



For information

Title: Chief Executive Officer Report and Convener update

Prepared by: Grant Moir, Chief Executive Officer

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 (NPPP).

Nature and Climate Change

1. In 2025/26 the Peatland team worked on 15 projects across the Park. The grant requirement for these projects is £3.37 million (estimated on 31 January). 1,614 hectares (ha) of peatland were brought under restoration between 01 April 2025 and 31 January 2026. A further 256ha could be achieved by end March but are subject to snow melt in different locations.
2. Nature Restoration Funding is enabling significant progress towards delivery of the Capercaillie Emergency Plan; a coming together of 27 partners including land managers across 20 landholdings, led by the Park Authority. Over 12,000 metres of deer fencing has been removed; woodland grazing has expanded across more than 4,000ha of capercaillie habitat; robo-cutting of dense heather over 150ha, and diversionary feeding expanded to 90% of landholdings currently supporting female capercaillie.
3. The National Park peregrine report was published in November 2025. The study shows that the estimated number of peregrine pairs in the breeding season within the National Park has declined by 56% since 2002, with less than half of territorial pairs successfully fledging young in 2024. Contributing factors are likely to include upland land management practices, decreased prey availability for peregrines, wildlife crime and, more recently, outbreaks of Avian Flu.
4. Dr Rachel Helliwell started as the River Dee Catchment Project Officer in November 2025. This 18-month post is part of the Public Sector Reform (PSR) pioneer



catchment programme, which the Park Authority leads in the Dee catchment. The post will also support the Dee Resilience Group, a partnership of agencies, river bodies and community representatives. The PSR programme aims to coordinate the work of public agencies to be more efficient and effective in delivering Environment Strategy outcomes.

5. Five beavers were released on Wildland in mid-December, bringing the number of beavers released to 37, as part of the Park Authority's five-year license to release up to 50 individuals or 15 pairs and families. The total number of beavers in the Upper Spey catchment is 57, including kits born in the Park.

Planning and Place

6. Cairngorms Trust Chair, Rodger Clegg has now stepped down for the Local Action Group (LAG). The new Chair is Karen Derrick. A huge thank you to Rodger for all his work as a volunteer over the years.
7. Work on a number of path improvements have been progressing well including improvements to a section of the Speyside Way between Insh and Inveruglas and on the "Cinder path" at Ballater where the Park Authority has part funded a community led project. Further improvements to the paths round Loch an Eilean commenced in February.
8. The first three accessible paths that were surveyed by the disability access intern are now featured on the website under the path collection of "Accessible paths", with more to follow. A first draft of an 'Accessible paths toolkit' for land managers has been produced and funding earmarked for a small grant scheme for path improvements to make existing paths more accessible. Staff from the access, ranger, green health and volunteering teams attended an Outdoor Accessibility training day with Able2Adventure on 12 March.
9. A further 11 volunteer rangers have been recruited supplementing the 24 recruited earlier in 2025 with them finishing training in late February. Two of our existing volunteers have reached the milestone of having contributed 1,000 hours each of volunteering in the Cairngorms since they started.



