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. **Deer management** - The incentive scheme for deer managers carrying out reduction culls in higher density Deer Management Groups (DMGs) is now in operation for the 2026/27 season. The scheme offers £100 for each hind and associated calf above a threshold level. When estates have reached 85% of their individual cull targets payments will be paid for each hind and associated calf shot thereafter. The hind cull season for 2026/27 is now well underway and weekly cull totals across all DMG members are shared regularly on WhatsApp groups, providing full transparency of cull progress.

2. **Wildfire Environmental Recovery** - The Environmental Recovery Group has secured £150,100 investment from Scottish Government Nature Restoration Fund and £57,000 through UK National Park corporate partner Vodaphone to support delivery on the ground. Works includes LiDAR survey to establish burn intensity and impact of fire, track repair, firebreak landscaping, pond creation and removal of unsafe trees.

3. **Gamebird release** – A new research project looking at gamebird release practices in Scotland is being undertaken by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) in collaboration with NatureScot and the Scottish Government, with the Park Authority represented on the steering group. The project aims to improve our understanding of the scale and nature of gamebird release across Scotland. It will combine a review of the existing scientific literature alongside a study of release numbers and practices. The findings will help identify gaps in our current

knowledge and inform future guidance and recommendations in Scotland and the National Park.

4. **Beavers** - The Park Authority has been working closely with the Boat of Garten Community Company and Wildlife Group on the first community led beaver release. On 02 November 2026 a family of four beavers were released into Milton Loch. Local children helped with the release and around 20 local residents watched the released from the hide. A seasonal ranger contract was extended by three months to support the beaver team with the release and ongoing monitoring. The ranger will have daily presence at Milton Loch over the next six weeks providing a point of contact for the community.

5. **Spey Catchment Engagement Officer** - The Spey Catchment Initiative (SCI) are currently recruiting an engagement officer, part funded by the Park Authority. The role will focus on ensuring early and effective engagement, listening to and working with farmers and land managers in identifying and developing projects that will help build climate, nature and farm business resilience. The post will be hosted by the SCI and be managed jointly by SCI and Park Authority.

Planning and Place

6. **Local Development Plan (LDP)** – Work continues on preparation of the Proposed LDP following successful conclusion of the Evidence Report 'gatecheck' and a Call for Sites and Ideas consultation earlier in the year. The annual update to the Development Plan Scheme, which sets out the timetable for the next stages in preparing the new LDP, is presented to the Board for approval at this meeting.

7. **Planning casework** – Since the last formal Board meeting on 25 September, the Planning Committee has granted planning permission for realignment of the lower section of the Slugain Burn with associated road realignment and a new river crossing near Dalnahaitnach, as well as receiving an update on delivery of the Park Authority's Planning Improvement Action Plan. The Planning Committee also met on 13 November and approved planning applications for a toboggan track at Cairngorm Mountain and a serviced apartment building at the site of the former Braemar Lodge. The Planning Committee will meet once more this year, on 11 December.

8. **Countryside Rangers** – The ranger team continued patrolling until mid-October when seasonal rangers finished for the season with much of their engagement activity still revolving around fires and the byelaw. By the end of the season over 20% more patrols had been carried out when compared with 2025. A report on progress with the Active Cairngorms Action Plan which includes more detail on ranger activity and the fire byelaw is being presented to this Board meeting.

9. **Outdoor access** – Work has continued with the core path plan review following the public consultation coming to an end in late August. A number of objections either to routes proposed for inclusion or relating to the omission of routes were made and officers are working through those individually with the parties concerned as well as seeking views from the Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF).

10. **Volunteering** - The Volunteer Experience programme continued to work with five charity partners all of which have seen people out volunteering with five different land partners, but activity is now winding down over the winter period. Volunteer Rangers have remained active with two thirds of those recruited continuing to give at or over the two days / month of volunteering expected, and almost all others still giving at least a day a month.

11. **Youth Activity** - After five years and seven rounds of funding, through which the Youth Local Action Group (YLAG) have funded 127 projects for a total of £118,505.23, the YLAG have conducted a full review of their funding approach resulting in a number of proposals for improvements to make it more accessible and efficient. These are incorporated in a three-year plan and vision for the Fund. As part of a three-year Nordic Youth Project, funded by Erasmus+, eight members of Cairngorms Youth Action Team (CYAT) aged 16-30, plus leaders attended a knowledge exchange between three Nordic nations: Finland, Scotland and Iceland. The event looked at the issues young people face in rural areas, sharing solutions, ideas and inspiration for the future and over the three-year project we will see the previous Youth Manifesto updated for 2028.

12. **Green Health** - Nine new referrals were made via the Nature prescriptions service. A number of local engagement events were held / attended to share the Nature Prescription service with patients and healthcare teams including a Badenoch and Strathspey Hospital Drop-in Event and Community Nursing Team education

session. Green Health Link Workers and Senior Public Health Improvement Specialist also attended the UK National Parks Health and Wellbeing Conference to exchange and learn from different partners experiences.

13. **Transport** – Bike buses where primary school children cycle to school in a group with adult leaders are run in the two terms before and after the summer holidays. There are now nine bike buses supported to Aviemore, Deshar, Abernethy, Grantown (two routes), Kingussie, Strathdon (two routes) and Ballater primary schools with a strong sense of community and additional family cycling activities around each of the bike buses. 32 parents / carers have now completed Cycle Ride Leader training and regularly volunteer their time to support, lead and grow the Bike Buses with more helping informally.

