

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**Title: CEO REPORT AND CONVENER UPDATE**

**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.

**Conservation:**

2. **Cairngorms Nature:** Over the last two rounds of Scottish Government's Biodiversity Challenge Fund, Cairngorms Nature partners have attracted approximately £200,000 of conservation funding targeted at delivering the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan. Works which were previously delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions are now underway and back on track for delivery by March 2021. These include river restoration and riparian planting, wet grassland management for waders, pine hoverfly captive breeding and reintroduction, habitat creation for rare invertebrates, aspen planting and protection from grazing, and fresh water pearl mussel translocation.

Work continues on the Cairngorms Nature Index, developing a trial model for freshwater systems in the Park to assess habitat extent and condition, species distribution and abundance, and indicators of ecosystem functionality. Planning starts for Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend 2021, with strong partner support for an event which incorporates both virtual and socially distanced outdoor experiences.

3. **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project:** Recruitment is complete. A Project Manager, Community Ranger, Gamekeeper, Capercaillie Advisory Officer and Capercaillie Advisory Assistant now form the Project Team. They will soon be joined by a Communications Officer, Administration Officer and Project Officer. An Operational Management Team is also now in place, made up of representatives from all of the communities and organisations that the project is working with. More information about the Project Team and Operational Management Team is available [here](#).

Baseline surveys have been conducted to measure the impact of the project's habitat improvement work and predator control in targeted areas is underway. A contractor is currently being recruited to analyse the genetic diversity of the capercaillie population in the National Park using DNA extracted from capercaillie feathers.

The Carrbridge Capercaillie Group are preparing to publish their priorities for the next six months; based on the Carrbridge Capercaillie Conservation Strategy, the community consultation results, brood survey results and changes necessary in light of Covid-19. Community-led action work with visitors and mountain bikers is also continuing to develop, and a workshop to identify ways in which the project can help

the business community to help capercaillie will be hosted by the Cairngorms Business Partnership in early December.

4. **Woodland expansion targets:** We are 75% of the way through the 2017-22 reporting period but have now reached 95% of woodland expansion target of 5,000ha. The past year has seen the approval in the National Park of 1400 ha of new woodland by natural regeneration alone. This is the same amount of woodland creation as was achieved in the whole of England in 2019 by both planting and regeneration. We are continuing to discuss opportunities for woodland creation with a number of landowners across the Park. Around a dozen or so estates are currently proposing predominantly native woodland schemes of at least 100ha. Some of these will be nearer 1000 ha in size and some will contribute significantly to strengthening a forest habitat network across the National Park by linking up woodlands along and between river catchments.
5. **Peatland Restoration:** Contractors are making good progress on peatland restoration work on sites across the National Park. There are two projects on Balmoral Estate above Loch Muick, two projects on the south west of Glenfeshie Estate, two projects on Lynaberack Estate on the slopes of Meall Chuaich and one project on RSPB Abernethy below Bynack More. Work on all these sites started in September with Covid-19 protocols and the projects should all complete by Christmas. We have one further site on Tulchan Estate that we hope to complete this year.
6. **Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership:** The Landscape Partnership is in its final weeks and almost everything is complete, but it is still a race against time to complete a number of projects. Covid restrictions have severely affected many areas of work, and caused some significant delays, but the staff team led by our Head of Land Management are working extremely hard. My thanks to Will, all the team and partners on the TGLP Board. Final things to finish include: The interpretation boards which have been beautifully designed and prepared will be going in over the next few weeks. Brown tourist signs highlighting many of the key features of the programme have been approved and will be going in soon. New Dark Sky Park friendly lighting is being fitted in dozens of farms. Final tidying up and landscaping is being carried out at Blairfindy castle and willow bank protection being installed at Scalan. Extra work on the Speyside way spur to repair recent flood damage is being completed. Agreements for purchasing a new storage facility for the community to use into the future are being negotiated. Finally, 10 year Management and Maintenance agreements with all the many partners are being finalised so that beyond the life of the LP programme we can ensure everything is kept in good heart, so that we and the partners in the community can build on all the superb work that has been done over the last several years.

