

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### FOR INFORMATION

**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**

1. **Cairngorms Nature:** The trial freshwater ecosystem for the Cairngorms Nature Index (CNI) is complete. This comprises of a methodology used to identify and analyse a suite of indicators about the health and functionality of freshwater ecosystem in the National Park. The next step is to share findings with stakeholders. Recruitment for a Monitoring Officer is underway and the CNI will be rolled out across different land use types and habitats in 2023. Recruitment is underway for a beaver officer to lead consultations, land manager support, site evaluation, population modelling and pull together an application for release in 2023.
2. **Cairngorms Capercaillie Project:** Work coming up for the project includes producing a community-led action plan working with the dog walking community in Badenoch and Strathspey. This aligns with the recent report by NatureScot's Scientific Advisory Committee which highlights human disturbance as one of the main factors driving poor productivity.  
A request has been made to NLHF to extend the project's grant expiry date from 30 July 2023 to 30 January 2024 so that work delayed by the pandemic can be completed and a firm legacy secured that contributes to CNPAs overall commitments to capercaillie conservation as per recommendations from the CNPA Board meeting in June.
3. **Woodland Creation:** We have been formally consulted by Scottish Forestry about woodland creation proposals at Glen Banchor, Muckrach, and Rothiemurchus estates, contributed to several Long Term Forest Plans, including amendments in response to windblow generated by storm Arwen, and we are in early discussions with forestry agents about a number of other potential woodland creation schemes. A review of the NPPP3 period showed that the 5000 ha target had been achieved through the approval

of 5195 ha of new woodland by July this year, 43% of which was delivered through natural regeneration, and 96% of which consisted of native species.

4. **Peatland Restoration:** The peatland restoration programme has a seasonal cycle. Spring and early summer are used for survey work and project planning, with most restoration work beginning from mid July onwards. Tenders have been issued for projects throughout the Park with the area being brought under restoration expanding rapidly over late summer and autumn and we are on track to achieve the programme target of 905ha in 2022/23.  
Stephen Corcoran, Programme Manager left CNPA in May 2022. We are grateful for Stephen's efforts in establishing the Peatland Action Programme within the CNP. We have replaced Stephen's post with two programme managers (Operations and Programme Development) and have recruited two replacement Peatland Officers to start in September.
5. **Moorland Management:** Work with the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership has focussed on wader productivity monitoring, willow establishment, peatland restoration opportunity mapping and the production of a 5yr action plan clearly describing what constitutes the public and private interest and how they can be delivered together through moorland management. Partners recently produced a blog on [wader conservation in the ECMP](#)
6. **Deer Management:** Work is continuing on the Strategic Land Use Plans for the West Grampians DMG and for South Deeside and North Angus DMG, gathering natural capital and impact assessment data. A contract has been issued for work with the South Grampians DMG, separating out the deer modelling from the natural capital assessments. CNPA staff continue involvement in the working groups taking forward the recommendations of the Deer Working Group and the CNPA CEO chairs the workstream to develop incentives for better deer management as well as sitting on the Strategic Board.

## **Visitor Experience**

7. **Managing for Visitors:** The Managing for Visitors Group, chaired by CNPA and involving landowners and managers from across the Park, has continued to meet fortnightly during the summer season. 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. There have been some notable exceptions, most notably when Glenmore / Loch Morlich which saw significant parking and camping pressures towards the end of the Scottish school holidays during particularly fine weather coincided with the weekend. Meetings have taken place with Highland Traffic Enforcement Team to promote a number of actions.
8. **Ranger Services:** In addition to the permanent & seasonal rangers a further 4 trainee rangers have been employed by CNPA throughout the summer season. 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. In view of the recent dry conditions, a particular focus has been on providing

advice around fires. A joint event bringing together all the rangers in the Park, is being held in early September to exchange experiences, review how the family of ranger services across the Park works together and implements the Partnership Plan.

