

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: CEO REPORT AND CONVENER UPDATE

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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.

Conservation

2. **Cairngorms Nature:** We have been supporting our partners to develop two projects focused on waders and invertebrates for the Nature Restoration Fund. The timescale for developing the full application and level of commitment required from landowners has resulted in the wader project being withdrawn. Another funding opportunity through the Edinburgh Declaration Fund will occur later this year, however details of the fund are yet to be confirmed.
3. **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project:** The visitor research and the Mountain Bike Trail Mapping Internship are now complete. This work is helping to develop an MTB Recreation Management Plan for Badenoch and Strathspey. The grant scheme to enable land managers to apply for up to £5000 to create more habitat for capercaillie is now open for applications.

NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) Caper report advises that if population declines continue the species could be lost to Scotland within two to three decades. Factors having the biggest impact on breeding success were identified as predation and disturbance due to rises in visitor numbers and recreational activities. The report highlights the importance of further action across the core area of Badenoch and Strathspey if the population is to be conserved. [Measures to save capercaillie outlined | NatureScot](#)

Over the next couple of months CNPA and NatureScot will be engaging with a wide range of people to help formulate options to tackle the two main identified issues. Options will need to include a thorough assessment of costs, resource, risks and feasibility – all of which the project will be able to play a big part in shaping. These will go to CNPA and NS Boards for discussion in May/ June.

4. **Woodland Creation:** Since December we have been consulted by Scottish Forestry about woodland creation proposals of varying scale at Abernethy, Mar Lodge, Kinrara and Balmoral, and we anticipate formal consultations soon relating to Atholl and Ben Alder estates. We have also been informally consulted about potential woodland creation proposals at Rothiemurchus, Mar Lodge and Auchavan estates.
5. **Peatland Restoration:** We have completed mapping all areas of eroded peat across the Park. The new map represents a significant resource for the CNPA Peatland Team and will also be valuable for estates. We will shortly be able to analyse this map so we are in a much better position to plan future peatland restoration and to target resources where they will be most effective.

On the ground, the 2021/22 annual target of 557ha of restored peat will be exceeded, but the final area restored has not yet been calculated. Despite a mild winter, snow has still lingered on high ground and held up work on some projects. Low ground projects have continued with relatively few interruptions.

6. **Moorland Management:** Nature Scot continue to take forward proposals to develop Grouse Moor Licensing and CNPA feed into that process. We have held discussions with the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership and with a number of individual estate managers and head keepers about how we can make licensing both effective and fair. More practical work with ECMP continues, with an aspen planting project being a recent example.
7. **Deer Management:** The Scottish Government continues to work towards implementing the recommendations of the Deer Working Group. These seek to focus deer management on tackling the climate change and biodiversity crises across Scotland. Legislation is expected in 2023. CNPA met with DMG representatives from around the Park to discuss the deer management and wider land management objectives within NPPP4. Discussion was constructive and we will meet again to discuss the NPPP in due course. The South Deeside and North Angus DMG have agreed a consultant brief which is now open for tender. This consultant brief will take forward the development phase of the Heritage Horizon DMG project. This project will look to explore a variety of income streams for estates, while analysing the risks and liabilities associated with those income streams. Discussions are on-going with the South Grampian DMG re a similar consultant brief. Outwith Heritage Horizons, CNPA are working in partnership with the West Grampians DMG to fund Strath Caulaidh Ltd to explore natural capital-based approaches to managing their estates. The projects with the three DMGs will conclude by March 2023.

Visitor Services

8. **Managing for Visitors**
The Managing for Visitors Group has met monthly over the winter and reviewed the operational plan for Managing for Visitors. CNPA will promote the #TreadLightly and #CairngormsTogether campaigns, encouraging safe, responsible enjoyment (with a focus on no fires in woodland and peatland and the need to keep dogs under close control in the nesting season) and the need to work together to benefit local communities, employees and visitors. The national visitor management arrangements

have been reviewed and CNPA is represented on many of the relevant groups. Additional funding has been provided by Scottish Government for managing for visitors and, via NatureScot, for the BetterPlaces fund which will assist in providing additional seasonal ranger cover at key hotspots. A Strategic Infrastructure Plan for the Park is being prepared. Meetings with community leaders and elected members, to provide briefings on the season ahead, are planned for mid-March.