### **Visitor Experience:**

7. **Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum:** Post 'Lockdown' we have seen a 100% increase in access issues being registered with CNPA as the Access Authority including paths being blocked by recently locked gates, temporary fencing and inappropriate signage. We have also seen a new use of social media to raise 'ad-hoc' access concerns. On a more positive note path counters indicate a significant increase in people getting outdoors with the August count for the Old Logging Way being the

highest ever by 30%, some 13,300 uses with 87% on bikes. The CLOAF will virtually meet again in early 2021 to review this year and advise on 2021.

8. **Speyside Way:** In partnership with Newtonmore Community an official Long Distance Route branded stone is being installed at a start/finish point in the centre of Newtonmore next to a stunning new shinty stick seat and associated interpretation. The route has been remapped and interpretation panels developed to install in villages along the route, and new signage is now in place from Kingussie to Tromie Bridge; all in preparation for a potential formal opening in Spring 2021. While the route is fully useable there are several sections within the National Park that require upgrade and improvement.
9. **Mountains and People Project:** This five year Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland led Lottery funded project supported by both National Park Authorities, Nature Scotland and Forestry & Land Scotland is nearing completion having upgraded 53km of key mountain paths in Cairngorms including the popular Munro's of Beinn a Ghlo (Perthshire) & Mount Keen and Lochnagar (Aberdeenshire). Further work is required with OATS to collectively agree how we best support the ongoing maintenance of these paths and the volunteers engaged with the project.
10. **Seasonal Rangers:** The summer contract for the nine seasonal rangers came to an end in October with the team having engaged face to face with over 5000 visitors and supporting the work of land managers and communities in encouraging visitors to Cairngorms to have a safe, enjoyable and responsible time. We have recently appointed two short term winter rangers to continue the work with visitors as required and keep the engagement with partners and communities in preparation for 2021 They are working closely with the recently appointed Capercaille Project ranger.
11. **Volunteering & Health Walks:** In August both the 38 volunteer rangers and 14 Health Walk Groups (supported by Paths for All) were given the opportunity to safely restart if they wanted. Many of the volunteer rangers have enjoyed getting outdoors supporting both the work of CNPA seasonal rangers and partner ranger services, and over half the health walk groups are back walking.
12. **Local Information Centres:** It has been a rather 'on hold' year for LIC's with some mainly in shut down and many of those open focussed on mainstream activity. We will host a virtual gathering this winter to bring the partners together to plan ahead for 2021. On a positive note; Glenshee Pottery successfully applied for Green Recovery Fund to redevelop information, interpretation in the centre, Glenlivet Mountain Bike Centre has joined the team, and Braemar tourism group has secured funding to develop an unstaffed information centre in the village.
13. **Education and Inclusion:** Take up of **John Muir Award** has recommenced following 'Lockdown' with 789 awards so far this year contrasting with a usual 3,000 per year. However, an impressive backlog of 3,584 people are currently registered to undertake the award in and around the Cairngorms. The CNPA, LL&TNPA and Nature Scotland partnership is supporting **Backbone** in developing two new projects; a symposium engaging with BAME communities in the outdoors in response to the Black Lives Matter campaign, and a new, one year, and version of the

Community Leadership Programme. The **Cairngorms Youth Action Team** virtually participated in Europarc conference and are inputting to the Heritage Horizons lottery bid.

14. **Information and Interpretation:** Main activity has focussed on developing Speyside way and supporting the work of Badenoch Great Place Scheme and Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership. After a hiatus this year we will be working on the the visitor leaflets likely to be needed in 2021.