9. **Access & Long Distance Routes:** Procurement is under way for a number of improvements to sections of the Speyside Way. These include minor repairs / maintenance but also some improvements to elements such as gradients in order to widen the range of people that can use those sections of the route.
10. **Volunteering and Health Walks:** A number of Volunteer Rangers continue to operate across the National Park, supporting the work of the ranger team. Two pilot sessions were held as part of the Volunteer Experience Programme with over 60 people connected to the charity Home Start East Highland taking part over the two days. Next steps will see Volunteer Cairngorms work with two or three groups for the rest of the year, to build on relationships and connect with other Park partners. A Green Space Dark Skies event was organised at Loch Insh and supported by many volunteers on 11th August to give a number of refugees, asylum seekers, families connected to charities and local people a chance to enjoy a unique event within the Park.
11. **Active Travel:** Significant activity has been undertaken recently on the Sustainable Transport & Active Travel elements of Cairngorms 2030 Programme. The contract for the Glenmore Sustainable Transport Plan has been awarded to Stantec who have commenced activity which initially includes direct engagement with local residents and businesses in the Glenmore corridor who will be most directly impacted by any changes that come about. A number of other contracts were advertised for the development phase of a series of local Active travel projects. Contracts have been awarded for the Active communities: Aviemore, Active communities: Badenoch and Strathspey and Active communities: Blair Atholl and Killiecrankie projects while the contract for the Upper Deeside Active and Sustainable Travel project is at tender stage with a closing date of 9th September. The consultation portal is now live at <https://cairngorms2030.commonplace.is> and the first face-to-face events are under way.
12. **Climate Conscious Communities:** Following a procurement exercise, similar public engagement sessions are now getting under way as part of the Cairngorms 2030 Programme with a number of communities across the Park and climate related work with schools has recommenced now that the summer holidays have finished.

## **Rural Development**

13. **Local Development Plan - Planning Guidance:** Scottish Government have recently confirmed they are content with the Supplementary Guidance on Developer Obligations. The Planning Committee has approved modifications to the Supplementary Guidance for Housing, and it has been submitted to Scottish Government. Feedback is awaited and, once complete, this will be the full suite of guidance for the Local Development Plan in place.

14. **Planning Casework:** Over the past three months, the Planning Committee has approved a number of applications including formation of bike track and related infrastructure at Cairngorm Mountain, Glenmore; Change of use of land to form 3 staff, farmhouses and the demolition of Lynvoan Cottage, Kingussie; Erection of 15 Dwellinghouses and Associated Infrastructure at Kindrochit Court, Braemar. An appeal was upheld by Reporters Unit about Killiehuntly Bothy and permission has been granted with conditions. The Committee also agreed not to object to the Corriegarth 2 Windfarm and agreed to approve the Tom Nan Clach in combination with existing and consented windfarms. There were three Proposal of Application Notices for forestry tracks at Glen Clova; and holiday lodges and residential development in Aviemore.
15. **Housing Delivery:** CNPA are continuing to support CBP and a number of social enterprises with housing delivery projects. A series of meetings with Communities Housing Trust and Rural Housing Scotland has taken place to promote key developments, and staff are liaising with key communities who are developing community-led housing projects. Costs have of course increased and officers have worked to include criteria within the new funding streams to help progress plans for community-led rural housing.
16. **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. A working group has been established involving HIE, Growbiz and Cairngorms Business Partnership and an update on the work programme will be provided to the Economic Steering Group in early September. The ESG will also consider the findings of the recent Cairngorms Business Barometer (see below) and the new NE Regional Economic Strategy. The Digital Steering Group is meeting in late September.
17. **Tourism Action Plan:** The Tourism Response Group has continued to meet monthly, chaired by Janet Hunter, as a subgroup of the Cairngorms Tourism Partnership. A submission to Europarc for accreditation under the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism is due to take place by December 2022. A Tourism Action Plan, to supplement the NP Partnership Plan, is in preparation and will be presented to CNPA Board for approval in late November, alongside a review of visitor management activity in 2022 and the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan.
18. **Tourism and Business Data:** The Cairngorms Business Barometer survey, undertaken by CBP with financial support from CNPA, focuses on Q2 from April to June 2022. In summary, the performance of businesses during Q2 has been mixed. CBP noted that, unsurprisingly, the latest results paint a more pessimistic picture than we have seen for some time. The impact of increasing costs is really starting to bite with 93% of businesses reporting increased energy costs, 86% increased supplier costs and 47% increased labour costs. Only 3% of businesses have been able to pass on increased costs in their entirety with 52% of businesses only able to pass on less than half of the increased costs and 31% unable to pass on any of the increases. Worryingly, 8% of businesses are considering ceasing trading all together in response to rising prices. The full report can be accessed [here](#).

