



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. **Peatland restoration:** Capital funding in grant awards to land managers in 2022/23 totalled £1.896m. This comprises work on 10 estates, 900ha of restoration completed of a further 317ha in progress. If achieved, weather depending, the total of 1217ha will exceed the 2022/23 target of 905ha. We have recruited a Trainee Project officer which will increase capacity in the peatland team and contribute to supporting skills and training development in the sector.
3. **Deer management:** The Strategic Land Use Plans for three DMGs in the Park developed as part of Cairngorms 2030 will be presented to landowners in March for consideration over summer. The aim is to develop Delivery Plans based around how estates can benefit from natural capital and develop alternative income streams in a future where income from stalking may be reduced. Members of the South Grampian DMG have recently entered into a Section 7 Agreement under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. This Agreement aims to reduce deer densities from a current level of around 16 deer per km² to below 10 deer per km² in three years. The DMG is included in the Cairngorms 2030 programme and it is hoped members will be able to develop new income streams as deer numbers are reduced.
4. **Moorland Management:** The Cairngorms National Park Authority response to the Wildlife Management (Grouse) Bill is available on the Cairngorms National Park Authority [consultations page](#). Partners in the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership have agreed a 5yr Action Plan. Objectives for habitat restoration, species recovery, data gathering and sharing, socio-economic sustainability and communications align



with the NPPP and demonstrate the positive role moorland management can play in its delivery.

5. **Freshwater restoration:** Cairngorms National Park Authority continues to support and encourage coordination between Catchment Management Partnerships on the Spey, Dee and Esk. CMPs have all been very successful in attracting over £550,000 into funding the design, delivery and monitoring of restoration in the Park via the most recent round of the Nature Restoration Fund.
6. **Nature Networks:** Work to date on Nature Networks has focused on identifying and mapping a woodland network determined by nativeness and age. A subset of this work is also focusing on a nature network for aspen, a species which in turn supports a range of highly specialist flora and fauna. This is pulling together data on mature aspens in the Park from aerial and field surveys, as well as those planted in recent years. The Park Authority hosted a workshop with staff from ScotGov, Nature Scot and LLTTNPA to discuss the development of 30 x 30 within national parks, including the role of the current system of designated sites.
7. **Species recovery:** Significant work has taken place over the last few months in engagement with land managers, fisheries, residents and agencies over the planned release of beaver into the National Park later in 2023. Informal engagement with land managers has focussed on individual site visits, and with resident via drop-in sessions in communities. More information is on the [webpage](#).

Plans are underway for the release of wildcats into the National Park in summer 2023. The Park Authority is represented on the Saving Wildcats project board and delivery group. The Park Authority is working closely with The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland on two further captive breeding and release programmes this year: pine hoverfly and Dark Bordered Beauty moth, an extremely rare moth found in only four sites in the UK - three of which are in Cairngorms National Park.

Visitor Services and Active Travel

8. **Active Cairngorms Action Plan:** Park Authority staff have begun the process of developing the revised Active Cairngorms Action Plan. Largely focused on the People element of the National Park Partnership Plan it will include aspirations for Ranger Services in the Park as well as Volunteer Cairngorms and our commitment to Managing for Visitors, the visitor management agenda.



9. Paths and Long-distance Routes:

- a) **Speyside Way** - substantial new path works have been completed in Anagach Woods which is owned and managed by the local community. Works are largely finished on the new path at Kincaig from the bridge towards the water sports centre. Once completed, this section of path will be incorporated into the promotion of the Speyside Way. A fencing contractor has been appointed to address fencing issues at Mains of Dalvey north of Cromdale and existing “rambler” style gates are to be replaced with more accessible ones.
- b) **Braemar to Keiloch Path** - Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland have commissioned a contractor to look at the design options for the re-routing the path lower down the slope, alongside the road. The final designs should be completed by end of March. A further planning application will most likely be required with construction works ideally starting towards early autumn. This path is intended to form part of the extended Deeside Way in due course.