10. A restructure of the Park Authority Ranger Service has been completed in anticipation of the different demands and responsibilities that will come with the fire byelaw. The Ranger Manager is now supported by two Senior Rangers one covering Deeside and Angus and one covering the west of the National Park who will take on line management responsibility for Seasonal Rangers. A new permanent Ranger started on 01 March which now gives an all-year-round ranger presence in the Angus and North Perthshire area.
11. The Park Authority Ranger Service piloted a project last summer to “bring nature inside” through a range of activities with Praesmohr House Care Home in Deeside. Each visit lasted 45-minutes to an hour and was designed to make the activities accessible to people with a range of abilities. The benefits to the residents were recognised by the care home manager and we were invited back to run monthly sessions this year, concentrating on reconnecting with Nature and focussing on the wildlife in the garden and the woodlands around Praesmohr House. Two indoor sessions have been delivered so far this year and in future we plan to use the garden when the weather improves and the days are warmer.
12. In advance of the fire byelaw coming into force in April, productive meetings have continued with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service as the Park Authority moves towards becoming a Specialist Reporting Agency which will allow the Park Authority to take enforcement cases direct to the Fiscals service for consideration. Parallel discussions with Police Scotland have taken place to ensure a robust process around evidence gathering and this is to be followed up with dedicated training by Police Scotland for Countryside Rangers.
13. **Local Development Plan (LDP):** The Evidence Report for our next LDP was presented to Board for approval at a special meeting on 13 March. This was approved by the Board and it will now be submitted to Scottish Government's (SG) Division for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) for a 'gatecheck' review to ensure the evidence is sufficient. The gatecheck review is expected to take around three months to complete. A Call for Sites and ideas to help inform the new LDP will also be launched in late March. This will provide an opportunity for people to suggest ideas that could help shape future planning policies and development priorities across the National Park. It will also enable landowners and developers to



propose sites that they believe may be suitable for development and potential allocation in the new LDP.

- 14. Planning casework:** Since the last Formal Board meeting in November 2025, the Planning Committee has granted planning permission for a small housing scheme at Boat of Garten (comprising two affordable homes for rent and two open market homes to cross-subsidise the affordable units), and an extension to the Braemar Caravan site. The Committee has also approved updates to the Park Authority's planning call-in criteria and enforcement charter, as well as agreeing the Park Authority's consultation response to the Kyllachy Wind Farm proposal just outside the Park boundary. The Planning Committee will meet on 13 March to consider planning applications for a flood defence bund at Dalwhinnie, a series of wildlife ponds near Ballater, minor variations to house plots at ongoing development sites in Aviemore and Newtonmore, and the Park Authority's consultation response to the proposed Dorenell Windfarm Extension just outside the Park boundary.

Communications and Engagement

- 15. Fire byelaw:** We have been working with creative agency Bright Signals to develop a coordinated communications campaign for fire byelaws, under the umbrella title of 'Protect our National Park. No flame. No spark'. The campaign, which commences week commencing 16 March, will feature residents / workers from across the National Park, calling on visitors and residents alike to join them in helping reduce the threat of wildfires. Promotion will include everything from road signs to social media videos and adverts, ranger conversations, partner signage, beer mats, window stickers and leaflets (see below visuals). Video and radio adverts were also shot in locations across the National Park in mid-March, featuring four residents and a Park Authority ranger.



16. We are also exploring partnerships with key social media influencers, with a specific focus on teenagers / men in their early twenties and 'van life' adventurers to ensure we get the message across to key target audiences. Our paid online / social media activity will help us reach far beyond our own channels, targeting those planning a trip to the Cairngorms, as well as specific visitor types and geographical areas.
17. The press team is working on a range of proactive media opportunities, with filming already planned with Channel 4 News, STV News and BBC Reporting Scotland. Specialist publications are also being targeted to maximise coverage and awareness of the byelaw as we approach launch date.
18. The success of the campaign will be tracked via a specific pre-and-post-campaign survey with a random sample of 100 residents and 400 visitors, as well as through the next tranche of our visitor and resident surveys and direct feedback from partners.
19. **Communities Fund:** Recruitment for the [C2030 Communities Fund panel](#) opened on 07 January for six weeks. The paid opportunity was promoted extensively (including via local and national press, a door-drop to 30,000 households, social media videos, partner communications and posters in communities across the



National Park) and we were delighted that over 250 people expressed an interest in being involved. We received applications from every major town and village in the National Park and from every age group, with applicants ranging from 16 to 85 years old. All seven of our Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) target audiences were well represented and we had strong engagement from a range of under-represented groups, including ethnic minorities and disabled people. Another positive sign was that just under half of applicants reported having 'minimal' or 'no previous contact' with the Park Authority. A final shortlist of 18 people is currently being pulled together, ahead of their first session on 25 March (led by our partners Involve UK).

