



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).

Glenmore and Abernethy Wildfire

1. The Glenmore and Abernethy wildfire was one of the largest incidents that has occurred since the National Park was established. There are many key issues that need to be taken forward as we look to ensure that the National Park and Scotland are more prepared for these incidents in the future. This goes from land management and aerial support to communications and resources. The Park Authority will be taking part in the debriefs associated with the wildfire. The CEO also sits on the national wildfire oversight group which is reviewing the national wildfire action plan. Wildfire management will also be a major part of the next National Park Partnership Plan that will be consulted on from mid-October.

Nature and Climate Change

2. **Glenmore and Abernethy Wildfire** – The Park Authority is chairing the post wildfire Environmental Recovery Group, one of three subgroups established by the Local Resilience Partnership. The group's membership includes affected land managers, NatureScot and Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services (RESAS). The remit is to establish extent and impact of the wildfire and develop a costed monitoring and recovery plan. In collaboration with the University of Western Scotland, drone and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) surveys are taking place to collect information on burn extent, intensity and identify where it stopped and areas of resilience.
3. **Land-Based Business** – A contract has been awarded, and work is commencing on supporting land-based business transition and rural skills development as part



of the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Strategic Land Management Plan (SLMP) delivery. Estates in the programme identified that new legislation, climate adaptation and changing economic, social and environmental contexts are creating new demands, pressures and opportunities on existing estate management models and workforce strategies to provide the skills rural workers will need in the future. The Future Rural Skills programme is co-designed and developed with estate owners and managers from the five estates within the West Grampian SLMP area, starting September 2026.

4. **Muirburn** – From 15 September it will become an offence to carry out muirburn in Scotland without a licence. The aim of the licence is to help ensure that muirburn is carried out safely and appropriately. It is a condition of licencing that practitioners must have regard to the Muirburn Code, which has recently been updated in collaboration with stakeholders, including the Park Authority. With over 50% of the National Park classified as moorland (heathland and peatland) the implementation of muirburn licencing could have significant effect on the National Park's landscapes, and we will be working closely with NatureScot on ensuring and monitoring compliance.
5. **Fresh Water Pearl Mussels** – A licence has been secured from NatureScot to trial an innovative technique for attaching microscopic pearl mussel larvae to the gills of young salmon, which are then to be released into new areas on the Avon and Fiddich. This will be a significant step forward to aid population recovery. A freshwater pearl mussel breeding facility has been set up at the Spey Fishery Board and NatureScot are currently considering a licence application to take mussels into the facility later this year.

Planning and Place

6. **Visitor Infrastructure** - Working with Nethy Bridge community the Park Authority has completed the replacement of the Alltmore bridge which gives access to the school and woodland. The formal opening for the new bridge was on 10 July.
7. **Outdoor Access Activities** - The new 'Paths around Tomintoul' leaflet has been published.



8. A toolkit to support community development of more accessible paths has been finalised, (summary of path criteria, how to assess and audit potential accessible paths), with training delivered to groups at the Community Path Group gathering on 13 June. Working with the Cairngorms Trust an Accessible Paths Fund for community groups has been put in place, with an initial £16,000 allocated as a grants fund supporting accessibility improvements to existing paths. New resources have produced to support responsible motorhome and campervan parking including a new leaflet, webpage and online facilities map.
9. **Countryside Ranger Activity** – A full team was in place in advance of the main holiday season with the final additions being four trainees who started in June (and continued until mid-September). This included more weekend specific staff to allow increased patrols over summer weekends when more fire byelaw related activity was anticipated.
10. 15 Junior Rangers took part in this year's three days expedition from Balmoral estate through to Glen Doll in the Angus Glens, led by the two senior rangers and Balmoral Estate ranger Georgia. Along the way Junior rangers took part in some practical conservation tasks with partner ranger services and picked up campcraft and navigation skills along the way
11. **Glenmore and Abernethy Wildfire** - The Recreation and Access Team have been working with the Ranger Service and land managers to develop a webpage and map showing what's open and what's still closed as well as producing temporary signage for the current exclusion zone which were subsequently put out by rangers at all main access points to the exclusion zone and main information points in the wider community. The ranger team played a key role in supporting partner ranger services directly affected by the wildfire, notably Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) delivering extra patrolling activities at their sites whilst their own team was re-deployed at the active fire front. Following the reopening of some areas Rangers continued to support partners through engaging with the general public and preventing individuals entering the exclusion zone.
12. **Transforming Transport** - Transport work has continued to transition from project development into delivery, with Cycle Friendly Cairngorms grant contracts issued to support community-led active travel and sustainable transport projects. Design