9. **Long Distance and Strategic Routes:** Work is ongoing to repair worn sections of extended Speyside Way at Drumguish and Insh. Improvement projects at Grantown and Kincaig now have funding in place from the Improving Public Access funding stream from Scottish Government and are programmed for Autumn 2022. CNPA and Aberdeenshire Council have offered grant-aid to Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland to construct a new path linking Braemar to Invercauld Bridge and work is due to commence in Spring 2022. The Sustrans 'Paths for Everyone' Strategy has recently identified the need to improve existing routes that are part of the National Cycle Network: NCN7 in western Cairngorms, extension of NCN195 (Deeside Way) and a potential new route from Aviemore to the Moray coast.
10. **Ranger Services:** Eleven CNPA Seasonal Rangers have been recruited and will be trained to start work on ground in time for Easter 2022. CNPA continue to coordinate and financially support the wider family of ranger services within the National Park and partners have the opportunity to apply for funding to support seasonal rangers this summer. Following on from Kickstart scheme last year, we will also be supporting two Trainee Rangers and one long-term student placement this summer.
11. **Volunteering and Health Walks:** CNPA will train 12 new volunteer rangers this spring to join the current team of 38 working in partnership with rangers across the National Park. CNPA rangers will re-engage with current team of **junior rangers** in the Cairngorms, with six to ten young people attending a volunteering day each month. This summer, Junior Ranger training will be offered to pupil's attending the five secondary schools in and around the Cairngorms. There is increased demand for countryside volunteering opportunities around the CNP and we are working with partners to promote their 'days out'. **Heath walks** continue to develop with further work planned through the Heritage Horizons/Cairngorms 2030 Project. A Cairngorms Litter Network meeting is planned with Keep Scotland Beautiful in Mid-March to promote community-based volunteering.
12. **Education and Learning and Inclusion:** Cairngorms Youth Action Group, supported by Cairngorms Trust, is developing the Cairngorms Youth Fund, supporting projects that promote young people's connection to nature. The Our Natural Heritage partnership project will restart in in Spring 2022 encouraging 'New Scots' (people from any background who have recently immigrated to Scotland) from urban areas of Highland and Aberdeen to visit and enjoy the National Park.

Planning and Rural Development

13. **Planning Guidance and National Policy:** The work to finalise the planning guidance covering Design and Placemaking, Developer Obligations and Housing is progressing well, and officers will bring formal reports (on changes to the guidance on Design and Placemaking and Developer Obligations) to the Committee for adoption in the next few weeks. The Housing planning guidance requires some further work before taking it back to Committee for formal adoption. CNPA will respond to consultation on the National Planning Framework by end of March.
14. **Planning Casework:** The Planning Committee has approved a range of developments at the monthly Planning Committee meetings including the replacement of visitor centre at the Highland Wildlife Park, small business units at the Lion's Face quarry near Braemar, extension of the Dalraddy caravan park and a new camper-van site near Nethy Bridge, an accessible accommodation for rent in Glen Tromie, and changes to housing developments in Aviemore. The CNPA called in a major planning application for a battery storage facility near Boat of Garten in February 2022.
15. **Economic Steering Group:** The Group met in February and discussed ongoing economic recovery activity and the launch of Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation, particularly the need to focus on rural issues. Officers from WeALL Scotland also attended and the Group discussed the plans to develop a Wellbeing Economy Action Plan as part of the Heritage Horizons/Cairngorms 2030 Project.
16. **Cairngorms Tourism Partnership:** The Tourism Partnership met in February and discussed the feedback on the NP Partnership Plan, future plans for the Tourism Recovery Group and the development of the Tourism Action Plan later in the year. The Action Plan will require to be submitted to Europarc by December 2022 to allow re-verification of the National Park for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.
17. **Housing Delivery:** Officers assisted the Cairngorms Business Partnership with development of plans for a stronger business lead on various aspect of housing provision for workers in Badenoch and Strathspey. Officers are progressing discussion on a number of key development sites and work has recently commenced on construction (e.g., at Dulnain Bridge) and is progressing well (e.g. with 12 new affordable houses at Tomintoul, delivered by the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Development Trust).
18. **Community participation:** Work is underway to prepare a new Community Action Plan in Carrbridge, led by Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS). The Marr Area Partnership continue to facilitate a range of similar projects in the east of the Park. Meanwhile, preparations are being made for wide range of work as part of the Heritage Horizons/Cairngorms 2030 Project. Commissioned work has been advertised on the Public Contracts Scotland website for projects involving community engagement and also perceptions of landscape change. Discussion is underway with Scottish Government about the establishment of a new Regional Climate Action Hub for the Park.