10. Ranger Services: The Park Authority Rangers have been trained and have commenced a new path assessment process using a mobile path mapping application that populates the Cairngorms National Park Authority GIS. A gathering of all Ranger Services in the Park took place in early March at Glen Tanar to agree on common ways of working and priorities. Recruitment of Seasonal Rangers took place during January / February with the first Seasonal Rangers starting work on 13 March to prepare for Easter and a further intake starting in mid-April.

11. Tourism Infrastructure: The Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan was approved by the Board in November and submitted to VisitScotland at the end of 2022. Work is now under way to identify projects that can be delivered in the short term. Six projects have been supported to a value of nearly £350,000 through the Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme. This includes two path improvement projects on Rothiemurchus Estate, creation of a new blue trail at Laggan Wolftrax, refurbishment/reopening of Burnfield Toilets in Grantown, Cairngorm Mountain Sense of Arrival project and Glen Doll overflow carpark improvements. A new car park for access to Beinn a' Ghlo in Atholl is now complete delivered by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland.

12. Volunteering and Health Walks: A new intake of 30 Volunteer Rangers took place in late 2022 with training provided in the early part of 2023. The new volunteers will be out from late March initially “buddying up” with Volunteer Rangers who have been



part of the programme for three years or more. The programme of Health Walks led by local volunteers has continued over winter. A very successful and well-attended Health Walk leaders' gathering and training day was held in Grantown in early February.

13. **Youth Action Team:** Nine people from the Cairngorms Youth Action Team attended a national youth residential event in Orkney in February. This aimed to build the youth voice to inform policy and governance as well as developing Youth Funds in Local Areas to support youth-led projects. With the Cairngorms Youth LAG members having already been involved in managing youth funds via the Cairngorms Trust, they were seen by other groups as being leaders in the field and were involved in presenting on this to the other areas.
14. **Active Travel:** Work on the series of Active Travel projects has continued with draft concepts having been provided by the specialist consultants for the Active Aviemore and Badenoch communities projects. Five public engagement sessions have been held to get community feedback on the ideas put forward and a further one is still to take place. Draft reports on the Active Travel network plan, E-bike plan and the Deeside Active and sustainable Transport plan have been received and further engagement events for these are to follow. A second workshop with stakeholders was held to consider a range of options from the initial engagement events and to further develop the Glenmore Transport Plan.

Planning and Rural Development

15. **Local Development Plan:** The Local Development Plan 2021 was approved in March 2021 and officers will take a two-year monitoring report to the Board in September 2023. The National Planning Framework 4 came into force on 13 February and is now a formal part of the development plan. Work has recently begun on preparing the evidence report in the new style for the next Cairngorms Local Development Plan and we will take a paper to the June Board with the development scheme to set out the process and timetable.
16. **Planning Casework:** In December the Planning Committee approved the Planning Enforcement Charter for adoption and publication and were briefed on the National Planning Framework 4 was also given. In the first meeting of 2023, Planning Committee were informed of Highland Council's consultation on a Draft Non-Statutory Short-Term Secondary Letting Planning Policy to accompany Short-Term Let Control Areas in Highland. Agreement was sought to agree the Park Authority



response to the consultation. A confidential paper sought the authorisation of planning enforcement action to serve a breach of condition notice in respect of application at the Tomintoul wigwams site. At the March Committee meeting consent was granted for a SuDS basin at Newtonmore to serve a housing development, the redevelopment of the Laurel Bank site in Aviemore for self-catering apartments, shops, hotel and parking, and the erection of 20 commercial units at Granish in Aviemore. Committee was also asked to consider a windfarm just outside the Park boundary (Ourack) and the associated proposed construction access works. Planning Committee were informed of Highland Council's consultation on a Draft Grantown-on-Spey Conservation Area Management Plan and asked to agree the Cairngorm National Park Authority's response to the consultation.