development has progressed across key infrastructure projects in Aviemore, Nethy Bridge, Newtonmore and Boat of Garten, including active travel improvements, cycle parking, e-bike charging facilities and a wayfinding initiative with construction dependent on securing external funding and preparing recommendations to ensure projects remain deliverable within programme timescales.

13. Behaviour change programmes have continued to expand, with “bike buses” now operating in eight schools with Ballater and Strathdon added to the earlier Badenoch and Strathspey initiatives.
14. **Local Development Plan (LDP)** - In July, the Scottish Government's (SG) Division for Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) confirmed that the Evidence Report for our next LDP had successfully passed their 'gatecheck' review process. This officially enables us to move onto the next stage of preparing the draft LDP. In parallel with the gatecheck assessment process, a Call for Sites and Ideas was undertaken from late March until mid-June. This enabled communities, individuals, organisations and landowners to suggest ideas that could help shape future planning policies in the new LDP and to suggest potential development sites for consideration. All submissions are now being assessed and will be taken into account during preparation of the draft LDP. An updated timetable outlining the next stages in preparing the new LDP will be presented to Board for approval in November.
15. **Planning casework** - Since the last formal Board meeting on 26 June, the Planning Committee has granted planning permission for a segregated non-motorised user route between Aviemore and Carrbridge, an outdoor eating / drinking area and car parking provision at the Old Bridge Inn in Aviemore, and minor variations to an ongoing housing development in Newtonmore. Following the Planning Committee's decision on 12 June to grant planning permission for a motorhome site at Ballater, the application was referred to Scottish Ministers due to an outstanding objection from Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) on flood risk grounds. On 10 July, Scottish Ministers notified us that they were not going to intervene by issuing a direction restricting the granting of consent for the development, or by calling in the application for their own determination. The planning permission has therefore now been issued in line with the Committee's decision.



Communications and Engagement

- 16. Glenmore and Strath Nethy wildfire** – The period was dominated by the Glenmore and Strath Nethy wildfire, with staff members attending (at least) daily national coordination meetings for communications and public engagement, with colleagues represented from Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), Highland Council, Forestry Land Scotland (FLS), the Met Office and multiple other agencies and key stakeholders. We committed to providing twice daily updates in the early days of the fire – including regular video updates from Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place or Grant Moir, CEO – before moving to daily updates via social media, web and traditional media for the next couple of weeks. The timing of these updates was dictated by national communications messaging (coordinated largely by SFRS and Police Scotland), which in practice meant a number of updates were issued later than was ideal. Despite this, engagement rates on our posts were very high, with our 118 posts reaching 10.6 million impressions, 1.2 million video views and 850,000 engagements in total. Alongside the updates, we have also created a dedicated [landing page](#) showing the current exclusion zone and related path closures. This is being updated as the situation on the ground changes.
- 17. Media coverage** – Over 11,000 individual pieces mentioned the Glenmore and Strath Nethy wildfire over the past few weeks, with an estimated reach in the hundreds of millions. The team facilitated 50+ interviews and / or provided quotes for broadcast, print and online titles. Coverage across local and national media included Sky, BBC Reporting Scotland, STV, Channel 4 News, Channel 5 News, Landward, New York Times, Bauer Radio, Radio 5 Live, LBC Radio. Interest in the story continues to be high, with the BBC's Scotland Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs Correspondent Kevin Keane producing a [deep-dive into the topic](#) in late August. Interviews and features are currently in progress with The Herald, The National and two separate episodes of Landward.
- 18. Recovery communications** – In recognition of the sizeable impact the wildfire has had on businesses both in and around Glenmore and further afield, we have been working with VisitScotland and Cairngorm Business Partnership (CBP) on a coordinated marketing effort to promote the Cairngorms as 'open for business'. This will include targeted public relations (PR) activity and press familiarisation



