



## For information

**Title:** CEO Report and Convener Update

**Prepared by:** Grant Moir, Chief Executive

### Purpose

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

- 1. Climate Adaptation Fund** - There were 52 applications for the £370,000 Climate Adaptation Fund. Decisions on the applications will be made in due course and successful applicants will have until the end of March 2025 to complete the projects.
- 2. Peatland restoration** - The Peatland ACTION team have started work on the 16 projects in the 2024 - 25 pipeline, to bring 1500ha under restoration. Three projects are underway or completed, others have contractors appointed or are in the tendering stages. Contractor capacity has grown with around six contractors currently bidding for each tender. Some forestry contractors are now keen to broaden their portfolio in response to cuts to the Forest Grant Scheme. Peatland ACTION is hosting webinars to help contractors through the bidding process, and we will organise two 'new entrant' projects this year.
- 3. Farming** - The Cairngorms Future Farming project (Cairngorms 2030) is working with the 6 trial farmers to narrow down the low carbon and high nature farming practices they will trial. Three recently appointed farm advisors will provide help and advice to deliver these options. One farmer has purchased and started using discs instead of a plough to break ground for barley crops, the impacts of which will be monitored through tailored soil sampling to identify changes in carbon and soil structure.
- 4. Freshwater systems** - The Dee Resilience Strategy group met at the end of May to formalise a partnership with the common goal of adapting to the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss in the upper catchment. The group is



working towards a better understanding of the costs and relative impacts of different interventions to inform a place based approach to policy alignment and blended finance.

The Park Authority has worked with the River South Esk Catchment Partnership on a successful £1.4 million Nature Restoration Fund bid to deliver climate change adaptation and nature restoration in the Angus Glens. Key themes include woodland expansion, wetland creation and river restoration at a scale unseen before in Angus.

- 5. Deer management** - The Strategic Land Management Plan (SLMP) for the West Grampians Deer Management group, written as part of the Cairngorms 2030 development phase, has aggregated historic and planned habitat restoration activity across the five estates. The SLMP has identified an approximate budget allocation over 5 years to deliver restoration targets, linked to the potential sources of funding available over and above standard government capital grants.

The Cairngorms National Park Deer Incentive Scheme has been further developed with discussions taking place with the deer management groups within the Cairngorms National Park. Final details will be shared and processes in place before the start of the hind season in October.

- 6. Cairngorms Nature priority species** - The Beaver Management and Mitigation group has been established for those with beavers on their land to share information and inform the application of the Park Authority's management and mitigation plan. Monitoring is successfully identifying beaver movements and no land management issues have been reported to date.

A Park wide peregrine falcon survey is underway. The Park Authority Raptor Officer is working with Raptor Study Group volunteers and independent contractors to survey over 110 sites.

As part of the freshwater pearl mussel emergency plan a translocation proposal for the Spey is being developed with the Spey Catchment Initiative and specialists. If approved this will see mussels moved from vulnerable or degraded locations to high quality habitat in the upper Spey catchment.



## Visitor Services and Active Travel

- 7. Land Reform (Scotland) Act statutory duties** - The Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF) met on the 5 June. Key topics discussed included River Spey access and egress points with the LOAF advising on the development of the brief to identify opportunities to improve access for water borne users. The LOAF also advised on the draft guidance for land managers on the management of water borne recreation and access.
- 8. Paths and long distance routes –**

Braemar to Keiloch (Charters Chest Path) - Work commenced on the path between the Queens Drive and the Old Bridge of Dee in the week beginning the 27 May. The section close to the A93 is anticipated to take four weeks to complete. Works on the path south of Creag Choinnich that will compliment this new path and provide a link in the long term aspiration to extend the Deeside Way are being led by the Braemar community