19. **Community Engagement:** Consultants have been appointed and are undertaking a review of our approach to community engagement within the National Park as part of the Cairngorms 2030 Programme. A meeting has taken place with Directors of the Association of Cairngorms Communities to determine their aspirations and they are planning a significant meeting for their member organisations during the autumn is planned to help determine their future.

## **Stakeholder Engagement**

1. **National Park Partnership Plan:** our fourth Partnership Plan was launched at Boat of Garten Community Hall on 23 August by Lorna Slater MSP (Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity). Around 115 people were in attendance, representing the over 100 partners involved in delivering the plan on the ground. The event was BSL interpreted and live captioned. The launch was covered by a range of outlets including STV, The Scotsman, P&J, Strathspey and Badenoch Herald, and Aberdeen Live, and a series of video interviews and materials from the event have been shared across social media drawing out key elements of the plan. In addition to producing the [main Partnership Plan document](#), we mailed a 16-page shortened version to all 14,000 households across the Park at the end of August, summarising both the plan and how residents' feedback helped shape the final outcome. Both documents were printed on 100% recycled paper using eco-friendly inks to minimise our environmental impact. The door-drop was the first of a new series of physical newsletters, due to be published three times a year (the next of which will go out in the winter).
2. **Community drop-in sessions:** Linked to the new residents' newsletter above, discussions have taken place with the Cairngorms Business Partnership about broadening our existing managing for visitors' community meetings to establish a regular pattern of community drop-in sessions with a more flexible agenda. If successful, these events would allow us to roll out everything from Heritage Horizons engagement to conservation and land management project updates.
3. **LGBT Youth Charter:** CNPA signed up to the [LGBT Youth Charter](#) in mid-May and we have held introductory meetings with the LGBT Youth team, at which a range of activities were discussed including a targeted comms campaign engaging and celebrating LGBT residents and visitors in the Park (due to be delivered within the next 12 months).
4. **Green Space Dark Skies:** A community-focused event took place at Loch Insh on 11 August, welcoming over 300 visitors to the Park (many for the first time). [Green Space Dark Skies](#) is specifically designed to reach out to under-represented audiences, giving people a unique opportunity to engage with nature as part of a collaborative cultural experience. The event was captured on film both for the project website and as part of a [Countryfile special](#) in the autumn.

## Communications

5. **Active Cairngorms:** We launched our first digital Managing for Visitors advertising campaign in June, targeting those who do not typically follow our existing channels. Whilst the campaign has yet to conclude, we had already reached an audience of over 1.5m in the first month, with posts ranging from responsible dog walking to wild swimming, littering, toileting and the danger of wildfires. Customisable assets were shared with all estate, DMO and NGO partners, and accompanying videos were also created. Data from the campaign will inform our long-term comms approach and help us refine messaging for hard-to-reach audiences. [You can see an example here.](#)

We are currently in the initial planning stages for Wee Walks Week with the outdoor access team, reviewing content we currently have and exploring the possibility of using the event as an opportunity to mark the completion of the Speyside Way.

6. **Cairngorms Nature:** Following the Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend in May, the team have been reviewing our activity across the website and social media. Across all channels, our posts reached 350,000 people and attracted nearly 3,000 likes and shares.
7. **Press and media:** Recent news updates include planning stories about [affordable housing in Braemar](#) and the approval of a [family bike trail at Cairngorm Mountain](#). Conservation news items including [beaver](#) and [capercaillie](#) board papers and freshwater pearl mussels were also picked up fairly widely.

The fourth and final episode of [our new podcast series Cairngorms Characters](#) (produced in partnership with CBP and The Big Light) aired last month. The series attracted an audience of over 2,000 people in its first five weeks of transmission, and all four episodes will remain available for the foreseeable future for further promotion. We are currently exploring options for follow up activity, including the potential of a broadcast plus podcast series with BBC Scotland, Channel 4 or Channel 5.

Alongside a number of new Cairngorms Voices posts (showcasing the people who help make the National Park tick), we produced a [long-format news piece and photo story](#) highlighting the East Cairngorms Moorland Partnership's conservation work helping protect wader species. As part of the piece we commissioned a local photographer to go out with Michael Bennet, Head Keeper at Delnadamph, and we hope to repeat this approach in future seasons to paint a more complete picture of the work being carried out on estates across the Cairngorms.