### **Rural Development:**

15. **Local Development Plan 2020:** The Plan was approved by CNPA Board on 13 November and will be sent to Scottish Ministers for final adoption.
16. **Development on the ground:** While some development slowed in 2020, work started on the new distillery near Grantown-on-Spey and the brand for the new whisky was launched - 'The Cairn'. Ground works began this summer and erection of the steel frame started in November. Work has continued throughout the year on the new Badenoch & Strathspey Community Hospital and Healthcare Centre in Aviemore which it due to be completed in 2021.
17. **Cairngorm Mountain:** All planning conditions were discharged on time and construction work on the funicular repair has now commenced. Advice has been given to HIE on the draft Masterplan and further meetings are planned soon to take this forward.
18. **Community-led Housing Delivery:** Community Housing group met in September and progress with several projects was noted. The two main projects are taking different approaches to delivering their housing although both are working to similar timescales. Braemar have appointed a design team and secured loan funding from CAF Venturesome (a first in Scotland) for this stage of work. They will then tender for the build once the design is agreed. In Tomintoul a contractor has been appointed for a fixed price design and build scheme. Both hope to submit planning applications in early 2021. In Dulnain Bridge, feasibility work is underway on affordable self-build plots in the village. Scottish Ministers have announced that Rural Housing Fund is to be extended - which is very welcome.
19. **Economic Action Plan:** The business support programme led by Growbiz is now established and is currently recruiting mentors for its one to one new mentoring programme and has held its first workshop to establish a Cairngorms women's business network. Growbiz are also working to develop an artisan hub for the National Park, reenergizing and enhancing the Creative Cairngorms network. The Smart Village concept, also led by Growbiz, is now being developed with groups in Grantown, Braemar and Ballater.
20. **Tourism Action Plan:** Cairngorms Tourism Partnership met on 9 November to review progress with implementation of the Tourism Action Plan and consider the strategic changes required to our approach due to Covid 19. A paper will be taken to

the March meeting of Board. The Heritage Horizons proposals and the recent visitor survey results were also discussed.

21. **Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund:** Work started in November in **Glenmore** constructing a 2.4m wide tarmac path linking Old Logging Way to Beach, Campsite, Visitor Centre, Reindeer Centre and the multi-use path to Glenmore Lodge - creating the first direct path from the village to the beach and linking OLW (13,300 uses in August 2021) safely to the key attractions. Road slow raised bumps will also be installed on the minor county road at key crossing points to slow vehicles down. No applications were submitted for Round 3 of the Fund but work is being progressed for future applications.
22. **A9 Dualling project:** Transport Scotland will undertake a month long public consultation from 17th November to 17th December on the two Non-Motorised User (NMU) route options for the Aviemore to Carrbridge section; direct following B9152, A95 and B9153 and indirect following Speyside way to Boat of Garten, then NCN7 to A95 & B9153 to Carrbridge. Transport Scotland arranged a preplanning meeting with Highland Council in August attended by CNPA; planning, natural heritage and visitor services representatives.
23. **Badenoch Great Place Project:** The BGPP has had to adapt its programme due to the impact of COVID, revising its approved Activity Plan and gaining a 9 month project extension from the NLHF. It has focused on those elements that will form the content that will populate the public facing deliverables. The visitor itineraries are being developed and a key storytelling contract has now been let. 3D visualisations of Ruthven, Dun da Lamh and Torr Advie have been produced and the first set of aerial imagery of the area and key sites has now been completed. All this material will feed into both the website and the App which is due to launch next Spring. Very successful Badenoch Heritage Festival was held recently and the shinty trail and website were launched. A workshop to plan out the legacy for the project has recently been held.
24. **Digital connectivity:** The Cairngorms Digital Steering Group is meeting later in November and will discuss roll out of R100 project and Broadband Voucher scheme. A project to use the "internet of things" to establish a new "Lorowan" Network and then connect visitor and traffic monitoring devices in the Cairngorm/ Glenmore and Aviemore area is being planned.
25. **Green Recovery Fund:** The Fund proved to be hugely popular and was heavily oversubscribed. 13 projects across the Cairngorms were chosen to share the £130,000 of funding available. Successful applicants include a new community woodland in Braemar, building a sustainable welcome for camper vans, a rare invertebrate's project and the start-up of up a new community facility in Kingussie. All projects have been provided with 40% of their grant up front with the rest to be claimed on during and on completion of the projects.
26. **Cairngorms Business Barometer Quarter 3 (July - September):** This study is undertaken by CBP members and is funded by CNPA. This survey has been running for more than 13 years. Note that the survey questionnaire was completed by more