trips, digital advertising and partnerships with a number of travel influencers, encouraging visitors to seek out the Cairngorms over the autumn and winter months. This will complement our 'Where Winter Comes to Life' campaign, elements of which are being brought forward to ensure the message hits home well ahead of the Christmas holidays.

19. **Social media** – Since June our social media following has expanded significantly, with Facebook rising 11,251 (to 53,316), Instagram by 8,613 (to 45,076), LinkedIn by 371 (to 15,680) and YouTube by 85 (to 1,810). Our total social media following now stands at 115,882, up from 74,177 a year ago – an increase of 56%.
20. **Cairn magazine** – The summer issue of *Cairn* was due to hit doorsteps in the middle of July, including a feature on peatland restoration, an update on the fire byelaw campaign, news about Nature Restoration Fund projects and an interview with Angus Glens Countryside Ranger George Patterson. Unfortunately, on the eve of distribution, the wildfire at Glenmore occurred and – given the sensitivity of the situation – we took the difficult decision to pull the magazine from circulation. A certain number (up to around 20% of copies) had already been posted to households at the point of cancellation, but we were able to have the majority removed from circulation. The team have identified various opportunities to repurpose content from the magazine, from upcoming columns to website articles etc.
21. **C2030 Communities Fund** – After nine in-depth sessions, the C2030 co-design panel finalised the structure of the £1 million fund ahead of its launch in late August. They decided that anything could be funded as long as it was within the four C2030 themes; that a minimum 10% of the overall fund projects would prioritise Equity Diversity and Inclusion; and that there would be three different grant sizes available: small (£500 - £5,000), medium (£5,001 - £50,000) and large (£50,001 – £100,000). The team will support applicants through the process and ensure funding opportunities are effectively communicated, including case studies of successful grantees, an interactive map of funded projects and ongoing roadshow events to promote the fund and encourage ideas-sharing between potential applicants. Expressions of interest are being sought from members of the local community to join an 11-person Communities Fund Forum, who will make



decisions on who receives medium and large grant awards over the next few years.

22. **UK National Parks Conference** – A range of materials and activities have been pulled together to support the delivery of the UK National Parks Conference, taking place at Macdonald Aviemore Resort from 16-18 September. From a full [printed programme](#) to [website resources](#), pop-up banners, delegate packs and specific workshops / field trips, the team have been busy ensuring that the event meets the needs of delegates and sponsors alike. A videographer will be capturing events as they unfold and the event will be promoted extensively on and offline.
23. **Recent and upcoming events** – Throughout the summer, the Engagement team has delivered a range of events connected to the C2030 programme. They supported attendance at the Tarland Show by Park Authority staff and coordinated a large staff presence at the Grantown Show, showcasing the work of the farming, beaver, nature and ranger teams. This was followed by a large presence at the Lonach Gathering and the Greentown Show in Grantown. At all these events, staff were briefed on the recent wildfire and supported by senior management staff where required. The next phase of work is planning a series of formal consultation events for the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) consultation. These will be held across the National Park and the team is collaborating with Edinburgh University again to develop several interactive elements to facilitate the consultation (building on the success of our Local Development Plan (LDP) trial last year).
24. **Cultural heritage, communities and creative events** – The annual gathering of community councils and development trusts is planned for Thursday 29 October at Nethy Bridge Community Centre. The event will include a session on community resilience / response following the wildfire, a chance to feed into the NPPP consultation, a piece on community ownership and on engaging with the planning process, plus the usual mix of workshops and networking. Elsewhere, a follow up Cultural Heritage Network event is coming up on Tuesday 13 October at Boat Hall, and the newly formed Cairngorms Creative Collective have organised a [series of creative workshops](#) across the National Park over the coming months.