17. Housing Delivery: The Park Authority are continuing to support Cairngorms Business Partnership and several social enterprises with housing delivery projects. A series of meetings with Communities Housing Trust and Rural Housing Scotland has taken place to promote key developments, and staff are liaising with key communities who are developing community-led housing projects. Costs have of course increased, and officers have worked to include criteria within the new funding streams to help progress plans for community-led rural housing. Tomintoul & Glenlivet Development Trust are close to launching their 12 new affordable homes as part of a five-year community-led project which saw them purchase, demolish and develop the former secondary school site in Tomintoul.

17. Wellbeing Economy Action Plan: Work is continuing to develop the Cornerstone Indicators, as part of Heritage Horizons in Partnership with Wellbeing Alliance (WEAll) Scotland. The key themes identified as priorities for the Plan, identified through stakeholder and community engagement, and the Wellbeing Economy Working Group, a sub-group of the Economic Steering Group include Transport, Community, Health, Nature, Skills and Business. A timetable for delivery the Action Plan is in development and will be shared with Board in due course.

18. Sustainable Tourism Action Plan: In December, the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan was submitted, alongside the National Park Partnership Plan and supporting documents, to Europarc in application for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. As part of our assessment for the Charter, we will have a verification visit from a sustainable tourism expert from Romania and arrangements for that are currently being discussed, with a likely timescale of mid-May.



19. Support to Business and Communities: The Cairngorms Business Barometer for Q4 2022 has just been released and overall shows a fairly mixed picture in terms of business performance and confidence, probably reflecting continuing uncertainty in the tourism sector. However, confidence levels are now close to the long-term average. As in previous quarters, recruitment and supplier costs continue to be issues. The biggest barrier to growth currently though is bureaucracy and legislation, with concerns about short-term let licensing and the planned Deposit Return Scheme flagged as particular concerns. The results are available [here](#).

Communications

20. Active Cairngorms: Alongside our partners in the Cairngorms Business Partnership, we launched a targeted social media advertising campaign in January encouraging people to visit during the winter months. The campaign positions the Cairngorms as a place 'where winter comes to life' and is designed to address objective C5 of NPPP4, specifically to 'stabilise visitor numbers in the peak season, focusing growth on quieter months'. It is based on detailed market research last year with 1,000 adults from Scotland, the north of England and the south of England, which showed that the Cairngorms was seen by many as a preeminent winter destination. The campaign has three main strands – interactive Google Display adverts, Facebook and Instagram Stories, and Spotify / podcast audio ads. In its first few weeks the campaign reached well over 500k people, with 97% of our Spotify audience listening to the whole 20-30 sec advert. A toolkit has also been developed for local businesses to 'brand' their content as part of the campaign. Activity runs until late-March, at which point we will engage with businesses in the area to judge its effectiveness and plan next steps. Ahead of the new visitor season we are updating our 'Tread Lightly' materials for rangers to hand out on the ground, including the creation of a simple guide around avoiding wildfires in the National Park. We have also taken a lead role in helping coordinate national messaging around wildfires, pulling together representatives from the Scottish Wildfire Forum, Scottish Fire and Rescue and VisitScotland (who coordinate all visitor messaging across Scotland). Elsewhere in the realm of visitor management signage, the Outdoor Access Team has developed a toolkit to assist land managers in creating signs and using consistent messaging across the Park- [Visitor Management Signage - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#).

21. Cairngorms Nature: The Comms team have been working closely with colleagues in Conservation to arrange and promote a [number of 'Beaver Blethers'](#) on 9, 16 and 22 March in Kingussie, Kincaig and Aviemore. The sessions are designed to provide residents and local land managers with a clear picture of what happens next,



address any concerns they may have and highlight potential mitigation measures. A number of 'vox pop' video interviews have been created with key stakeholders and members of the project team to bring this work to life, alongside a suite of printed materials, website updates and social media posts. A new website is currently in the works for the Cairngorms Nature Festival, which is due to replace the Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend this May. Inverness-based agency Strut (who look after our current site) won the contract to deliver the site. You may remember that last year our digital team turned around a fairly basic £250 WordPress templated site for the BIG Weekend to address structural issues with its predecessor; however, this project is much larger in its scope, including a dedicated events system that can 'plug in' to other sites once the new Cairngorm National Park website is live. We plan to have the new site live before the end of March to coincide with wider promotion of the event itself.