than 100 businesses before the enhanced lock down measures and before the recent furlough extension.

- a) Businesses reported significant reductions in both customers and turnover compared to average and recent Q3's. This indicates that whilst visitor numbers were generally strong, businesses did not benefit financially and had a relatively poor trading quarter, perhaps reflecting the restrictions and the reduced capacity under which they were operating.
- b) Business confidence in the short (3 months) and medium (12 months) term continues to be very low compared to long term averages. Confidence in the long term (24 months) has reduced since Q2 2020 though is not as low as short and medium term confidence.
- c) 53% of businesses remain likely or very likely to reduce staff numbers (beyond normal seasonal levels) over the coming months.
- d) 25% of businesses expect to employ less staff in summer 2021 than they would 'normally' employ.
- e) 48% of businesses expect to have continued reduced profitability in summer 2021
- f) 15% of businesses have a low confidence of surviving (compared to 11% in the previous quarter)
- g) In terms of business support, the organisation which recorded the largest positive change in perception from Q2 2020 was CNPA - scores increased from 5.06 in Q2 2020 to 5.82 in Q3 2020. CNPA remains the highest place public sector organisation

The full Business Barometer results are available:

<https://www.visitcairngorms.com/barometer>

### **Stakeholder Engagement:**

26. The CEO is now sitting on the national Visitor Management Strategy Group and also co-chairs the Infrastructure and Investment sub-group. The CEO has also attended the EELG, CoHI and the NDPB Forum meetings during the autumn.
27. The CEO has had meetings with many different partners in relation to visitor management and the heritage horizons bids. The CEO has attended the Equalities Advisory Forum and Youth Action Team in the past month. Liaison meetings have been held with CES, NLHF, Spey Fisheries Board, HIE, KSB, LLTTNPA and NatureScot. The CEO has also attended the Highland Council Ward Area Committee and attended the Glenmore Review organised by FLS. Finally the CEO spoke at and SLE training event to around 100 land managers on access and visitor management,

### **Communications:**

28. **Cairngorms Nature Campaign:** Planning is about to start for the Cairngorms Nature BIG Weekend 2021 and the Steering Group will meet later in November to decide what this will look like. The [RSPB Nature of Scotland Awards](#) will be announced in an online ceremony. Our nominated project is the Dee Catchment

Partnership river restoration work, which has been shortlisted in the [Coasts and Waters category](#). There are also four other shortlisted projects within the Park: The Peesie Project (TGLP), Speyside Fields for Wildlife, Peatland ACTION and Scottish Wildcat Action. The final Climate Change film is being completed and should be available by the end of November.

29. **Make It Yours Campaign:** We launched, and are continuing to run, [#CairngormsAutumnViews](#) – a social media campaign designed to support businesses by encouraging visitors to the Park (whilst following covid restrictions). Other social media messaging has focused on encouraging residents and visitors to support businesses in the Park by shopping locally.
30. **Active Cairngorms:** We continue to help manage visitors to the Park, focusing on promoting clear, consistent and positive outdoor access advice to encourage responsible behaviour in the Park, including tackling litter, fires, wild camping and parking issues. To reach new audiences who don't follow the CNPA or other public body social media channels or visit our websites, we have worked with social media influencers and retail outlets to help get our messages across. This year's [Wee Walks Week](#) took place virtually, from 21-27 September. With a focus on the benefits of walking for health and wellbeing, we took the opportunity to highlight many of the paths around the Park's communities.
31. **Corporate Communications:** Scottish Government's COVID19 health and safety messages continue to be promoted through our social media activity and [website](#). October communications focused on youth and cultural heritage, with a number of blogs, case studies and social media highlights published. Our new online resource [The Shinty Trail](#) – prepared by Bruce MacDonald, our Gaelic Language intern – was launched in October, in both English and Gaelic. An online event about Shinty, and promoting the new online trail, was chaired by Fiona MacLean at the virtual Badenoch Heritage Festival. November communications will focus on the Green Recovery.