Organisational Development

25. **Staffing update:** Since the end of June, the following staff changes took place:
26. **Staff leaving the organisation:**
- a) Olly Davies, Head of Communications and Engagement, leaves us at the end of August as he moves to a promoted role with a new organisation.
27. **Staff joining the organisation:**
- a) Alasdair Dennis joined the Park Authority as Finance Manager. This was a re-shaped role following Mark Tucker's resignation.
 - b) Jon Digby joined the Park Authority on a temporary contract as a Conservation Officer to help deliver nature restoration fund projects in the National Park.
28. **Staff appointments:**
- a) Following the internal recruitment process, Brenna Jessie has been appointed to replace Olly Davies as Head of Communications and Engagement. Brenna was previously the Park Authority's Digital Communications Manager.
29. **Live recruitment:**
- a) Eilidh Todd (Communities and Rural Development Manager) and Kaye Nicolson (Media Communications Manager) are both going on maternity leave towards the end of the year. Both posts are now being recruited, on a fixed-term maternity cover basis. They are currently being advertised through the internal recruitment process.
 - b) Recruitment has also been opened to replace Brenna Jessie – Digital Communications Manager.
 - c) We did not appoint to the Information Management internship. We have revisited this role, and what our specific needs are for this post, and realise that the responsibilities we require are at a higher level than would be appropriate for an internship. We have therefore re-shaped this role and have gone out to recruitment for the revised role of Data and Information Assistant.
30. **Youth Development** - In early July, we hosted a group of young people from Black Professionals UK to a ranger led event at Loch Morlich, to showcase some of our nature-based roles, and to discuss career paths into these roles. The young people



were treated to a gloriously hot day and were particularly blown away by the beauty of the area; the evidence of beavers in the vicinity and career prospects in the environment sector.

31. **Organisational Development** - with both the Organisational and People Development Strategy and Workforce Management Strategy now adopted, work is commencing on bringing those strategies to life. We are in the process of developing our thinking around succession planning, skills passports and innovative approaches to supporting a more agile workforce.
32. **Public Service Reform** – The Programme for Government set out an agenda for public service reform. This included significant structural reform in the environment sector. The Park Authority is leading on the place-based approach to catchment resilience for Scottish Government with the Dee and Esk being pioneer catchments.
33. **Wellbeing, engagement and equalities:**
 - a) Over the summer, we hosted a group of mature students from the University of Michigan who were keen to hear about our flexible working policies and our approach to equalities and diversity. Feedback from this session was that: "the students were amazed to learn how the Park Authority puts flexible working conditions into practice. Even more impactful for them was seeing firsthand a workplace culture that genuinely values the whole person. It was clear that your employees are viewed as people with unique talents, goals, and lives, rather than simply workers filling a role. For many of the students, the experience was truly eye-opening and seeing an organization so intentionally committed to employee well-being and engagement was both inspiring and, quite honestly, mind-blowing. One of my students was so inspired by your talk that they want to implement some of your initiatives at their own places of work, starting with the men's health component".
 - b) Recruitment is underway for new members of the Equality Advisory Panel. We aim to have 15 members and following a recent review of the membership and meetings with all existing members, several posts have become vacant. We are specifically targeting folks who have expertise in equalities and are able therefore to provide informed and expert advice.