Old Logging Way - Following completion of a route survey earlier this spring, the Access Team are working with partners to develop a refurbishment plan for sections of the Old Logging Way to tackle drainage and accessibility issues.
- 9. Ranger services** - Recruitment of seasonal rangers was completed although two posts are now being readvertised as the post holders have secured other posts within the Park Authority. Four trainee rangers have also been appointed, starting in late June. There has been a steady start to the season in terms of visitor numbers but fewer issues than last year which reflects the fact that the weather has not been as pleasant as in May / June 2023. However, evening patrols started in June and did immediately start to pick up instances of campfires. Park Authority Rangers again supported the “Lek it Be” campaign with dawn patrols around Lek sites. Junior Ranger activity continued with awards completed by pupils at Speyside High, Grantown Grammar, Kingussie High, Alford Academy and Aboyne Academy.
- 10. Visitor infrastructure** - The deadline for expressions of interest for financial support for visitor infrastructure improvement projects, in line with the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan, was on the 31 May and staff are currently assessing the responses with a view to working with partners to secure high quality infrastructure projects.



11. **Volunteering and health walks** - Volunteer ranger training was completed in April with 25 new volunteer rangers now fully trained and equipped and out on the ground. Volunteer managers have also been continuing work to increase the number of health walks and a health walk leaders available across the Park and a gathering bringing together 28 Health Walk leaders was held in May.
12. **Youth action team** - Hosted meeting with youth Local Action Group (LAGs) from Finland and across Scotland over 3 - 5 May 2024.
13. **Active and sustainable transport** - The full team is now in place with the Transport Manager and a Sustainable Transport Officer both starting in late May. Funding applications to deliver further detailed design work on active travel routes that were submitted in January were considered by Sustrans in spring 24. However, although deemed suitable for funding support, there is currently insufficient funding to support any new projects so alternative funding opportunities are being considered.

## Planning and Rural Development

14. **Local Development Plan** - [Public engagement](#) on the evidence base for the next Local Development Plan has started and will continue on a range of topics over the summer and into the autumn.
15. **Planning casework** - At the March Planning Committee meeting, the Committee approved the change of use of land to a beer garden at the Old Bridge Inn, Aviemore for a two year period. At the following meeting in April, the Committee approved a new caravan / motorhome site in Dalwhinnie and an extension to the Grantown on Spey Caravan site for 16 static holiday caravans.
16. **Wellbeing economy** - Work is continuing to develop the Wellbeing Economy Action Plan. Officers have attended the Wellbeing Alliance Scotland (WEAll) cross party working group.
17. **Community Action Plans** - Community Action Plans are currently progressing across the Park, with Marr Area Partnership supporting the communities in Braemar and Strathdon, and Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey facilitating the local action planning event in Kincaig on 10 May.



- 18. Sustainable Tourism Action Plan** - The Cairngorms Tourism Partnership met on Wednesday 5 June for their annual face to face meeting and visit. Based in Braemar this year, the day was a chance to better understand the opportunities and challenges for the visitor economy in Royal Deeside, with a particular focus on community led tourism projects.
- 19. Visitor and residents' surveys** - MEL Research have been contracted to develop, facilitate and analyse the visitor and residents survey following a successful tender process. The visitor survey went live at the end of May 2024, with market researchers carrying out face to face surveys at key countryside sites, visitor attractions and village centres across the park, throughout the year. The residents survey will go live online during July 2024, utilising promotion through Cairn Magazine and our social media channels, but we are also looking at hard copies and use of tablets at community roadshows and highland games to engage with local residents.
- 20. Business Barometer, real living wage update** - The Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) have just published findings from their quarterly Business Barometer for the period of January – March 2024. Compared to the same time a year ago, slightly more business reported a decrease in customer numbers and turnover than an increase. Expectations for the next 12 months were more positive with around half of businesses expecting increased levels of customers and turnover, but year on year levels of business confidence have decreased for the short, medium and longer term, most notably in relation to the long term (next 24 months) period. Questions about business support flagged that some businesses were unaware of the support available to them from a range of stakeholders and the CBP plan to increase their promotion to members of the range of support available.
- 21. Community Led Local Development** - The Cairngorms Trust, supported by the Park Authority, has secured an initial allocation of £260,000 in funding for community led local development activities and grant awards over the 2024 / 25 financial year. This is a higher start point than £225,000 awarded at the start of last year, although significantly lower than the final sum secured in 2023 / 24 of £406,000. The Cairngorms Trust met in early June to consider applications which significantly over subscribed available funds, with initial awards currently being communicated.