19. **Badenoch Great Place Project:** The project has now formally closed but legacy work continues, led by a legacy board (chaired by Karen Derrick of VABS) and Badenoch Heritage, the community-led SCIO that was established. Work is underway to develop the Badenoch Storylands Sessions and, to pick up on Scotland's Year of Stories and work on the Spirit of the Highlands project.

Stakeholder Engagement

20. **National Park Partnership Plan:** Around 40 face-to-face and online sessions were carried out with a range of audiences for NPPP4, including community groups, schools, farmers / other land managers and local businesses. Whilst attendance was impacted by Covid-19, over 500 people and 50+ organisations were engaged through these activities. We plan to continue this engagement over the months to come to provide stakeholders with clear feedback on the results and to promote connections to Heritage Horizons.

We also commissioned independent research agency Scotinform to conduct 17 one-to-one interviews with audiences that were under-represented last time around. This included ethnic minority groups and audiences with accessibility needs, as well as land managers, local businesses, community groups and health providers. A paid and organic social media advertising campaign reached nearly 500k people across the formal and informal phases, including local residents, workers and visitors to the Park. Content was liked, shared or commented on 3,673 times. The team also created a partner toolkit of resources for e-newsletters, social media and print publications.

In total, we received 1,453 responses as part of the formal consultation, an almost fivefold increase from five years ago. The Planning and Communications teams have been working through these responses in detail over the past month or so and will share highlights from this publicly over the next few weeks.

21. **Heritage Horizons:** Two workshops were carried out in early March with project leads across all 25 Heritage Horizons projects, with the aim of mapping the various stakeholders we are working with via the programme, and coordinating engagement activities over the next few months. Alongside this, we are pulling together a follow-up promotional film (narrated by a young Gaelic speaker from Carrbridge) that explains how we plan to deliver this ambitious programme of work, as well as a series of short project overviews and 'spotlight on' blog pieces to give audiences a better idea of what each project involves. Both projects should be complete by late March / early April.

Communications

22. **Managing for visitors:** Building on the successful managing for visitor's partnership in 2021 under the #CairngormsTogether umbrella, we are working with the Cairngorms Business Partnership, VisitScotland and NatureScot to take forward a targeted digital campaign to reach those audiences that do not typically engage with our existing channels. The aim is to positively influence behaviour in the planning stages before individuals or groups travel to the National Park, and the campaign will dovetail with national activity (led by VisitScotland), SOAC-specific activity (led by NatureScot) and the existing organic social media activity of CNPA and CBP. Key

areas of focus include responsible dog walking, wildfires, wild camping, parking issues, and wild swimming. The first stage of the campaign will go live ahead of the Easter season.

