

# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

---

## 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

2. **Cairngorms Nature:**  
Members of the Cairngorms Nature beaver working group, including Scottish Land and Estates, Spey Fisheries Board and National Farmers Union Scotland, are working closely with CNPA in reaching out to land managers and interested parties in the Park to discuss the opportunities and concerns around beaver translocation. CNPAs overall approach and work to date continues to be highly regarded by stakeholders. Recruitment will be underway soon for a fixed term post focused on engagement, submitting an application, overseeing translocation and supporting land managers.
3. **Woodland Creation:**  
There are currently five large woodland creation schemes across the Park at various stages of design/ consultation/ seeking approval but no hectares have been formally approved since the last CEO report in September. Two smaller schemes at an early stage of planning have been brought forward for discussion. We are also discussing two Long Term Forest Plans for existing woodlands with forest agents. Since September David Hetherington has been promoted to Nature Networks Manager and Fiona Holmes has replaced him as our new Woodland Advisor.
4. **Peatland Restoration:**  
Offers of grant have been made for nine projects and as of 31<sup>st</sup> October, diggers were on the ground on seven locations across the Park with additional projects scheduled to start soon. We are on track to achieve our programme target of bringing 905ha of peatland under restoration by end March '23. We have recruited two highly experienced Peatland Officers over the summer and are currently recruiting a Trainee Project Assistant. This post is part of our response to the skills shortage affecting peatland restoration at all levels.

Landowners remain keen to engage and a pipeline of potential projects is developing for next year. Contractor capacity appears to be growing slowly. We are optimistic we can continue to increase the area of peatland brought under restoration in future years.

**5. Cairngorms Capercaillie Project:**

Action plans with the business, visitor and mountain biking communities are delivering peer managed refuge areas and awareness rising to encourage responsible enjoyment. A Deeside action plan has just been developed and delivery continues in Carrbridge promoting responsible enjoyment and population data collection. Action planning with members of the dog walking community in Badenoch and Strathspey is in the early stages of development. Information on population genetics is currently being analysed and results will be made public soon. Habitat improvements continue on a range of estates throughout the Park.

**6. Moorland Management:**

We have been working to develop an action plan with the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership where we agree projects which we can take forward together. Potential projects include collaborative peatland restoration, biodiversity audits and the expansion of scrub. The Park Authority have also continued to meet with moorland managers and recently met with the SGA.

**7. Deer Management:**

The implementation of the recommendations of the Deer Working Group is now led by the Strategic Deer Board which oversees work on four workstreams which are i) developing Legislation, ii) use of Regulation, iii) developing Incentives and iv) public sector Operations. Grant Moir sits on the Strategic Deer Board and chairs the developing Incentives group. CNPA is also represented on the Operations group, where there is a particular focus on work in the National Parks and includes the preparation of Strategic Land Use Plans via Cairngorms 2030.

NatureScot are currently leading on a Section 7 (voluntary deer control) Agreement for the South Grampians DMG. This Agreement attempts to resolve issues around deer impacts on the Caenlochan SAC.

## **People**

- 8. Wellbeing Economy Project and Economic Steering Group:** WEAll Scotland are continuing to progress the development stage of this work as part of Cairngorms 2030 Programme. WEAll Scotland and CNPA staff facilitated a bespoke seminar with Cairngorms Business Partnership members. The team have also been delivering workshops to determine “cornerstone indicators” through the Heritage Horizons Cairngorms 2030 Roadshow Events in Nethy, Braemar, Ballater and Blair Atholl. Work is continuing towards development of the cornerstone and business indicators, and findings from the engagement events and online workshops will be presented to the Wellbeing Economy Working Group and Economic Steering Group in December. This work is crucial in developing the Wellbeing Economy Action Plan in 2023.