A bid has been submitted for additional funds to bring total allocation to £450,000, with a further bid of around £57,000 submitted to support the Cairngorms Youth Local Action Group.

Members of the Cairngorms Trust are presently involved in discussions to establish a group to better represent Local Actions Groups in policy development and funding discussions around Community Led Local Development.

## **Communications**

**22. Active Cairngorms** - Our programme of spring visitor management communications has begun, with key messages around ticks and lyme disease, lambing, ground nesting birds, litter and campervans all scheduled for the coming months. Within this programme there is space for reactive messages, guided by the visitor management group, made up of ranger services and partner organisations from across the National Park.

**23. Cairngorms Nature** - We worked in partnership with Royal Society of the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Scotland and the Beaver Trust to support the release of beavers to Insh Marshes, the final releases of this first 'beaver year'. Content from the release ([available here](#)) was positively received, as was a wrap up blog from Beaver Project Manager Jonathan Willet, sharing personal reflections and recommitting to our monitoring and mitigation work with landowners and managers ([blog available here](#)).

The Beaver Trail at Rothiemurchus is now mostly installed, with just one panel left to go in. Feedback to date has been positive and Rothiemurchus have reported good usage of the path by visitors. See figure one below for a photograph of the interpretation in situ.





Figure one - new Beaver Trail interpretation at Rothiemurchus

A dedicated farming newsletter was created at the end of May and circulated to around 150 farmers and agricultural contacts within the National Park. The newsletter included updates on the new Climate Adaptation Fund, a screening of regenerative farming documentary Six Inches of Soil and an update on the Park Authority's goose management scheme. We plan to distribute the newsletter three or four times a year from now on.

**24. Public and stakeholder engagement** - We concluded the consultation on recreational fire management within the National Park on 17 April. In total we received 1,664 responses (nearly 200 more than the Partnership Plan consultation), 943 of which – or 58% – were from local residents. The campaign was supported by a dedicated postcard sent to every address in the National Park, an article in Cairn magazine, multiple press columns and interviews, video content and dedicated social media activity.

The draft consultation on the third edition of the Gaelic Language Plan was completed on 7 March, with a total of 427 responses (396 in English, 31 in Gaelic). This compares to a total of 36 responses received back in 2017. For more information see Paper 4 on the new Gaelic Language Plan.

Recruitment concluded for a number of Cairngorms 2030 comms and engagement roles. Josie Slade was appointed as Engagement Officer in early March, managing a team of two Engagement Coordinators, Jo Rodgers and Fi Thompson (who took up their posts in mid to late April). Rosalyn Watson also joined on 21 May as Communications Coordinator. The team's first public roadshow event took place in Braemar on Wednesday 1 May. Over 50 people turned up between 2pm and 7pm to hear more about projects including active



travel / transport improvements, a floodplain initiative, health walks and our schools programme.

We are currently finalising details of our dedicated visitor and residents' surveys for the coming year. The visitor survey is being delivered face to face from mid May until early 2025, with the aim of securing 1,500 responses during that period. A further 1,500 responses will be sought at the end of 2026 / early 2027 to give us a comparable sample to previous five yearly surveys, and these will be supplemented by an online component. The residents' survey is earlier on in its development (likely go live in mid July), but once complete it will seek to capture residents' attitudes on a range of subjects covered in the Partnership Plan.

**25. Corporate communications** - Two stories required a significant amount of reactive media work during this period – proposals around a new national park (which have led to a number of inaccurate reports about the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond), and the relationship between land managers / farmers and the Park Authority. Our fire management consultation was also the subject of some misinformation activity. Interviews on these topics were arranged with Good Morning Scotland, The Times, Countryfile, Out of Doors and the Daily Record, with multiple factual corrections issued. Similarly, two columns (in The Herald and The Strathspey and Badenoch Herald) took significant resource to correct. This led to a formal IPSO complaint and in turn saw a full apology and correction printed.