8. **Heritage Horizons:** The Heritage Horizons engagement programme continues to gear up, with media releases created for the [launch of the new creative directory](#), a blog from Janet Hunter on the [wellbeing economy](#), plus the [launch of our active travel consultation](#). We have also [produced a second 3-min video](#) explaining how the programme hangs together. The film is narrated by 16-year-old local resident Cailean Mckerron, and features many of the individuals and partners who will be instrumental in making the project a success.

A [new Commonplace site](#) for Heritage Horizons: Cairngorms 2030 was launched last month, focusing (at least initially) on the active travel side of the programme. The site features a bespoke heatmap for residents and visitors to the Park to tell us what improvements are required to make it easier, safer and more enjoyable to get around by foot, bike or wheelchair. A new [community-owned assets map](#) was developed to showcase over 90 assets currently owned or managed by community interest organisations, alongside a new [Cairngorms Creative Directory](#), spotlighting more than 80 creatives working in the Park featuring poets, painters, sculptors and storytellers. This is the first part of the Community Arts and Culture element of Heritage Horizons.

We were delighted to welcome Kasia Stringer-Ladds to the team as our new Heritage Horizons Comms & Engagement Officer in mid-July. Kasia will be instrumental in ensuring engagement activities for all 24 projects run according to plan and that we capture key stories as the programme develops. Kasia and the team are currently assisting with the development of various consultation / engagement events for active travel projects, Keep Scotland Beautiful-led climate workshops, the launch of the outdoor dementia activity centre and much more.

9. **Website and social media:** The website redevelopment project has geared up significantly, with a range of stakeholder workshops taking place with Park residents, local businesses and the Equalities Advisory Panel (further workshops are planned with land managers and visitors). We are also preparing an online survey to gather views of existing users of the site, and our agency partners are conducting a full review of both our site and a number of partners' (eg VisitCairngorms.com) to better chart how visitors and data move between them, identifying any pinch points.

Following the completion of a Digital Accessibility Centre (DAC) audit, we have now updated cairngorms.co.uk so that it complies to the AA standard under the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. This work has included changing the colour of key navigation elements to make them more legible, providing text alternatives to maps and graphics, amending multiple downloadable pdfs, and making all elements controllable by keyboard. DAC have also delivered two bespoke training sessions for staff across the organisation on how to create content, design websites and edit documents to make them accessible to the widest audience possible.

10. **Publications:** Earlier this summer we commissioned four photographers to capture a range of people images for use in the new Partnership Plan, Heritage Horizons and across a variety of CNPA publications and channels. The photographers captured just shy of 1,000 new images, over 100 of which feature non-white and disabled audiences, nearly 200 people 'new to nature', and over 300 featuring young people and families. Another key strand of this work was capturing rural workers in the Park, from gamekeepers to stalkers and farmers. We will continue to update this image bank over the next few years to ensure we represent all facets of the National Park in our comms materials.

## Organisational Development

11. **Business Continuity Planning (BCP).** Staff are now working to the Trial Hybrid Working Approach during which the default working location is 50% at home and 50% in the office. Staff attendance in the office has notably increased, and the minority of staff have requested more than 50% home working. This approach, and the office configuration to support it, is being evaluated every 3 months to identify what is working well, or not. The evaluation will inform any moves to a more permanent arrangement.
12. We are arranging a day-long, face to face Staff Gathering in October, recognising that approx. 25% of our staff group were appointed and joined remotely, and that many staff have not met up with colleagues on a face-to-face basis since the pandemic started. This event will be an opportunity for staff to get to know each other, and for some on-site collaborative work around key themes and projects for the next few years.
13. **Staffing update:**  
Since June, staffing updates to 1<sup>st</sup> September are as follows:
  - a) Staff who left the organisation were:
    - i. Mike Woolvin, Research and Knowledge Exchange Manager, left on a 12-month career break
    - ii. Vicky Inglis, Seasonal Ranger, left to move to a permanent position elsewhere
  - b) External appointments, following a competitive external recruitment process were as follows:
    - i. Catriona Strang joined as Clerk to the Board, job sharing alongside Alix Harkness
    - ii. Mariaan Pita joined as Executive Support Manager, new post.
    - iii. Colin Simpson joined as Head of Visitor Services and Active Travel, replacing Pete Crane.
    - iv. Beccy Stanton joined as Facilities Assistant, new post.
    - v. Andy Smith joined as Access & Infrastructure Technician, new post
    - vi. Lisa Maclsaac joined as Data, Governance and Reporting Manager, replacing Vicky Walker
    - vii. Kasia Stringer-Ladds joined as Heritage Horizons Comms and Engagement Officer, new post
    - viii. Sally Phillips seconded by RSPB as Peatland Action Project Assistant.
  - c) Internal staff appointments, following a competitive internal recruitment process were:-
    - . Matt Watson was appointed to the Peatland Action Programme Manager (Programme Development) role, and Emma Stewart was appointed to the Peatland Action Programme Manager (Operations) role. The Peatland team was restructured when Stephen Corcoran left, and these roles are part of the new structure. Matt and Emma's roles as Peatland Officers have been recruited, with appointments to Ewan Campbell and Simon Thomas who both start in September.