9. **Volunteering and Health Walks:** Volunteer Rangers continued to operate across the National Park, and a recent call for additional volunteers has seen a further 30 added to the existing pool of 30 volunteer rangers. The Volunteer Experience Programme saw further events in the Autumn giving a number of refugees, asylum seekers and families connected to charities a chance to enjoy the Park.
10. **Outdoor Access & Long Distance Routes:** Work is under way to significantly improve the section of the Speyside Way through Anagach Woods to widen the range of people that can use the route and this should be completed in December. Further smaller repairs / maintenance and fencing work is currently being planned for other sections of the route. Near Braemar work has stopped temporarily on delivery of a new path by Outdoor Access Trust Scotland while a new specification is drawn up to ensure final path is as accessible as possible by wide range of users.
11. **Climate Conscious Communities:** A series of workshops have been held with communities, facilitated by Keep Scotland Beautiful. The in-person events were in Blair Atholl on 25<sup>th</sup> October and Ballater and Braemar on 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> November with a final online event on 17<sup>th</sup> November.
12. **Community Engagement:** Ongoing meetings have taken place, or are scheduled with our key delivery partners in delivery Community Action Plans within CNPA, in particular Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey and Marr Area Partnership. The CNPA and VABS are facilitating a meeting of the Association of Cairngorms Communities, scheduled for 30<sup>th</sup> November at the Lecht to look at the future of the Association of Cairngorms Communities across the Cairngorms and also consider implications of the Cairngorms 2030 Programme.

## Place

13. **Local Development Plan - Planning Guidance:** We are waiting for Scottish Government to approve of the LDP Housing Supplementary Guidance which we hope will happen before the end of the calendar year. Once in place this will complete the full suite of guidance for the Local Development Plan.
14. **Planning Casework:** In September the Planning Committee approved a large battery storage scheme (49.9 MW) beside the Boat of Garten substation, a ski tow at Cairngorm Mountain and a prior approval application for forestry related tracks at Kinrara. A Proposals of Application Notice for a distillery and warehousing south east of Spey Dam was also considered. At the November meeting, the Planning Committee responded to two windfarm proposals outside the National Park and to a Proposal of Application Notice for housing on the allocated HI site at Ballater. A planning appeal against the Planning Committee's refusal of an application for lodges associated with the Glen Clova Hotel was dismissed by the Department for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA).
15. **Housing Delivery:** CNPA are continuing to support Cairngorms Business Partnership and a number of social enterprises with housing delivery projects. A project at the Colquhounie Hotel in Strathdon is being developed by the development

trust and owner with advice from the Communities Housing Trust. Three community housing projects have won grants from the most recent Cairngorms Trust's Cairngorms Community Led Vision Fund to support community housing projects.

- 16. Managing for Visitors:** The Managing for Visitors Group, chaired by CNPA and involving landowners and managers from across the Park, continued to meet fortnightly until the end of October. Meetings are continuing on a monthly basis over the winter. Overall, feedback from partners about key hotspots sites remains relatively positive with staff and infrastructure largely able to cope with the visitor numbers and pressures but with some notable exceptions, coinciding with holiday weekends and fine weather coincided with the weekend.
- 17. Ranger Services:** CNPA seasonal rangers continued until the end of the summer season (30 October) with five permanent rangers now continuing over the winter. Their presence on the ground has continued to be a valuable contribution to advising visitors on appropriate behaviour and minimising visitor pressures and complements the communications activity on raising awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. All Rangers Services in the Park were asked to feed into the end of season review. The proposed joint event bringing together all the rangers in the Park, proposed for September was cancelled due to it falling within the period of national mourning but a smaller scale event was held at the end of the season.
- 18. Active Travel** Significant activity has continued on the Sustainable Transport & Active Travel elements of Cairngorms 2030 Programme with engagement sessions being held in virtually all the main communities across the Park. Contractors working on the Active communities: Aviemore and Badenoch & Strathspey projects have reached the draft report stage after which more detailed feasibility work will be undertaken on preferred options. Consultation has finished on the Active communities: Blair Atholl & Killiecrankie project which will see draft proposals shortly while the Upper Deeside Active and Sustainable Travel project is still at the consultation stage with events in Ballater and Braemar held in mid-November.
- 19. Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan:** The Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan is presented at the November Board meeting for approval alongside a report on the Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme. CNPA is working with consultants to review the initial findings from the Cairngorm and Glenmore Transport Study as part of the Cairngorms 2030 Programme while advising Forest and Land Scotland and the Highland Council on way forwards with the stalled lochside parking project.
- 20. Sustainable Tourism Action Plan:** The Sustainable Tourism Action Plan has been presented and discussed via the Equalities Advisory Panel, the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership and individual meetings have taken place with Cairngorms Business Partnership, VABS and other stakeholders to ensure the action plan reflects the Cairngorms National Park as whole and meets the requirements for our European Charter resubmission. The plan is presented at the CNPA Board in November for approval and onward submission to Europarc and a visit by an international team of verifiers is expected in Spring 2023.