Procurement

34. The first annual procurement report, for the year 2025/26, has been prepared and was presented to the Audit and Risk Committee at the committee's meeting in June. The report details a total spend of £4.5 million across 53 contracts. This spend included both regulated, and unregulated procurements, including those using Scottish Government framework agreements.
35. The report highlights the Park Authority's commitment to procurement that aligns with strategic objectives, embedding principles such as Fair Work First, sustainability, and ethical practices. It also emphasizes the delivery of community benefits, the strengthening of local supply chains, and the encouragement of innovative, outcomes-based solutions from suppliers, all in compliance with Scottish public procurement legislation.

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03 September 2026

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Title: Convener's update

Prepared by: Sandy Bremner, Board Convener

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.

Glenmore and Abernethy Wildfire

1. Made immediate contact with Scottish Government (SG) officials regarding logistics support from the first confirmation of a wildfire on day one, pursuing aerial back-up as a critical necessity in conjunction with the Park Authority senior staff until late evening.
2. Early morning day two, convened then chaired joint Park Authority / SG officers meeting, exploring all routes to provide urgent aerial support to supplement ground operations. Continued to liaise with the Park Authority staff and SG on strategic responses in the days following the outbreak.
3. Attended meetings with First Minister John Swinney MSP at Glenmore on July 21, stressing the impact of the wildfire on communities, businesses, livelihoods and natural heritage in one of the National Park's most sensitive areas of nature designation. Explained the National Park's extensive preparations for heightened wildfire risks, including the development of the UK's first Integrated Wildfire Management Plan, the introduction of a wildfire byelaw which had already led to a significant reduction in incidents of recreational fires, and the funding of firefighting equipment to support estates from our Climate Adaptation Fund. Stressed the necessity of developing standby access to air support as a national contingency, given previous experience and the certainty of further wildfires. At the same meeting, the First Minister committed to considering other countries' models for responding to wildfires.



4. Followed up on July 23, meeting the SG's Director of Environment and Forestry at St Andrew's House, Edinburgh, underlining the urgent case for action to plug strategic gaps in firefighting capability.
5. Hosted Gillian Martin MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs, and Ariane Burgess MSP Highlands and Islands, and a senior government official on a tour of wildfire-affected areas on July 27, before meeting community and business leaders and other stakeholders, stressing the importance of urgent action for strategic wildfire response.
6. Visited Nethy Bridge residents at the evacuation rest centre in Aviemore following the voluntary evacuation of the village, answering their questions about a wide range of related issues.
7. Attended Wildfire Response meetings chaired by Highland Council initially in Aviemore, then online, addressing business needs, stressing the importance of avoiding the substantial environmental impact being followed by significant economic and social damage, with so many small firms in a precarious position at what should have been their peak earning period.
8. Continuing meetings and update sessions with SG officials, MSPs, community representatives and a range of stakeholders throughout, along with media statements and answering public inquiries.
9. Regular visits, meeting volunteers, support staff and community representatives at the village hall in Nethy Bridge before being excluded by a SFRS's Incident Commander, along with other elected representatives of public bodies.
10. Attended post-wildfire community event at Nethy Bridge, reflecting on the weeks building up to and including the threat to the village.
11. Wrote on behalf of the Park Authority Board to SG's Director General Net Zero and senior EnFor Directorate officials for the further attention of all relevant ministers, highlighting urgent action requested regarding the establishment of a national on-demand aerial firefighting service, and the implementation of strategic actions by SFRS to enhance their wildfire capabilities.



12. On the day that the Justice Secretary announced to Parliament the introduction of an on-demand aerial firefighting system during periods of high fire risk, met with Director General Net Zero, Director EnFor and other Scottish Government officials. Welcomed the announcement and discussed the need for further action to develop a better-integrated firefighting service for wildfires.
13. Maintained daily contact with senior Park Authority staff regarding the welfare of Park employees, other volunteers and members of the community fighting and supporting the wildfire effort, and support for affected businesses.
14. Wrote to all Park Authority staff, praising their collective efforts throughout the course of the wildfire.