### Organisational Development:

32. **Business Continuity Planning (BCP):** The BCP team continues to meet regularly to plan around the next stages of the SG roadmap. Staff access to the building is currently limited to business critical reasons, which are approved and logged by Heads of Service. Access is currently restricted to a maximum of 12 staff/board with no access to the public. We also monitor staff attendance at site visits/external meetings, which have to be on the basis that they approved at Head of Service level as being business critical, and have implemented robust risk assessments and lone working systems to ensure staff safety and wellbeing. The BCP has been updated according to SG's new tiered system, which shows how restrictions may change depending on the tier the organisation is located. Staff have been advised that it is likely that they will continue to Work From Home (WFH) until Spring 2021. We have contracted several bespoke on-line courses to support staff during this time, including how to manage people in a virtual environment; chairing virtual meetings and mindfulness training to support resilience while WFH.
33. **Office Extension Project:** We have had to put on hold the plans to upgrade the meeting and social space in the old building, as depending on guidance from Scottish

Government regarding the opening of non-essential offices, we may temporarily require this space for office space, to facilitate more staff being in the office whilst still adhering to social distancing. In the meantime, we have appointed a contractor to redecorate the old building, and this work will take place over the winter, when staff numbers in the building are limited

34. **Staffing update:** Since September, staffing updates are as follows:
- a) **Tania Alliod** joined as Rural Development Officer as at 21 September. This is a new role, fixed term for 18 months.
  - b) 3 of the Seasonal Rangers have been appointed to additional roles following the internal recruitment process, as follows: - **Duncan Macdonald** appointed to CCP Community Ranger to July 2023; **Pete Short and Polly Freeman** appointed to the CNPA Winter Ranger posts to 31 March 2021.
  - c) **Francoise van Buuren** retired at the end of October, having been with the organization for 15 years.
  - d) **Carrie Marlow**, Admin Support Officer left having secured a new job in advance of her fixed year contract coming to an end.
  - e) Six of the Seasonal Rangers left at the end of October, their fixed term contracts having come to an end. They are; **Craig Fraser, Blair Johnston, Nicola Williamson, Victoria Inglis, Lianne Starbuck-Stephen, Tom Cole.**
34. **Youth Employment:**
- a) **Internships:** **Katherine Willing** joined as HR intern on a 12 months contract. This is a new post to support the increase in HR workload over the coming period (recruitment, restructure and Voluntary Exit Scheme)
  - b) **Apprenticeships:** **Luke Diggins** joined as IT Apprentice, replacing Reece Musgrave, who at the end of his Internship went to University to pursue a degree in IT.
  - c) We are working in partnership with UHI and Kingussie High School to support **Damian Paluga** complete a Foundation Apprentice – this involves a work placement for a youngster still at school, working for the organisation one day/week during term time. The placement will help Damian achieve his SVQ qualification in business administration.
35. **Shared Services:** Continued work to provide HR support the Scottish Land Commission has included the development of new policies, the development, staff consultation and pay remits.
36. **Organisational Development:** We are currently consulting with staff on the proposed management restructure. In addition, we have launched a Voluntary Exit scheme for staff – all staff with 2 years' service are eligible to apply, and applicants will be scored on the basis of Payback period; fit to organizational structure plan and cost/benefit analysis.
37. **LEADER:** The Cairngorms LEADER Programme has now exceeded £4 million in community led local development (CLLD) investments over the last 4 years, with £4,004,092 total programme expenditure supported by £2,466,302 LEADER grants to community groups and organisations. The great majority of projects have now closed and completed their planned activities, while 13 projects remain active and are being

supported by the team toward full closure by the end of February 2021 to allow final claim by the 31 March 2021 deadline.

