



Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group meeting

Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey and on Teams

Wednesday 12 November | 1pm – 3pm

Attendees

Alice Fogg (Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey), Annabel Davidson Knight (Scottish Land Commission), Anne Elliott (NatureScot), Carolyn Robertson (Park Authority), Claire Smith (RSPB Scotland), Ian Wilson (National Farmers Union Scotland), Kelly-Anne Dempsey (River South Esk Catchment Partnership), Matthew Hawkins (Park Authority), Neil Gunn (Wildlife Estates Scotland), Pete Cosgrove (Park Authority Board Member), Roger Knight (Spey Catchment Initiative), Sarah Henshall (Park Authority), Steve Liddel (WildLand), Susan Cooksley (Dee Catchment Partnership)

Apologies

Alistair Whyte (Plantlife Scotland), Nicola Melville (Forestry and Land Scotland), Deborah Long (Scottish Environment Link), Chris Donald (NatureScot), David Hetherington (Park Authority), Helen Senn (Royal Zoological Society of Scotland), Lorraine Hawkins (River Dee Trust), William Hawes (Durrell Wildlife), Shaila Rao (National Trust for Scotland), Sydney Henderson (Cairngorms Connect)

1. Previous meeting actions

Actions from the last meeting were reviewed:

- No further feedback was received on the updated wording for the group's responsibilities, so these will now be published on the National Park website.
- A Vision Subgroup was convened to help draft potential visions for the new Nature Action Plan to be reviewed in the meeting.



- An update on the Nature Action Plan was shared with the Cairngorms Upland Advisory Group who are keen to contribute to the Managed Uplands chapter.
- A Freshwater Subgroup was convened and has developed an initial draft of the freshwater chapter to be reviewed in the meeting.
- The current Nature Action Plan remains active and is still described as such on the National Park website until the new Action Plan is published in 2027.
- An analyse of resident and visitor survey data, LDP consultation data and Local Community Action Plans has been completed to review in the meeting.
- Indicators for the Cairngorms Nature Index were shared with all members of the group. Some feedback has been received and more is welcome.

Actions:

- Carolyn to work with colleagues to publish the updated wording for the group's responsibilities on the National Park website.
- Carolyn to recirculate the indicators for the Nature Index for final feedback.

2. Vision for the new Cairngorms Nature Action Plan

A discussion was held on three draft vision statements developed by the Vision Subgroup. The following key points were made:

- A clear and explicit link to communities and people is essential.
- The vision must recognise that people are a fundamental part of nature and the natural systems we depend on.
- The vision should clearly signal opportunities for everyone to contribute to restoring nature and the benefits to be gained.
- There was consensus around the following draft vision:

By 2045, as the world continues to change, ecosystems in the Cairngorms National Park - from rivers to forests - will be richer in wildlife and better adapted to our changing climate. They will help ensure that clean air, food, and water remain available to us for generations to come, encouraging us to make more space for and live in greater harmony with nature.



The following suggestions were made for refining the draft vision:

- Strengthen the connection between people and the land.
- Shorten the wording slightly.
- Avoid the term “ecosystem” to keep language accessible.
- Explore alternative wording for “encouraging”.

Action:

- Carolyn to update the draft vision based on the feedback shared.

3. Cairngorms Nature Network

The group discussed the proposed approach for establishing a Cairngorms Nature Network, building on the *Nature Networks Evidence Paper* developed to inform the Local Development Plan and public engagement on the paper which took place earlier in the year. As the Nature Network will be a key component of the new Cairngorms Nature Action Plan, several questions were posed to guide the discussion, and the following key points were made by members:

- **Clarity and language**

It was noted that some of the terminology used in the draft Nature Network materials (e.g., “fens”) may not resonate widely. Using more familiar, everyday language could help the Nature Network feel more accessible to communities. It was also suggested that “managed grasslands” is used rather than “managed lowland grasslands,” as this better reflects the landscape of the National Park.

- **Role of communities**

It was strongly emphasised that communities will play a central role in delivering the Nature Network. Including case studies of community involvement and a call for sites will help demonstrate how local people can contribute and benefit.

- **Network maps**

It was noted that the species-rich grassland maps are difficult to distinguish where similar colours overlap and grassland mapping, including satellite analysis and ground truthing, needs to be completed to build a more accurate picture.



- **Connection to wider nature networks**

The group discussed how the Cairngorms Nature Network connects to other regional and national networks. While national data helps ensure alignment, it was felt that the links with other nature networks could be made clearer and described in more detail.