- 21. Tourism and Business:** The recent quarterly for the Cairngorms Business Barometer were presented at their annual conference in November. Levels of occupancy reported for the period were in line with the norm for the Quarter but slightly lower than those recorded during Q3 2021. However, looking to the future, expectations for customer numbers and turnover for the next 12 months are somewhat less positive than the norm. Overall levels of confidence are somewhat lower than the quarter average and decreased on those recorded 12 months ago while confidence for the long term (next 2 years) is at its lowest level since 2012. CNPA staff gave an overview of the Cairngorms 2030 Programme at the conference and all the presentations and the full Business Barometer reports are available at the link below <https://www.cairngormschamber.com/membernews.html>

## Stakeholder Engagement

- 22. National Park Partnership Plan:** NPPP4 was launched officially by Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, on 23 August at Boat of Garten Community Hall. The event was attended by more than 100 partners, key stakeholders and community representatives, and featured a keynote address from Ms Slater and spotlights on each of the Nature, People and Place sections of the plan. The event was BSL interpreted and captioned. Alongside the publication of the plan itself, we produced a 16-page 'Park Plan at a glance' document which was mailed to over 12,000 households across the Park, summarising key themes in the plan and how residents' feedback had helped shaped the final outcome.
- 23. LGBT Youth Charter:** We are working in partnership with LGBT Youth Scotland on their LGBT Charter, a programme that enables organisations to proactively include LGBTI people in every aspect of their work. The programme kicked off with online training for CNPA staff (including testimonials from LGBTI young people), and was followed up by an in-person, facilitated session to inform an organisation-wide action plan over the next 12 months. This will include a dedicated communications campaign celebrating the LGBTI community within the Park and raising awareness of the challenges they face.
- 24. Green Space Dark Skies:** GSDS was an innovative, low-impact lighting project illuminating national parks across the UK. At the heart of the project were up to 20,000 'Lumenators' – people from all walks of life, each carrying a GPS-enabled light so organisers could create unique patterns in the landscape. A GSDS event took place at Loch Insh in late summer featuring storyteller Merryn Glover, musician Willie Campbell and visual artist Claire MacDonald. The event specifically targeted people who do not usually get to experience the Cairngorms. This included a group of Ukrainian citizens who had a chance to explore the loch by boat, and guests from Equal Adventure, a community interest company which specialises in offering water sports for disabled people. A Countryfile special on the project aired recently and can be seen at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001drlr>

## Communications

- 25. Active Cairngorms:** our summer paid-for managing for visitors campaign came to an end on 4 September after a period of two months. The campaign specifically targeted audiences we don't reach through our standard channels and was mostly driven through Facebook and Instagram. In total the campaign reached 1.8 million people and 12.4 million impressions (almost double the original estimate), with Facebook performing well with audiences over 45 and Instagram specialising in reaching younger demographics. Ads on parking, dog walking and camping performed best, with those for littering and outdoor toileting performing less well. Images without people performed better than those which included them, backing up visitor research conducted as part of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project. Alongside our paid-for work, we also produced a series of posts and videos for our owned channels, with these reaching around 170,000 people across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Findings from the project will inform our long-term approach to visitor information and behaviour change campaigns (both in terms of ad placement and content / design).
- 26. Cairngorms Nature:** Species work came to the fore during the period, with press and social media activity taking place for the release of the national capercaillie survey results at the end of September (in partnership with NatureScot, RSPB Scotland and Forestry and Land Scotland) and wader survey results (in partnership with ECMP members). Successful breeding programmes for the critically endangered pine hoverfly and Scottish wildcats – both in partnership with RZSS – were announced, whilst the Park Authority's role in reintroducing beavers to the area was also covered. Preparations are also underway for the Cairngorms Nature Festival in May.
- 27. Website and social media:** A series of stakeholder workshops have taken place to inform the development of a new Cairngorms National Park website, including with members of our Equalities Advisory Panel, local businesses, residents and partners. Further workshops are planned with land managers and Cairngorms Nature team members over coming months, and this activity will be supported by more detailed surveys of web users on the existing site. Findings from this work will be combined with a technical analysis of our current digital estate, with our agency partners producing a detailed technical spec and suite of user journeys for public tender in the spring.

Across social media we have shared a number of new Cairngorms Voices blog and photo story pieces, celebrating the people who live, visit and work in the National Park. These include a [celebration of the Speyside Way](#) by Shaun Patterson, a piece about [volunteers maintaining paths across the Park](#) by Becky Wilson, and a photo story from artist Rachael Horsburgh on a [folklore map of Glenmore Forest](#).