We are liaising closely with colleagues at Loch Lomond, NatureScot and Scottish Government to coordinate the approach to the development of new national parks in Scotland, something which we will contribute case studies / data to and also support via our own channels. One of the outputs of this collaboration was a piece on Landward showcasing Scotland's national parks and the valuable role they play for people and nature. The Badenoch and Strathspey junior ranger group were joined by our rangers Will and Polly and HighLife Highland's Saranne Bish for a day of pond dipping at the Highland Folk Museum. You can find the [episode on the iPlayer](#).

Karen Archer, our Press Officer of nearly 20 years, left on 20 March for a new role at HighLife Highland. Recruitment for a new Media Communications Manager took place in late June and we are hopeful that the team will be back up to a full complement in six to eight weeks. However, in the short term we have been working at significantly reduced capacity.





Other news stories over the period include a piece on the [£8 million being invested in the Cairngorms](#) by the Park Authority in 2024 / 25, promotion of the [fire management consultation](#), a piece on [keeping livestock safe during lambing](#), the return of the [capercaillie LekItBe campaign](#), the launch of a new [summer programme at the outdoor dementia resource centre](#), and the [approval of a new caravan site at Dalwhinnie](#).

**26. Website and social media** - The web development project is progressing according to schedule, with outline 'wireframe' designs now confirmed for the majority of pages across the site, the menu structure comprehensively tested, and the structure of key sections (such as site wide alerts) confirmed. A substantial amount of time has gone into the creation of a 'content finder' and smart search functionality, which will be used throughout the new website. This seeks to simplify the process of finding content buried deep within the site structure (at last count we had more than 15,000 pages), and we are exploring ways of using AI to speed up this process further.

The team have prepared a detailed social media report for 2023 to allow us to reflect on learnings and to guide our digital strategy going forward. By way of comparison, for the period 15 February to 30 April 2024 versus the previous year, impressions have risen by 92% to 1.5 million, engagements are up 164% to 58,883 and video views are up nearly ninefold at 224,348. This includes a specific focus on residents of the National Park, with reach and engagement rates rising sharply.

To support our Gaelic Language Plan consultation (see 'Public and stakeholder engagement' section below) and mark World Gaelic Week, we partnered with Gaelic influencer Somhairle Johnston to reach a particularly engaged audience. Somhairle's content ([available here](#)) alone amassed over 30,000 impressions, 32,000 video views and 123 shares, clicks and comments.

**27. Branding and publications** - The team are collaborating with community groups in Strathdon and Nethy Bridge to refresh National Park branded interpretation panels in both villages. Community path leaflets are also being refreshed for Strathdon and Dalwhinnie.

The summer issue of *Cairn* is in the design process and will land on doormats throughout the National Park mid July. Articles will include an interview with volunteer and partner ranger services in the National Park, a piece around



farming funding and the new Climate Adaptation Fund, and an update on the new visitor and residents' surveys.

We are working with the Cairngorms Business Partnership on a workshop session with local businesses, aimed at exploring how a 'made in the National Park' scheme might work in practice. It is hoped we will get more clarity on what measures will be workable for small, medium and large scale businesses in the Cairngorms.

## Organisational Development

**28. Workforce Management** - Staff commenced the reduced 35 hours working week from 1 April. This now brings the Park Authority's contractual hours in line with the majority of the public sector. The Hybrid Working Policy default position of 50:50 office base: home working is now well established, with the majority of staff being office based on Tuesdays to Thursdays. Whilst Mondays and Fridays are quieter, there are still typically 25 – 30% of the staff complement office based on these days.

### 29. Staffing update

Since March 2024

- a) Staff leaving the organisation were
  - i. Karen Archer, Press Officer – resignation
  - ii. Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning and Place - retirement.
  - iii. Liz Henderson, Infrastructure Manager - resignation
  - iv. Matt Watson, Peatland Actin Programme Manager - resignation
- b) Staff joining the organisation through the external recruitment process were
  - i. Chris Mackie joined as C2030 Knowledge Exchange Coordinator. Fixed term C2030 post
  - ii. Fi Thomson and Joanna Rodgers joined as C2030 Community Engagement Officers. Fixed terms C2030 posts.
  - iii. Karen Johnstone joined as Clerk to the Board, replacing Catriona Strang
  - iv. Bo Mansell joined as C2030 Sustainable Transport Officer. Fixed term C2030 post
  - v. Eleanor MacDonald joined as C2030 Sustainable Transport Officer. Fixed term C2030 post.
  - vi. Colin Bryans joined as Senior Planning Officer (Development Management) – new post