**14. Youth Employment:**

- a) 4 Trainee Rangers joined on a 3-month contract: - Sam Phillips, Tom Fredriksson, Joe Mcilwraith, Kirsty Menzies
- b) In addition to the two work experience rangers (Chelsea Hewitt and Liam Carruthers), the Authority is also hosting Alfie Ford, from Grantown Grammar School, on IT work experience. Alfie work shadowed the IT team for two afternoons/week during the school holidays and will do one afternoon/week during term time.

15. **Equalities:** Following an open procurement process, the Authority appointed JRS KnowHow to deliver equalities training for staff and Board. All staff have now attended the one-day Equalities Awareness session. The Senior Management Team will attend two further half day sessions focussing on Ally-ship, Reasonable Adjustments, and Leading by Example, and all line managers will attend a session on Disability in the Workplace. The Board training has been scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> April.

16. **Cairngorms Trust:** supported by the Authority as its Accountable Body, has secured a Scottish Government grant of £281,000 for 2022/23 to support Community Led Local Development (CLLD) investment from a £7 million fund put in place to continue to support CLLD in the absence of LEADER. While not achieving our target of finding LEADER replacement of equivalent value to the 2014 to 2021 programme, this funding is a step change in scale to the £50,000 secured in 2021/22. Trustees have established an investment plan including continuation and increasing scale of the Cairngorms Youth Local Action Group and community grant funding. The Trust continues its evolution of ideas around voluntary donations as had been reported regularly and in more detail to the board's Performance Committee.

**Grant Moir**  
**September 2022**

## Board Convener Report – For Information

### External Engagements (1 June 2022 – 30 August 2022)

I attended the Royal Highland Show on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June and Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June including the Presidents lunch being hosted by the Highlands & Islands and the ministerial reception hosted by Mairi McAllan, Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform. Good engagement was made with stakeholders and Ministers at both functions and around the wider event with future meetings with partners set up on the back of it. Anne Rae Macdonald and I also visited the Natural Capital stand hosted by the Highlands and Islands and funded by a cross section of government bodies including the Cairngorm National Park Authority and had been well visited during the event.

The launch of the new National Park Partnership Plan was very well supported by a wide range of partners, including new ones, and by Board Members. It was very positive to have Lorna Slater MSP along as our Minister to help us launch the plan and we hope she will be able to join us for a Board meeting in the future. A huge thanks on my part to the staff for the incredible amount of organisation that went into making the day such a big success, and for the enormous amount of work that went into the plan over the past couple of years.

In addition to scheduled Board meetings and internal meetings, I have attended the following external engagements in my capacity as Convener of the Board since our last Board meeting.

Date	Engagement	Venue
23/6/22	Presidents Luncheon at the Royal Highland Show (RHS)	Edinburgh
24/6/22	Mairi McAllan Evening Reception at RHS	Edinburgh
23/8/22	NPPP Launch with MSP Lorna Slater	Boat of Garten

**Xander McDade**  
Convener – Cairngorm National Park Authority

### Other Board Member Engagement Updates:

#### Carolyn Caddick (Board Deputy Convener)

Date	Engagement	Venue
13/06/22	Represented Board at Dave Fallows Funeral	Newtonmore
27/06/22	Staff Consultative Forum Meeting	Grantown on Spey
28/7/22	Land Reform meeting	Online
23/8/22	NPPP Launch with MSP Lorna Slater	Boat of Garten