23. **Cairngorms Nature:** A new website for the Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend is being worked up in time for the first in-person programme for two years. The new site will be fully mobile responsive and accessible and will provide a more straightforward mechanism to promote the variety of events hosted by CNPA and partners. The event will be promoted through a range of local media channels, via door drop to postcodes both in and outside the National Park, and via a targeted social media campaign.
24. **Corporate Communications:** In addition to NPPP4 promotion, press releases were created to recognise the peatland team winning a 'Rural Natural Capital' SHIRE award, a new fund for youth projects in the National Park, CNPA signing up to the Young Person's Guarantee scheme, the launch of Wee Walks Week, and a variety of planning updates. We also worked with National Geographic and VisitScotland on a paid-for editorial called '[Scotland's Storylands](#)', published at the start of the year. The piece featured interviews with CNPA Ranger Polly Freeman, Merryn Glover, Hamish Napier, canoe guide Dave Craig and various other National Park residents.

Work is ongoing on the 2021 Annual Review, which will feature case studies from across CNPA's rural development, conservation and visitor management work. As in previous years, this will be published online and made available via our website. We are also costing a hard copy residents' newsletter, covering key areas such as the rollout of NPPP4 and Heritage Horizons, conservation, planning, rural development and land management updates, and a spotlight on human stories from the National Park. Depending on budget and staff resource, this is likely to be distributed three or four times a year.

25. **Website and social media:** In 2021, we reached 351,820 website sessions, a 7% increase on the 2020 figure and in line with growth from 2019 (but short of our 400k target). We reached 72,300 followers across 3 Facebook pages, 1 Instagram account, 1 LinkedIn account and 5 Twitter accounts. This was an increase of 50% on the previous year. This growth can be attributed to focusing on building our Instagram and LinkedIn audiences, including reaching our end of year goal of 10,000 followers on Instagram.

Our existing website is now well over six years old and starting to show its age, not least from a usability and accessibility standpoint (as highlighted by the recent DAC audit). We have just embarked on a technical review our current site and wider digital ecosystem, and will take forward facilitated audience-centred workshops, comparator benchmarking and user testing, to help inform a detailed technical specification for the new website (or websites). The technical spec will form the basis of a formal website tender, which we hope to develop within the next six to 12 months, depending on the complexity of the process itself.

26. **Green Space Dark Skies:** This UK-wide will take place between the months of April and September, with around 20 events happening in National Parks and AONBs

up and down the country. Led by outdoor arts experts Walk the Plank, the aim is to 'take the nation on a journey through our National Parks and AONBs, to a climactic closing moment across the UK that will be broadcast to millions on the BBC'.

At the heart of the project are up to 20,000 so-called 'Lumenators' – people from all walks of life, each carrying a low impact light into the landscape. These lights will be sensitive to the night-time environment and will be GPS enabled, meaning that the organisers can create unique patterns in the landscape based on where individuals are located.

We'll be working closely with Walk the Plank, CBP and others to engage local community groups and businesses in this process, with a particular emphasis on participants from ethnic minority communities, disability groups and areas of multiple deprivation. All CO₂ emissions from the events will be tracked and reported on, with the aim of delivering a net carbon positive programme across the six months of operation.

Organisational Development

27. **Business Continuity Planning (BCP):** the business continuity team, with extensive support from the wider corporate and communications groups, is now implementing the end of the BCP operational phase and managing a return to office for all staff on a hybrid office / home working arrangement. The initial three months implementation of our hybrid working arrangements will be monitored and reviewed, with any further amendments implemented from June 2022. The team are also working to implement effective, robust arrangements for hybrid board meetings.
28. **Staffing update:** Since December, staffing updates are as follows:
- a) Staff who left the organisation were:
 - i. Bruce MacDonald: fixed term internship (Gaelic and Comms Intern) came to an end at the end of December
 - ii. Douglas Carchrie: Fixed term internship (Mountain Trail Intern) ended in January
 - iii. Margaret Smith retired as PA to the CEO and Convener.
 - b) Internal promotions, following a competitive internal recruitment process were:
 - i. Tania Alliod was appointed to the Heritage Horizons post of Learning and Engagement Officer, with effect from December 2021
 - ii. Sarah Henshall started in her new role as Head of Conservation on 1st January 2022

Recruitment is currently live for posts that have become vacant as a result of internal appointments and retirement/resignations.