20. **Community engagement:** An Aviemore roadshow event took place on 11 December. Aligned to the next stage of consultation around C2030 active travel proposals, the event included information about local health walks, transport and landscape projects, and craft activities such as Lego building and screen printing. Despite its proximity to Christmas, 49 people joined the team over the course of the day, and this has been further supplemented by a business drop-in session and a nighttime safety audit with members of the local access panel.
21. A second roadshow took place in Boat of Garten on 15 January, linked to the active community's consultation and designs for improving crossing points / walking routes within the village. The C2030 Communities Fund was also promoted, and the beaver team came along with video camera footage of recent activity in the local area. The Engagement team are currently finalising plans for spring and summer, with roadshow events planned in the Angus Glens, Blair Atholl, and Laggan / Dalwhinnie, together with Highland games in Strathdon and Tomintoul (via the ranger team).
22. **Cultural heritage:** Building on the success of the cultural heritage networking event in Boat of Garten last year, a follow up meeting took place in early March. Key topics included developing a connected archive for the National Park and agreeing the scope and key priorities for a new Cultural Heritage Network. We have also been working with the Cairngorms Trust over the past few months on a dedicated [Communities and Cultural Heritage Fund](#), with a total of £65,000 awarded to 11 projects celebrating local heritage, crafts, art and music. Among those granted funding were the Braemar Local History Group for digitising their archive material, a Kingussie High School project to design, build and launch traditional boats



(including a canoe, kayak and Spey coracle), and the creation of a heritage hub in Strathdon, providing a workspace and archive storage. We hope to repeat the fund next year.

23. **Corporate communications:** C2030 projects have also been a key focus over the past few months, with a range of coverage secured on [Communities Fund recruitment](#) and the [creative residency](#). We also marked the launch of a [new fund for farmers and crofters](#) in the National Park, alongside a [new cycle hub fund](#) to help local communities and partners take forward active travel projects. German TV company ZDF filmed with Glenkilrie Larder and Grantown Grammar for a piece on the deer larder project (yet to air). Nature stories included a feature on freshwater pearl mussels by [BBC Out of Doors](#), the launch of this year's [Climate Adaptation Fund](#) and the results of the first [survey on peregrine falcon](#) numbers for 20 years.
24. Staff have contributed newspaper columns for the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald and Deeside Piper on a range of topics including woodlands, ranger work and youth projects. We've secured a [new column with the Press and Journal](#) and the Courier for Malcolm Smith, our Agricultural Advisor, which has been well received.
25. **Website and social media:** Between November 2025 and March 2026, we reached a collective social media audience of 89,425 across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and BlueSky, up 8,608 (or 32%) on the same period last year. Unfortunately, with staff capacity significantly impacted by staff sickness and the induction of a new staff member, we were unable to post as frequently across all channels. This resulted in impressions falling by 19% to 3,601,436 and engagements by 5% to 190,377. However, link clicks rose 45% to 19,974 and the overall engagement rate rose 17% to 5.3%.
26. 35,000 users visited the new National Park website during the period, with key developments rolled out including a new 'map builder' function to allow us to create our own maps (see our new health walks page), a bulk document function to streamline and standardise board / planning paper uploads, and an upcoming meetings and events section. We also rolled out dedicated funding opportunities



and tender opportunities pages, giving communities and businesses all the information they need in one place.

