app. The research project was in two parts, with an initial review of 20+ comparator apps, followed by audience interviews with c. 100 people on what they were looking for. Encouragingly, 55% of respondents said that an app would be 'very' or 'extremely' useful and a further 25% said it would be 'moderately' useful. In terms of key functionality, the ability to use a map of the National Park offline was most popular, followed by tips from rangers, real-time busyness info and an interactive attractions map. We are now working with colleagues at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, Perth and Kinross and East Lothian Councils and the university to explore a collective funding bid for app development, likely in 2024.

A public-facing LGBT History Month campaign was shared across our website and social media channels. Across the month we shared blog pieces from five members of the LGBTQ+ community living in the National Park and also showcased our work towards the LGBT Youth Charter. Our Cairngorms Voices pieces had a total social media reach of 35,724 and more than 2,000 engagements. One piece from the [owner of River Wild Adventures](#) quickly became our most read Cairngorms Voices piece ever, demonstrating the impact of powerful storytelling and audience interest. [An International Women's Day post](#) from writer Merryn Glover a few weeks later proved similarly popular. We also celebrated World Gaelic Week in February, featuring some translations of commonly used words and phrases.

27. Branding and publications: We hosted a third business branding workshop in Ballater alongside CBP, following similar events in Boat of Garten and online earlier in the year. The workshops explored how the Park Authority can best support businesses to celebrate their role in the National Park via the brand charter process. Over 130 businesses responded to our follow-up survey, with the most popular requests being maps in different sizes, access to the Park logo to use on their materials, photography / video, leaflets and an annual wall planner. Work is ongoing to create these materials, with the majority being produced in partnership with local businesses.

The [second issue of Cairn magazine](#) hit doorsteps in the run-up to Easter. In addition to the usual mix of community and conservation news, the magazine featured articles about the Cairngorms Nature Festival, the work of the ranger service, a summary of Cairngorms 2030 and information about our work with beavers. Work has already started on the next issue, which will hit doorsteps at the end of July /



early August.

Working with partners at the Highland Rail Partnership, Scotrail and Network Rail, we have updated National Park signage across six stations on the Highland Mainline. There are around 25 signs in total along the route, featuring the refreshed National Park brand against a solid purple background (to avoid the fading issues that occurred last time around).

We have been working with mobile outdoor activity provider Able 2 Adventure to produce a suite of images of people using all terrain wheelchairs and adaptive bikes, with a view to increasing diversity in the images that we use for comms. This follows similar photoshoots with ethnic minority communities, gamekeepers and land managers, the Peatland Action team and various community groups.

Organisational Development

28. Business Continuity Planning (BCP): We have now concluded the trial hybrid approach, and are in the process of agreeing the terms of the final, permanent policy in this regard. The 12-month trial has been broadly positive, and whilst most staff are working in a hybrid way, it should be noted that staff numbers accessing the office are higher than for similar public sector organisations.

29. Staffing update: Since February, staffing updates are as follows:

- a) Staff who left the organisation were:
 - i. Donald Ross, Digital Developer left the organisation for a Career Break
 - ii. Alan Atkins, Planning Officer left to pursue another role.
- b) External appointments, following a competitive external recruitment process were as follows:
 - i. Joel Johnson joined the Authority as Cairngorms Peatland Action Trainee Officer.
 - ii. Paul Davison joined the Authority as Information Manager
 - iii. Marie Smith was appointed to the Receptionist role.
 - iv. Adam Alexander was appointed to the Digital Projects Coordinator role.
 - v. Jonathan Willett joined the Park Authority as its Beaver Project Manager
 - vi. The Seasonal Rangers who joined in March and April are: Lewis Barr, Tom Fredriksson, Scott Hastings, Toni Lamont, Sarah Lawther, Danny O'Brien, Becki Redmond, Tony Seivwright, Craig Fraser, Jennifer Clark and Fiona McClure. Scott, Danny, Tony and Craig were Seasonal Rangers last year, and



Tom was one of last year's Trainee Rangers. Danny and Scott were in the Trainee Ranger cohort in 2021, and both worked as Seasonal Rangers last year.

- vii. The four Trainee Rangers who joined in June are: John Calder, Craig Forsyth, Jessie Grant and Catherine Wilkinson.

30. Youth Employment:

a) Graduate/Internship posts:

- i. Alaska Stikova joined us as on a 4-month internship as Digital Content Intern. We are also in the process of recruiting an Access and Infrastructure GIS Intern. The internship model is proving to be very successful. This model requires the identification of a specific, time bound piece of work. It gives young people the opportunity to experience work in the corporate environment, whilst delivering a meaningful project for the Park Authority. It also provides us with the opportunity to develop the line management skills of existing staff, as interns are usually line managed by staff who are new to the line management role.

31. Equalities:

- a) We have recently adopted two innovative policies that were developed through the Internal Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advocacy Group, and consulted with the external Equality Advisory Panel. They are the Neurodiversity Policy, and the Reasonable Adjustments Passport Policy.
- b) The Park Authority has signed up to a partnership agreement with Black Professionals Scotland, through which we get access to mentoring opportunities, racial diversity training, access to the job board, and targeted internship recruitment.

32. Organisational Development

- a) The Organisational Development cross cutting Programme Board was refreshed and had its first meeting in the last quarter. The organisation has grown significantly since the last Organisational Development Strategy was established, which is now out of date, and we are in the process of identifying the key areas for organisational development and change management for the next few years.

33. Finance

- a) Our draft financial position shows a near break-even position for the 2022/23 financial year, achieving our target of maximising our effective deployment of the Scottish Government grant in aid made available to the Park Authority. Further detail on the position will be presented to the Resources and Audit and Risk



Committees in their forthcoming meetings with regard to budget management and final accounts audit positions respectively.

Grant Moir
June 2023