- c) External appointments, following a competitive external recruitment process were as follows:
 - i. Vicky Hilton was appointed to the fixed term post of Outdoor Access Officer, replacing Adam Streeter-smith who was promoted to Recreation and Access Manager. She joined the Authority in January

- ii. Anna Ronayne was appointed to the fixed term HH Sustainable Transport Officer post, joining the Authority in January
- iii. Louise Emslie joined the Authority in February as HH Green Health Ranger, fixed term.
- iv. Sjoerd Tel was appointed to the fixed term HH Sustainable Transport Officer post, joining the Authority in February
- v. Moya Macdonald was appointed to the fixed term HH Nature Based Solutions Officer post, joining the Authority in February
- vi. Lewis Pate was appointed to the fixed term HH Nature Based Solutions Officer post, joining the Authority in February

All the Heritage Horizons posts were successfully recruited

29. Youth Employment:

a) **Graduate posts:**

- i. Calum Guy started as Graduate Trainee Accountant in January. Fixed term post
- ii. Craig Lewis started as Graduate Trainee Accountant in February. Fixed term post.

b) **Work Placements:** - CNPA is hosting an environmental science student at UHI on a two-week work placement. This is part of a programme that we run with UHI to provide students an opportunity to see what the world of work is like in the environmental sector.

CNPA is a Young Persons' Guarantee recognised organisation. In addition to focussing on Youth Employment, the HR team will be working with the two local secondary schools on employability skills.

30. Shared Services: Continued work to provide HR and payroll support to the Scottish Land Commission.

31. Organisational Development: The Best Companies survey was completed by 77% of our staff. CNPA was listed on 3 of the Best Companies league tables – Sector, Region and Medium sized organisation. The results are currently being consulted with staff and will inform the next iteration of the Organisational Development Strategy.

32. Cairngorms Equalities Advisory Panel (EAP): 3 new members were recruited to the EAP, joining in January. They are Liliana Corriere, Lina Payne and Rebecca Vinall. The panel meets monthly, chaired by the Boards Equality Champion, Fiona McLean.

33. LEADER/Cairngorms Trust: The 2014 to 2021 LEADER programme has now been closed. The team are managing the effective closedown and ensuring our records are “audit ready” for any domestic or EU led audit of the Cairngorms or Scottish LEADER Programme. The Cairngorms Trust achieved the implementation of new integrated transport signage outside Aviemore rail station, in partnership with HITRANS, and has completed a year of free ebike loans to residents in support of health and wellbeing improvements. The team are also bringing the £50,000 “Testing Change” fund to a close, which has funded the activity of a Youth Local Action Group

(Youth LAG) and a “Green Change Fund” of community led climate and nature action projects. The team are now also supporting the Heritage Horizons Community Grants project, blending work supporting Scottish Government LEADER replacement initiatives with the development of community grant structures within the Cairngorms 2030: Heritage Horizons Programme.

34. **Cairngorms Trust: Charity activities and voluntary giving:** the Cairngorms Trust is seeking to reinvigorate the development and roll out of voluntary giving opportunities across the Cairngorms. Donations of around £1,800 were received in the last quarter, with full year donations expected in the range of £6,000 to £9,000 despite ongoing significant disruption from COVID19 impacts. The Trust aims to revisit the business plan for the development of the voluntary giving scheme in the early part of 2022, with a view to significantly increasing the scale of voluntary and other charitable donations by 2023/24.

Grant Moir
March 2022

Board Convener Report – For Information

External Engagements (1st December 2021 – 18 March 2022)

In addition to scheduled Board meetings and internal meetings, I have attended the following external engagements in my capacity as Convener of the Board since our last Board meeting.

Date	Engagement	Venue

Xander McDade
Board Convener