- 28. Publications:** December will see the launch of a new 12-page magazine for residents in the National Park. The magazine will be published three times a year and will share easy-to-digest stories on what is taking place in communities across the National Park, as well as key nature and conservation activity being undertaken as part of NPPP4. Printed on 100% recycled paper using vegetable-based inks, we will balance any carbon impacts by creating native Scots pine, birch, rowan, willow and aspen woodland in the National Park.

## **Organisational Development**

- 29. Business Continuity Planning (BCP).** We have recently conducted the first 3-month review of the trial Hybrid Approach, which commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> June. Results suggest that staff have adapted well to the hybrid working environment. There is a noticeable increase in numbers attending the office, and the majority of staff are content with the working arrangements and office configuration.
- 30.** The Staff Gathering took place in October with almost 100% turnout. Feedback has been very positive, and the event achieved its objectives of giving staff an opportunity to meet one another, and new colleagues, as well as finding out more about the Heritage Horizons 2030 Programme, the Branding Project and the NPPP4

### **Staffing update:**

- 31.** Since 1<sup>st</sup> September, staffing updates to the end of November are as follows:
- a) Staff who left the organisation were:
    - i. Kasia Stringer-Ladd, HH Communications & Engagement Officer
    - ii. The Seasonal Rangers; Fiona Brewis, Blair Johnston, Danny O'Brien, Sott Hastings, Craig Fraser, Tony Seivewright, Gillian Gibson
    - iii. The Trainee Rangers; Joe Mcilwraith, Kirsty Menzies, Sam Philips and Tom Frerdiksson
    - iv. Nina Caudrey, Planning Officer (Development Planning and Environmental Advice),
    - v. Naomi Kaye, Cairngorms Capercaillie Project Coordinator
  - b) Staff who joined the organisation, following a competitive external recruitment process were:-
    - i. Sara Denner, Receptionist & Admin Assistant
    - ii. Ewan Campbell, Peatland Action Project Officer
    - iii. Simon Thomas, Peatland Action Project Officer
    - iv. Brenna Jessie, Digital Content Manager
    - v. Adam Fraser, Monitoring Ecologist
    - vi. Karen Aldridge, Planning Ecological Adviser
  - c) Internal staff appointments, following a competitive internal recruitment process were:
    - i. David Hetherington was appointed to the Nature Networks Manager
    - ii. Fiona Holmes was appointed to the Woodland Adviser post,
    - iii. Lewis Pate was appointed to the farmland conservation officer post
    - iv. Jenny Allen was appointed to the Cairngorms 2030 Programme Manager

### **Europarc Conference**

- 32.** The Convener and Director of Planning and Place attended Europarc Conference in France in October focussing on climate and nature issues. It was good to see Scotland's strong profile in this important European network. Good contacts were made and discussions took place about a range of issues including an international perspective on the planned work on Scotland on future national parks, working with young people and our collaborative work with other protected areas at UK level.

**Youth Employment:**

33. Katherine Willing and Calum Guy, both of whom joined the organisation as graduate trainees/interns attended the Young Scotland Programme, along with 30 other delegates from across Scotland. This was a residential, week-long course aimed at enhancing communications skills, inspiring confidence and broadening the intellectual horizons of people in the early years of their career. Both gained tremendous benefits from this opportunity.
34. In addition to Alfie Ford (Grantown Grammar School), who is on a Work Experience placement with the Park Authority one afternoon a week during term time with the IT team, Liam Beats (Nairn Academy) is on a Work Experience placement with the Autumn Season Ranger team.

**Equalities:**

35. 88% of Park Authority staff have now attended the Equalities training delivered by JRS KnowHow. A mop-up session in December should capture those who missed the opportunity. JRS KnowHow will be delivering an in-person session for Board members in the New Year.
36. **Cairngorms Trust:** The Trust Board has made funding decisions to award around £120,000 of funding made available by the Scottish Government in the 2022/23 round of funding aimed at testing approaches to Community Led Local Development in replacement of LEADER. A contract has been established with a local business to support the e-bike active transport project, with the business maintaining the e-bikes and supporting the delivery and collection of e-bikes to and from clients who have free use of them for a period in order to support health needs and / or trial life style changes toward more sustainable transport.

**CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**  
**Formal Board Paper | 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022**