27. Content highlights from the period include: a [‘View fae the ploo’](#) interview with local snow plough operators; a Cairngorms Voices piece about a member of the [Braemar Mountain Rescue team](#); a [photo story about Jean](#), who lives with dementia; a new format experiment on Instagram to celebrate [Gaelic place names](#); and a campaign to encourage Expression of Interests (EOIs) for the [C2030 Communities Fund](#).
28. **Publications and branding:** The spring edition of [Cairn magazine](#) – a fire byelaw special – will hit doorsteps across the National Park week commencing 23 March. Alongside features on the byelaw and short interviews with residents and partners backing the campaign, there are a range of other stories including funding updates, peatland archaeology training and a mental health course for the farming community. The issue also features a piece on the over £1 million of path upgrades taken forward in the National Park over the past three years.
29. Work to install new interpretation panels at the Charter Chest Path near Braemar, the Cairns Walk on Balmoral Estate, and the Sky Hide stargazing spot at Tomintoul is progressing well, with delivery expected in time for the busy summer season. Another key priority is refreshing signage at Glenmore Visitor Centre and Café, to include byelaw messaging at this strategic visitor location.

Organisational Development

30. Staffing update: Since November, the following staff changes took place:
31. Staff leaving the organisation:
 - a) Nancy Chambers left as Cairngorms Local Action Group (CLAG) Trust Manager after seven years. She left to pursue personal goals.
 - b) Mark Tucker left as Management Accountant after nine years. He left to pursue personal goals.
32. Staff joining the organisation:
 - a) Kerri Milligan joined as Conservation Officer - Nature Restoration Fund. This is a new, partner-funded post.



- b) Stephanie Walters joined as Finance Assistant replacing Craig Lewis.
- c) Heather Boswell joined as Senior Planning Officer - Development Planning, replacing Colin Bryans.
- d) George Patterson joined as one of our permanent Countryside rangers. This is a new post, based in the Angus Glens and Perthshire.

33. Ranger update:

- a) Ranger recruitment has been successful with the appointment of nine new Rangers to join six Rangers who were reappointed from the 2025 season. One of the new Rangers was previously a Park Authority Trainee Ranger. This takes the Ranger complement to 15 posts, representing a mix of full and part time staff. There was a huge amount of interest in these seasonal posts, with over 140 applicants.

34. Staff appointments:

- a) Duncan MacDonald and Will George were both promoted to the Senior Ranger posts. These posts are new following the restructure of the Ranger Service, prompted by the Ranger Manager previously having line managed all permanent and Seasonal Rangers. It was no longer viable for one officer to have so many line reports particularly at a key time for the ranger service with regards the Implementation of the new fire bylaws. The new structure better supports the expected increased demand on the service over the coming months.

35. Roles appointed for future dates:

- a) We have successfully appointed a Peatland Action Project Officer, replacing Simon Thomas.

36. Live recruitment - posts currently being recruited are:

- a) Management Accountant, to replace Mark Tucker.

37. Youth Development:

- a) Jodie Griffiths-Hagan joined on a short-term contract as Content Creation Intern.
- b) HR staff supported and attended several careers fairs, including fairs at Grantown Grammar, Kingussie High School, and Inverness Royal Academy.



Our support at career fairs is key to enhancing understanding by young people of the roles that the Park Authority employs and the career pathways to these roles. We typically support events aimed at young people who are having to make subject choices, which is a critical time for them with regards career aspirations.

38. Organisational Development:

- a) The Best Companies staff engagement survey results have now been published. The Park Authority has achieved "One Star" status, and the engagement trajectory shows that our current staff group are more engaged than ever before. We have run this survey every two years since 2012, and the results are key to informing our Organisational Development Activity for the next few years. The survey measures engagement across eight factors - Leadership, My Manager, My Company, My Team, Wellbeing, Personal Growth, Fair Deal and Giving Something Back.
- b) The results have been discussed with staff both at an organisational level and also team levels, to identify the key actions to support any highlights (areas where engagement is positive and which we would seek to retain) and shadows (areas where engagement could be better and actions to enhance engagement). The survey will be fully scrutinised by the Resources Committee.
- c) We are in the process of developing our Organisational Development and People Strategy 2026 - 2030. This is informed by the survey results, but also by other organisational, national and societal impacts, including digital transformation, budget and resource pressures, changes in law etc. The strategy will be discussed with the Resources Committee in due course.