- vii. Jeff Pyrah joined as Senior Planning Officer (Forward Planning) – new post
- viii. Rosalyn Watson joined as C2030 Communications Coordinator. Fixed term C2030 post
- ix. The following Seasonal Rangers were appointed:
  - Becki Redmond (returned from 2023 season)
  - Danny O'Brien (returned from 2023 season. Originally joined as a Trainee Ranger in 2021, and has served as a Seasonal Ranger since 2022)
  - Fiona McClure (returned from 2023 season)
  - Hector Bryden – first season
  - Tom Fredriksson (returned from 2023 season. Originally joined as a Trainee Ranger in 2022)
  - Sarah Lawther (returned from 2023 season)
  - Tony Seivewright (returned from 2023 season. Originally joined in 2021 and has served every season since then)
  - Emily Alford – first season
  - Em Wilkinson – first season
  - Craig Fraser (returned from 2023 season. Originally joined in 2020 season and has served every season since then)
  - Rhona Garry – first season
  - Niall Doherty – first season
- c) Existing Staff changes were
  - i. Andy Smith was appointed to the new post of GIS Officer
  - ii. Dot Harris was appointed to the post of C2030 Administration Officer
  - iii. Gavin Miles was appointed to the post of Director of Planning and Place, replacing Murray

**30. Youth employment** - The Park Authority is currently in the process of appointing four Trainee Rangers. There were over 50 applicants for these roles, which is a significant amount for a part time three month post. This is a key career pipeline for Ranger roles, and two of the current Seasonal Ranger complement started their Ranger careers with the Park Authority as Trainee Rangers.

**31. Equalities** - The Park Authority have recently adopted a new policy “Supporting Staff through Pregnancy Loss”, which has been added to our suite of equalities



policies. The Park Authority also achieved LGBT Charter accreditation at Foundation level.

**32. Organisational Development** - The Organisational Development and People Strategy has recently been adopted, following consultation with Senior Management Team, the Resources Committee and staff, and informed by information gathered through the Best Companies staff survey, and staff away days. This strategy has been designed to give our staff the framework and support to deliver our ambitions across the themes of Nature, People and Place. The strategy encompasses 6 themes around Infrastructure (including facilities and IT); Information and Data Systems; Staff Skills; Staff Wellbeing and Resilience; Leadership; and Communications.

As part of the work developing the Strategy, we contracted an external facilitator to help us review our Organisational Values and Culture. This work will be discussed with the Board in due course as the values are developed with the staff group.

### **33. Finance**

- a) Results for April and May are within budget expectations and conform to the pattern of spend experienced in the first quarter of 2023 / 24: actual spend on operational plan activities equates to 2% of the annual budget. It is too early in the year to observe meaningful trends, but investigation of payroll costs for April and May indicates that the budget provided will be sufficient, providing the annual award is made within the budgeted level.
- b) Committed spend (measured through grant offers and requisitions) is building and we expect to see the value of commitments at a healthy level by the end of the first quarter.
- c) Expenditure on the Cairngorms 2030 programme has commenced. The first quarterly claim has been submitted and was paid promptly. No issues were raised by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).
- d) There has been no significant expenditure to date against the 2024 / 25 peatland restoration budget. Most of the initial expenditure on peatland restoration is expected to contribute to the finalisation of projects contracted in 2023 / 24.



**Title: Convener Update**

**Prepared by: Sandy Bremner, Convener**

## **Purpose**

To highlight to Board Members and Cairngorms National Park Authority Management Team and staff the meetings and events the Board Convener has been attending since the last Formal Board meeting.