In addition to managing the efficient completion of live projects, the LEADER team is also turning its attention to preparing for programme closure and external audit. The team are also supporting the delivery of the commissioned “Transport in Cairngorms and Kilkenny” (TICK) project with 3 lots of electric bikes now procured, with all procurement lots won by local cycle businesses, and an electric minibus to operate in partnership with the Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company to be procured over the next month. The project has drawn attention of the government in Eire, with the project team meeting the Irish National Parks Service representative last week at the request of an Irish Minister to advise on their replicating the project initiative in some way.

**Grant Moir**  
**November 2020**

## **Board Convener Report – For Information**

Firstly I would like to congratulate Carolyn Caddick on her election as Board Deputy Convener. I would also offer my thanks and commiserations to Eleanor Mackintosh and Fiona McLean for their offer of service to the Board. The postal vote ran very smoothly and I would congratulate the staff involved in the organisation. We will use this same process for the election of the new Planning Convener this month.

Now that the immediate COVID response workload has reduced we have been able to pick up on a number of delayed items of work including most importantly the planning for the next National Park Partnership Plan. This work, particularly with partners will intensify in 2021 and is still expected to finish on time in 2022.

As we look to our new priorities for the next NPPP, we need to ensure that the organisation is ready both on the Board and officer side to execute those new priorities. Over the coming months the staff will be consulted on a management restructure and a Voluntary Exit Scheme is also being offered to staff. Through the Board Development Conversations over the next couple of months we will look too ensure we have the right structures on the Board side to scrutinise future delivery of our new priorities and continue to strengthen governance.

As the final Board report of the year, I feel it is important to recognise the enormous amount of work put in across the year by officers and Board members. We have collectively achieved a huge amount in very short period of time and our ability to respond so quickly to changing circumstances has demonstrated the agility of the organisation. However, we must also recognise that we could not have achieved everything we have without the close cooperation of our partners and communities. Years of close working and building of relationships allowed everyone to act as one team in response to an unprecedented situation since the founding of the Park. My grateful thanks to you all and I'm looking forward to seeing what we can collectively achieve next year as we create our next NPPP.

Xander McDade  
Board Convener

## **Other Board Member Updates**

### **Carolyn Caddick**

I attended the virtual, Scottish Lands and Estates Conference on Tue 10<sup>th</sup> Nov. The focus was very heavily on Climate Change and the keynote speaker was Professor Dieter Helm from Oxford University, who gave one of the most concise but also wide-ranging presentations on Peat, Trees, Bio-crops and the importance of soil! He specifically focused on motivating people to make real changes now and how the use of regenerative agriculture is so important in supporting these changes. There were presentations from 4 Scottish Businesses focusing on how they are diversifying in order to survive, particularly given the pressures from COVID restrictions and there was a debate between MSPs, which covered COVID, Brexit and Climate Change challenges.

### **Dr Fiona Mclean**

On 8th and 9th September, I attended the virtual Europarc conference. Inevitably, discussion was dominated by National Park responses to the influx of visitors post lockdown over the summer months. I am proud to say that the presentation by Murray Ferguson on behalf of CNPA which related our approach to visitor management, was the most warmly received and the most inspirational of the presentations. It emphasised the significance of working in partnership in developing a strategic and effective response. My other main take away from the conference was the importance of research for monitoring and developing understanding; that it should be built in to any programme at an early stage; and that careful consideration should be given to asking the right research questions!