- **Recreation and access**

It was noted that nature restoration and public access need to work hand-in-hand. It was recommended that more detail is included as to how recreational access may need to adapt alongside nature recovery to avoid conflicts and ensure mutual benefits.

- **Flexibility and future opportunities**

Whilst the Nature Network must provide clear direction, it was noted that it must also remain flexible enough to incorporate new opportunities over time. More detail would help clarify how this flexibility fits with funding processes and criteria, especially where future projects are not yet defined. It was also noted that there is a need for longer-term (3–5 year) funding plans and particular support for small-scale projects that will contribute to the network but may struggle to access existing (point-based) funding schemes. It was suggested that the Nature Network document should include information on funding approaches or potentially a fundraising strategy.

- **Economic potential**

It was highlighted that the Nature Network can unlock economic benefits, such as helping the whisky industry reduce risks linked to water shortages. It was felt that more explicit reference needs to be made to the economic benefits of the network, alongside ecological, social and cultural benefits.

- **Monitoring and updates**

The Nature Network will be reviewed annually in line with the National Park Partnership Plan. New datasets will be added and maps updated to track progress and reflect emerging evidence. This process should be clearly stated in information about the Nature Network.



- **Links with the Nature Action Plan**

It was agreed that the new Cairngorms Nature Action Plan should clearly introduce both the Nature Network and the Nature Index, explaining how these tools work together to guide nature recovery in the National Park and activities in the Nature Action Plan.

Actions:

- David Hetherington (Nature Networks Manager, Park Authority) to update the draft Nature Networks materials based on the feedback shared.
- Carolyn to clearly introduce both the Nature Network and the Nature Index in the Nature Action Plan.

4. Outline structure for the new Cairngorms Nature Action Plan and draft freshwater chapter

A draft outline structure for the next Nature Action Plan was shared ahead of the meeting, and members present felt that it is shaping up well and moving in the right direction. A more detailed discussion was held on the draft freshwater chapter, developed with the Freshwater Subgroup.

A suggestion was made to include clearer reference to water tables and the importance of maintaining a higher water table throughout the year. This could potentially be included in the chapter's vision statement. It was also strongly emphasised that communities want to be involved in freshwater restoration and should be recognised as key partners. As the chapter develops, community-led projects - both existing opportunities identified in Community Action Plans and future projects yet to be defined - will be built in.

There was a general consensus that the chapter needs a balance between well-defined actions, where the evidence for what needs to happen is already clear, and more open actions that allow projects to evolve over the lifetime of the plan. As drafting continues, there is also scope to include clearer timescales and targets, while ensuring expectations remain realistic, based on learning from the current Nature Action Plan.



Action:

- Carolyn to continue working with the Freshwater Subgroup to develop the freshwater chapter in response to the feedback shared.
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5. Community priorities

A presentation was given summarising findings from the most recent National Park Visitor Survey, Residents and Worker Survey, and Community Action Plans. The findings highlight what matters most to communities about the natural environment, and therefore what the new Nature Action Plan should aim to address, where possible, and provide solutions for.

It was noted that Community Action Plans can sometimes reflect limited options simply because communities may not always be aware of the full range of possibilities available to them. Follow-up conversations may therefore be helpful to support communities in exploring wider ambitions for nature. It was agreed that all the insights shared will be summarised within the new Nature Action Plan and reflected in the actions and activities wherever possible.

Action:

- Carolyn to draft a chapter for the new Action Plan setting out the findings shared, leaving room to update the chapter as new findings emerge.
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6. Community benefits

A presentation was given by Annabel Davidson Knight (Community Benefits from Nature Adviser, Scottish Land Commission) to start a discussion on how the new Nature Action Plan can help deliver community benefits. It was emphasised that meaningful community engagement is essential to achieving community benefits, and that engagement must begin early, build trust, and be proportionate to the scale of the project.



It was highlighted that identifying areas of common ground within communities is important to ensure effort is targeted towards what matters most to the majority, while still ensuring a range of voices are heard. The discussion also considered whether additional resource may be needed to support effective engagement, drawing on learning from Cairngorms 2030.

There was broad support for including a set of principles in the Nature Action Plan for community benefits, incorporating community wealth-building approaches such as skills development, education and job creation and, over time, helping to build the capacity for communities to take a more active role in nature restoration. It was noted that community benefits will need to be clearly defined within the context of the Action Plan, with indicators built in to monitor progress and impact.

Action:

- Carolyn to share a copy of Annabel's presentation with all members.
 - Carolyn to follow-up with Annabel to explore next steps for drafting a definition and set of principles for community benefits in the Action Plan.
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