Convener engagements

15. **Jim Fairlie MSP** – Met SG Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (before the wildfire), updating on the implementation of the Park Authority's Wildfire Byelaw, and discussing the opportunity to further support farmers and crofters through the new NPPP.
16. **Andrew Baxter MSP** – Met Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch MSP Andrew Baxter, discussing issues arising from the latest wildfire, preparations and timetable for the next NPPP, and related matters.
17. **Tim Eagle MSP** – Met Highlands and Islands MSP Tim Eagle, discussing strategic wildfire issues and answering questions about the response and lessons learned from this and previous wildfires.
18. **Dawn Black MSP, Lloyd Melville MSP** – Hosted a tour of Angus Glens with new MSPs Dawn Black (Angus North and Mearns) and Lloyd Melville (Angus South) meeting the Park Authority Rangers, landowners, business operators, and officials from Forestry and Land Scotland and the Scottish Land Commission, introducing them to the range of National Park work and initiatives including the Glen Clova Deer Larder.



19. **Laura Mitchell MSP** – Met Moray MSP Laura Mitchell in Tomintoul as part of an offer to meet all Parliamentarians with interests in the National Park following May's Holyrood elections, discussing local and Cairngorms-wide issues.
20. **Graham Leadbitter MP** - Met Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey MP Graham Leadbitter, discussing strategic Cairngorms / Scottish / UK strategic issues arising from the latest wildfire and the succession of previous ones, along with priorities for action.
21. **Agriculture Director** – Met SG's Director Agriculture and Rural Economy, discussing wildfire issues, also current and potential policy initiatives to support people who live and work in the National Park.
22. **Crofters and Farmers** – Met with representatives of the Cairngorms Crofters and Farmers Community, discussing wildfire-related issues, the upcoming NPPP, and the scope to explore the development of regional incentives which deliver across multiple agricultural / Park aims.
23. **NatureScot** – Discussions with the Chair of NatureScot on a range of projects being developed in collaboration across the National Park.
24. **Scottish Land and Estates (SLE)** – Met the Director of Policy, SLE, discussing preparations for public consultation on the new NPPP, new initiatives to manage deer numbers, and the collaboration on issues around wildfire management.
25. **Game and Wildlife Conservation (GWCT)** – Met the Director Scotland and Director Education of the GWCT, discussing a range of game and wildlife issues including a joint study on the impact of gamebird releases.
26. **Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS)** – Met the Head of Conservation, RZSS, discussing next steps in the Saving Wildcats programme.
27. **Countryside Learning Scotland (CLS)** – Met the Chief Executive of CLS discussing the provision of next-steps support for secondary school pupils seeking careers in countryside occupations.



28. **Spey** – Met the Operations Manager and a board member of the Spey Salmon Fishery Board, discussing concerns about early indications of water shortages in the catchment, the scope for further action to mitigate against negative impacts, and specific strategic issues.
29. **Scottish Game Fair** – Attended GWCT Scottish Game Fair at Scone Palace, meeting a range of stakeholders.
30. **Aultmore Bridge** – Performed the official opening of the Aultmore bridge at Nethy Bridge, outlining the role of the National Park Authority in helping the local community get a difficult project over the line after more than a decade of preparation.
31. **Greentown Show** – Attended Greentown Show at Grantown-on-Spey, meeting exhibitors and members of the public interested in environmentally-friendly issues.
32. **Cabrach Trust** – Met with staff of the Cabrach Trust, discussing their work on the fringes of the National Park boundary.
33. **National Park Conveners** – Met regularly with the Convener of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Board to discuss issues of mutual interest.
34. **The Park Authority Liaison** – Attended weekly liaison meetings with the Park Authority Deputy Convener, CEO and Deputy CEO.
35. 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.

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03 September 2026

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