22. **Heritage Horizons:** Heritage Horizons continued to dominate our media output, with releases to highlight a [series of community roadshow events](#), [climate emergency workshops](#), an [artist residency opportunity](#), and [a report on when the National Park is likely to reach net zero](#). We continue to explore broadcast / podcast opportunities to develop some of these stories further as Heritage Horizons enters its delivery phase. Our [Heritage Horizons microsite](#) has also been fully updated to reflect feedback from various stakeholder consultation exercises and to explain next steps.
23. **Corporate communications:** Board elections were a key strand of activity during the period, initially to encourage members of the public to stand and later for them to vote. Alongside the usual promotional effort – a flyer circulated to all households via Highland Council, social media content, updates to our website etc – we have created a couple of videos (see eg [this Twitter version](#)) featuring people from across the Park talking about what they look for in future board members. We promoted a series of drop-in sessions in each of the five wards before Christmas, followed by an online drop-in in mid-January. An article was also included in the first issue of *Cairn* magazine.
24. **Website and social media:** A formal invitation to tender has now been drafted by our partner agency to help select a new website development contractor. The tender includes a detailed analysis of our existing digital estate (both that controlled by the Park Authority and by third-parties), audience personas and key user journeys, and design standards we expect the successful bidder to meet. A core part of this project is to meet and ideally exceed international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and findings from last year's web accessibility audit have been baked into



our approach on the new site. We plan to run a two-part tender exercise starting this month. This is expected to take approximately 14 weeks with the hope of starting work in autumn this year. In the meantime, work continues with internal workshops involving key organisational teams on user journeys and site mapping. Donald Ross, our Digital Developer, is taking an 18-month career break at the end of March to complete a BA Hons in Fine Art at UHI. Donald has been instrumental to the development of multiple digital projects over the past few years, including an upgrade to the current cairngorms.co.uk site in 2019 and the creation of microsites for NPPP4 and the Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend. Recruitment has begun for a new Digital Projects Coordinator to pick up some of Donald's workload and we hope to have someone in place before the award of our website development tender. All major Park Authority-led social media accounts have been updated in line with our new brand guidelines to demonstrate a much clearer 'family resemblance' between our primary and secondary channels. This includes updates to Cairngorms Nature, Cairngorms Rangers and Cairngorms Volunteers, with the Cairngorms Youth Action Team soon to follow. We are also working closely with colleagues in CBP to provide advice on how they can update their social channels and website to incorporate the new VisitCairngorms brand. Perhaps more significantly, we are now beginning to see the impact of our new tone of voice / content guidelines on the type and presentation of content we're sharing on our channels. A major strand of this is showcasing the people of the National Park through our Cairngorms Voices platform. Stories over the past few months include a [spotlight on our junior rangers](#), information on the UK's [first outdoor dementia resource centre](#), a feature on the [accessibility work of Able2Adventure](#), a celebration of the [International Day of Women and Girls in Science](#) and a series of stories to mark [LGBT History Month](#) in February. We are also working with the University of Edinburgh on an options appraisal for creating a visitor welcome app to the National Park. The research team have reviewed over a dozen comparator apps from elsewhere in Scotland and the UK to see what functionality is most desirable and determine whether such an approach might work for the Cairngorms. The next step is to survey visitors to the Park, exploring the various app options in more detail, ahead of a final report in April / May.

25. Branding and publications: A full set of brand guidelines for the National Park family of brands has now been finalised, alongside the development of a series of practical templates and user guides for staff and third-party contractors to use.

