

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

FOR DISCUSSION

Title: CAIRNGORMS CAPERCAILLIE PROJECT

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Purpose

This paper presents the latest delivery updates on the Cairngorms Capercaillie project

Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to review delivery updates and consider:

- a) progress towards the project's agreed purposes;**
- b) any strategically significant impacts on delivery of the CNPA's Corporate Plan and National Park Partnership Plan;**
- c) any material impacts on the CNPA's strategic risk management.**

Project Overview

1. Capercaillie populations are negatively affected primarily by a combination of habitat loss and fragmentation, disturbance, collisions with unmarked fences, predation, climate change and possibly genetic diversity. Each of these factors plays an important role, and activity in each has a significant and complementary effect.
2. In 2015 CNPA produced the Capercaillie Framework, bringing together knowledge on population status, pressures on the population, and the suite of measures currently being deployed to inform co-ordination of management measures and identify where further investment and activity would be most beneficial.
3. In March 2018 CNPA and partners were awarded National Lottery Heritage Fund development phase funding to take forwards recommendations in the Capercaillie Framework relating to population monitoring, habitat creation, sustainable recreation planning and enabling communities to play a part in capercaillie conservation.

In 2020 a further c£2.3 million was awarded for the delivery phase of the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project (CCP), with the approved purposes to:

- a) enable communities to develop and deliver their own community-led actions for capercaillie;
- b) raise awareness of the plight of capercaillie and how people can help;

- c) research the genetic diversity of capercaillie in the Cairngorms National Park to help inform action;
 - d) improve and create more habitat for capercaillie and undertake predator control in key areas;
 - e) strengthen current capercaillie monitoring to enable more informed decisions
4. The project does not include action for all factors affecting capercaillie populations. It centres on a more people focussed approach in the hybrid spaces where people and nature coexist. Habitat management, fence removal, legal predator control and many other aspects of capercaillie conservation have been going on for decades by land managers and agencies. The project works closely with, but does not look to duplicate, this already existing good work.
5. In 2021, in addition to the work of the CCP and the ongoing work of many partners, CNPA initiated discussions with key stakeholders at a senior level to investigate the desirability and feasibility of new approaches not already under consideration or being implemented, primarily around the management of protected species, translocation/ reintroduction and creating areas of minimum disturbance.

Strategic Background

6. The most recent update to the Board on delivery of the Authority's strategic objectives as set out in the agreed Corporate Plan for 2018 to 2022 was presented at the June 2021 meeting. The Corporate Plan delivery report may be accessed at: [Meeting - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#)

Delivery of the Cairngorms Capercaillie project directly impacts on the Corporate Plan key work area 'Deliver Capercaillie Framework' and Key Performance Indicator 'number of capercaillie'. The KPI is currently rated red, based on an assessment that the population target of 1,200 by 2022 target will not be met.

7. Action 1d of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) priority 1d is to 'Co-ordinate habitat, recreation and development management to secure the capercaillie population through delivery of the Capercaillie Framework'. The most recent overview of delivery of the NPPP having been presented to the Board at its meeting in September 2021: [Meeting - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#).
8. The latest review of the Strategic Risk Register was considered by the Audit and Risk Committee in September 2021 and may be accessed at: [210910AuCtteePaper5Annex1StrategicRiskRegisterV8.1.pdf \(cairngorms.co.uk\)](#). Strategic risks of relevance to consideration of performance of the programmes of work considered by this paper are:
- a) A9.3 Staffing: additional externally funded projects strains staff workload capacity with increased risks of stress and reduced morale.
 - b) A11.2 Strategic Risk Resourcing: the end of major programme investments (Tomintoul and Glenlivet, LEADER) requires significant ongoing staffing to manage audit and legacy which the Authority finds difficult to resource.

- c) A14.1 Reputation: One-off, high profile incidents and / or vociferous social media correspondents have an undue influence on the Authority's positive reputation.
- d) A27 Technical: approaches to conservation and protection of endangered species may be insufficient to achieve associated strategic outcomes

Performance Overview: Delivery of Approved Purposes against Strategic Outcomes

- 9. Positive progress has been made against all of the project's approved purposes. The quarterly report to National Lottery Heritage Fund (Annex I) highlights operational activity and that the programme is on track to deliver project outcomes.
- 10. Work with the 6th, and final, community of place or interest is one of the key remaining strategic outcomes and points of activity on the project timeline. CNPA and partners recognise the need to identify a community that involves a wider range of people in capercaillie conservation, adds value and strengthens existing work within the project's scope, complements delivery across CNPAs and partners' work programmes. Discussions are currently underway with CCP Project Board and Operational Management Team and CNPA Operational Management Group on options to deliver the strategic outcomes and completion within the funding window.
- 11. Corporate Plan and National Park Partnership Plan actions and indicators position the activities of the NLHF funded project within the context of wider CNPA and partner work on land management, visitor experience and rural development. The project maintains strong links with ongoing and developing wider activities to strengthen information flow and support adaptive project and legacy planning:
 - a) Research into visitor types, both locals and visitors to the area, and work with the business community is helping to inform planning related to managing for visitors across CNPAs work on infrastructure planning and developing a 'sustainable tourism destination';
 - b) Habitat improvement planning and land owner liaison is routinely feeding into stakeholder discussions on a range of land management issues.

Performance Overview: Risk Management

- 12. All project risks and issues, as identified in the quarterly progress report, have mitigation plans in place.
- 13. **Staffing:** the project is operating with a full complement of staff.
- 14. **Resourcing audit and legacy:** Ongoing review of work plans enables re-allocations of staff time and responsibilities as the project work continues to develop.
- 15. **Reputation:**
 - a) The carrbridge capercaillie group decided not to continue with the path improvements designed to encourage recreation in areas away from capercaillie

habitat. The decision was predicated primarily on responses to public consultation which, whilst not conclusive, the group did not feel gave them sufficient mandate to continue. Carrbridge and Vicinity Community Council councillors have voted unanimously to seek support elsewhere to progress the works. The carrbridge capercaillie group are submitting a revised programme of activity to the CCP Project Board for approval.

- b) Engagement with stakeholders in Deeside has commenced, raising the profile of the project and the CNPA's involvement in capercaillie conservation. CCP partners, Project Board and CNPA Board members with close affiliations to the resident and land management communities in Deeside are acting as project champions to provide a sound basis for future work.
- c) A significant number of responses highlight a desire to see conservation activity that is outwith the scope of the project eg management of pine marten. The scope of the project and its role in the wider picture will be a focus for project communications as discussions continue with stakeholders.
- d) Misunderstanding about the scope of the CCP can lead to the CCP, and by extension the CNPA, being associated with inactivity. Project staff are developing a briefing note, increasing communications via social media channels and supporting key influencers. Effort will be further emphasised as the NatureScot SAC report is due for publication and this remains a high priority in the project's risk register and communications.

16. **Technical:** The NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee convened to review scientific evidence on factors affecting capercaillie conservation, including those outwith the approved purposes of the project. A member of CNPA Board sits as an observer on the sub group. The report is due for publication on 3rd March 2022. CNPA Board and key stakeholders will be briefed on the report's contents and findings on 24th February 2022.

Evidence from the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project's genetic research will become available in 2022. The findings will underpin any future decisions on the feasibility and desirability of species translocation.

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

17. There are no matters of strategic significance which merit escalation at this time in the opinion of senior managers leading the Cairngorms NPA's linkage to the areas of activity covered by this paper and associated reports.

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