39. Wellbeing, engagement and equality:

- a) The Park Authority is hosting an in-person event for the Equality Advisory Panel at the end of March. This panel comprises 13 volunteer members, who meet virtually on a monthly basis. This in-person event is an opportunity to showcase the work of / within the Park Authority, and also to thank them for their input over the year. This year, the event is based in Kingussie with a visit to the Highland Wildlife Park to discuss the work they have done to improve accessibility. It will also include a session on social media, supported by our communications team.



- b) The Park Authority has recently adopted a Men's Health and Wellbeing Guidance approach, which sits within our overarching Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and complements existing guidance documents supporting menopause, menstrual health and endometriosis, fertility treatment, pregnancy loss.

Procurement

- 40. The Park Authority has published a portal of tender opportunities designed to support key strategic aims across conservation, sustainable resource use, community development, and visitor experience. The updated page now highlights a range of live contracts on Public Procurement Scotland (PCS) from office cleaning services to peatland restoration projects, youth action coordination, and active travel initiatives, all aligned with our mission to enhance the Park's natural and cultural heritage while fostering sustainable economic and social development.
- 41. We've developed a clear, transparent pipeline that invites suppliers, consultants, and contractors who share our values to participate. We are particularly hoping to see strong bids from organisations operating within the National Park, given their local expertise and commitment to the area, especially those who can demonstrate alignment with our Fair Work First principles and contribute meaningfully to Community Wealth Building.
- 42. Full details are available here: [Tender opportunities](#)

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Title: Convener's update

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Purpose

To highlight to board members and Senior Management Team (SMT) and staff of the meetings and events the Board Convener has been attending since the last Formal Board meeting.

- 1. Business Rates** – Engagement with business owners across the National Park, concerned about significant increases in their business rates and the impact on the viability of their enterprises, followed up by internal representations to Scottish Government (SG).
- 2. Media** – Provided media comment on a range of issues including columns for local newspapers reflecting on the successes and challenges of the past year, and the Park Authority's commitment to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing communities and nature in the area.
- 3. River Resilience** – Contributed to Dee Resilience Strategy Group meeting, chaired by the Park Authority, bringing together stakeholders from across the catchment to speed up delivery of projects which can benefit all river catchments and their communities facing similar challenges.
- 4. Diversity** – Contributed to the SG's Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) review of public appointments diversity strategy, discussing the practical implications of current approaches and the importance of avoiding unintended consequences.
- 5. National Parks UK (NPUK)** – Participated in NPUK Chairs and CEO's forum, discussing the opportunities for National Parks to make a difference to the communities they serve and their respective aims through collective work.
- 6. Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP)** – Meeting with Highlands and Island MSP and member of the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs and Islands Committee



Tim Eagle, outlining work being done to deliver on the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP).

7. **Dee** – Addressed the opening ceremony for the River Dee salmon season, outlining the pioneering work being delivered by the Park Authority in conjunction with community groups, public bodies and other stakeholders to reduce the impact of flooding and droughts on the catchment.
8. **Board Recruitment** – Fielded approaches from prospective Park Authority Board member candidates and participated in extensive panel process to make recommendations for Ministerial appointment.
9. **Appraisals** – Completed all 18 Board Member appraisal processes including follow-up actions on agreed training and development needs.
10. **National Park Partnership (NPP)** – Meeting with NPP's new Chair, discussing strategic priorities for the organisation over the year ahead.
11. **National Park Conveners** – Met regularly with the Convener of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Board to discuss issues of mutual interest.
12. **Park Authority Liaison** – Attended weekly liaison meetings with the Park Authority Deputy Convener, CEO and Deputy CEO.
13. All meetings were in addition to individual meetings and discussions with Board members, senior officers, staff and other stakeholder groups on a wide range of subjects.

Sandy Bremner,

10 March 2026

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