In January – alongside CBP – we held two events for businesses in the Park, looking at how we can best support them to celebrate their place in the National Park via the new branding suite. The interactive sessions gave us an opportunity to highlight the



new 'proud to be part of' brand charter, and to explore which branded materials would be most beneficial to businesses. We are also holding a follow-up session in conjunction with the Ballater Business Association AGM on 16 March to gather views from the east of the Park, and have circulated a survey to all businesses on CBP and our databases to inform this work. The [inaugural issue of Cairn magazine](#) was due to be distributed in early December; however, significant issues with a third-party distributor (complicated further by bad weather and ongoing Royal Mail strikes) meant we were unable to confirm which households received copies. We have received a full refund on the print and distribution of the last issue as a result, and will attempt to reuse some content in a bumper 20-page spring edition in late-March. We are working closely with the Highland Mainline Community Rail Partnership to update around 25 National Park signs across six stations in the Cairngorms. The current panels are very faded and on a number it is now impossible to read the word 'Cairngorms' or to see elements of the osprey landmark. This will be a good opportunity to roll out the refreshed brand to a wider audience.

Organisational Development

26. **Business Continuity Planning (BCP):** We have conducted the 6-month review of the trial Hybrid Approach, which commenced on 1st June 2022 and is due to be formally reviewed on 12th June 2023. Results indicate that staff are now fully accustomed to the new way of working, and adapting well to it. The office is busiest on Tuesdays – Thursdays and we estimate that it is typically at 50% - 60% capacity on these days. This would appear to be an increase on what partner organisations are experiencing.

27. **Staffing update:** Since November, staffing updates to end February 2023 are as follows:

- a) Staff who left the organisation were:
 - i. Lisa McIsaac, Data Governance and Reporting Manager left for personal reasons
- b) Internal promotions, following a competitive internal recruitment process were:
 - i. Sara Denner, who was our Receptionist was appointed to the Visitor Services Admin Officer post, replacing Jenny Allen
- c) External appointments, following a competitive external recruitment process were as follows:
 - i. Louise Allen was appointed to the new Head of Finance and Corporate Operations
 - ii. James Ade joined as Clerk to the Board, providing maternity cover for Alix Harkness for 12 months



- iii. Sarah Fletcher joined as Planning Officer (Development Planning & Environmental Advice), replacing Nina Caudrey

28. Youth Employment:

a) **Graduate/Internship posts:**

- i. Alice Fogg joined us on a 6-month internship to support the Cairngorms Nature Festival

b) **Work with Schools: -.**

- i. The HR team supported Grantown Grammar School with a careers event to support S2 pupils about to make their subject choices. A team of staff attended to provide insight into roles across the organisation and career paths to these roles
- ii. A similar team supported another event at Grantown Grammar, but this time geared toward S4 students, and to therefore assist them in decisions about further/higher education options.
- iii. The HR team also supported a Career's Fair at Afford Academy which was an opportunity for young people to chat to employers, and find out more about the organisation and the roles the organisation employs.

29. Equalities:-

- a) The Equality Advisory Panel had a successful "in-person" event in the Autumn, during which they toured the Aviemore Hospital, and visited Badaguish. The EAP continues to meet virtually every month and has provided invaluable advice on our equalities work. We also have an internal Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advocacy Group who are supporting our LGBT Charter journey, and who have been instrumental in developing new policies, including the Neurodiversity Policy.
- b) All board members will be attending an in-person Equalities Training day in April. This training will be delivered by JRSKnowHow who successfully bid for the contract through our procurement process. They have already delivered staff training, which was extremely successful.

30. Organisational Development

- a) We are implementing a new sign-in system, which is electronic, and facilitates sign in by all staff, board members and visitors via an Ipad at the main office entry points. This is key to managing our Fire Risk approaches. The Facilities Team will roll out training to staff and board over March and April.