1. **National Farmers Union Scotland (NFUS)** - Hosted a visit by the President and Policy Director of NFU Scotland, including a visit to one of the six farms taking part in the Cairngorms 2030 pilot projects. We discussed opportunities for even closer cooperation to help farmers and crofter who work in the National Park and agreed a series of actions to help address challenges facing the sector.
2. **Convention of the Highlands and Island** - Attended the Convention and contributed to discussion on the need to develop ambitious new strategies for the delivery of affordable housing. Met separately with the then Deputy First Minister, Shona Robison, to underline the potential for strategies to address the affordable housing crisis, as discussed previously with the Housing Minister.
3. **Scottish Land Commission** - Met the Commission's Chair and Chief Executive to discuss a range of issues including the new post dedicated to ensuring community benefit from the developing area of Green Finance, the challenges and opportunities regarding Scotland's affordable housing crisis, and the implications of future changes in land related legislation.
4. **Braemar** - Attended a community engagement day, discussing issues with residents, community leaders and land managers, including work to restore the Dee's upper catchment, housing and transport issues in the area, and projects involving local schools.
5. **Scottish Environment Link (SEL)** - Met with SEL's Chair, Chief Executive and Board, followed by an evening session with Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) Board members and staff, discussing a range of issues including the importance of coordinating information about work which benefits both nature and people.



6. **Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park (LLTNP)** - Met monthly with the LLTNP Convener to discuss common issues, strategies and opportunities for further collaboration.
7. **The King's Foundation** - Visited rural development and skills training projects at Dumfries House estate and met with staff and trustees in advance of further initiatives to help further CNPA goals.
8. **The Environment and Forestry Directorate, Scottish Government (EnFor)** - Meeting with Director EnFor to review CNPA developments over the past year and look ahead to the challenges and opportunities of 2024 / 25.
9. **EnFor Chairs** - Attended the inaugural meeting of the EnFor Chairs Forum, discussing issues raised by the ongoing Public Service Review, and initiated discussion on the issue of Strategic Communications across public bodies.
10. **Cairngorms Trust** - Met with the Chair, Trustees and beneficiaries of the Trust at a stakeholder meeting in Ballater to review delivery of a range of projects across the Cairngorms National Park, and discuss how the CNPA can help generate even greater awareness of the Trust's work to support nature and communities.

The Trust has reported a worrying trend in the number of applications for funding it has been forced to reject because the recent loss of local authority part funding has resulted in a significant increase in applications for 100% support. In other words, the total number of projects which can be supported by the Trust has had to be reduced. There is particular concern about the impact on the wellbeing of children in some schools where there have been applications for project funding. The Trust is keen for this situation to be highlighted.

11. **Aberdeenshire Council** - Attended the Marr Area Committee of Aberdeenshire Council, outlining the main functions of the Park Authority and Board, our current areas of delivery, and how we are tackling some of the key challenges facing people and nature in the area. Our Director of Planning and Place dealt with specific planning issues.





12. **Dee resilience strategy workshop** - Attended all day workshop to develop strategies to reduce the catastrophic impacts for nature and people of increasingly damaging flood and drought events on the River Dee. Led by CNPA, involving the River Dee Trust, Dee District Salmon Fisheries Board, Dee Catchment Partnership, Aberdeenshire Council, a representative of upper catchment Community Councils, NatureScot, Scottish Water and Scottish Environment Protection Agency.
13. **UK National Parks** - Attended the National Parks UK Chairs Forum, discussing the work of National Parks at a time of political change, latest developments in leadership on nature recovery, and further opportunities to support the people who live and work in the UK's Parks.
14. **Board Member Appointment** - Took part in a series of preparatory meetings, culminating in interviews to provide recommendations to the Minister regarding the appointment of a new member of the CNPA Board.
15. **Cairngorms Housing Partnership** - Met with a representative of the Partnership to review progress in the provision of affordable housing in the National Park and next steps.
16. **Braemar Castle** - Attended the reopening of the castle following a community-led £1.6 million restoration project, meeting trustees and staff, discussing future tourism opportunities.
17. **Junior Rangers** - Met with some of the latest cohort of Cairngorms National Park Junior Rangers, discussed with them their work and aspirations, and presented certificates marking completion of their activities.
18. **General** - In addition to other meetings with stakeholders, and individual meetings with CNPA Board members, participated in the appointment of the CNPA's new Director of Planning and Place.

**Sandy Bremner,**  
**Board Convener**