14. **Active Travel** - Bids made to Transport Scotland for funding to take Active travel projects in Aviemore, Boat of Garten, Nethy Bridge and Newtonmore to construction ready stage were awarded funding in September. While welcome, the approval well into the financial year (applications had been made in January) does lead to some challenges in terms of the delivery timeline. Discussions are also under way with Transport Scotland regarding the Newtonmore project as its location on a Trunk Road requires a different approach to those on local authority roads. Work has also continued on the plan for and sourcing funding for a cycle hub at the Dell of Spey and to create a Cairngorms Cycle Network that makes it easier for less experienced cyclists to cycle around some of the main Cairngorm communities.

Communications and Engagement

15. **NPPP consultation** - This is live on our website and open for responses until 13 January 2027. We are hosting and attending a series of events across the geography of the National Park to support local engagement, including trialling a bespoke game designed to make the Plan digestible, and an online event to ensure accessibility. We are continuing to update and add to this list as opportunities present themselves. This is supported by a programme of communications activity including press and social media.

16. **Media coverage** – Key highlights were the King's visit to Lochan Uaine, the UK National Park's joint statement on wildfires, the launch of the NPPP consultation,

the National Park UK conference in Aviemore, the fire byelaw wrap up summary, the Cairngorm 2030 (C2030) Inside Out project and the C2030 cycle hub grant. We also facilitated a feature on BBC TV's Tech Now show (view here) on the use of drones during the wildfire, which goes out worldwide, and Sandy Bremner was featured on Out of Doors to discuss the Park Plan consultation.

17. There continues to be strong interest in the topic of wildfire. CEO has conducted several interviews or has supplied opinion pieces to media, including The New York Times, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Royal Geographical Society of Scotland and STV News on latest responses to the Glenmore ad Strath Nethy wildfire.

18. **Social media** – Since 01 September, our net audience has grown by 5,813 across Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube. This is a 1.7% increase from our net audience growth during the same period in 2025. Facebook has risen by 1,130 (to a total of 54,467), Instagram by 4,124 (to 49,340), LinkedIn by 530 (to 16,199), and YouTube by 29 (to 1,860). Our following on Bluesky remains consistent at 1,860, bringing our total audience across our social media channels to 123,726. This is up from a total audience of 78,291 this time last year – an increase of 56%. We had 161,551 engagements in this period.

19. ***Cairn* magazine** – The winter issue of Cairn is due to hit doorsteps week commencing 23 November. This issue includes a feature on the NPPP and consultation and has reflections on the Glenmore and Strath Nethy wildfire peppered throughout the issue – including an in-conversation piece with Duncan Grant, a plant contractor and crofter who used a custom wildfire-fighting unit funded by the Climate Adaptation Fund in the firefighting efforts in the summer. The magazine also has an advert for the upcoming board election in March 2027.

20. **Other events delivered and attended** - Over the last quarter include the Tarland Show, the Grantown Show, the Lonach Gathering, the Greentown Show, the Mountain Bike Festival at Glenlivet and the Climb Oot Festival in Glenmore. We made the difficult decision to postpone the Communities Gathering scheduled for the 29 October due to low sign-ups and are reviewing options to ensure these events are as valuable for attendees as possible.

21. **C2030 communities forum** – Recruitment for the decision-making forum has now closed, with 130 individual applications received from across the demographics and geography of the National Park. 11 forum members have been selected alongside our independent partners Involve, and the next step is training and induction. Forum member names will be publicised in the future.

22. **Cultural heritage networking event** – More than 40 delegates came together at Boat of Garten Community Hall on 13 October for a very well-received cultural heritage networking event. The varied programme showcased local projects – including a demonstration by the Badenoch Waulking Group – and explored Gaelic place names and their connections to the landscape, alongside information on the varied streams of national funding and support available for cultural heritage projects. The Communities and Cultural Heritage Fund, delivered by the Cairngorms Trust, is also now in the decision-making phase, ready for their board to make decisions in late November.

23. **C2030 creatives events** - A series of 12 free public creative workshops was put on between mid-September and early November, to celebrate the creative community in the National Park. The workshops spread geographically across the National Park from Glen Esk to Nethy Bridge, were delivered by paid local creatives and engaged more than 100 participants, with positive feedback received.

24. **Sustainable tourism** - Visitor survey face to face interviews began in November 2026 and will run till October 2027.

25. **Publications and interpretation** – Recent interpretation projects include Gaelic language interpretation at Glenmore Visitor Centre café, a heritage-focussed interpretation panel along the Charter Chest Path in Deeside, and a paths panel showing the route of the Balmoral Cairns walk with associated 'tread lightly' and fire byelaw messaging.

26. **Recruitment** – Following multiple internal promotions to fulfil maternity cover positions, as well as two staff members moving on to other positions elsewhere, the Communications and Engagement team is undergoing a period of recruitment. The new Digital Communications Manager is confirmed to be starting in the new year, and recruitment is underway to fill the Communications and Design

Coordinator, Content Creation Coordinator, and C2030 Engagement Coordinator posts. It is anticipated that these positions will also have a start date of early in the new year. To help the team with reduced capacity while recruitment is ongoing, we are contracting some short-term relief support to ensure core priorities can continue.

Organisational Development

27. Staffing update, since the end of September, the following staff changes took place.

28. **Staff leaving the organisation:**
    a) The four Trainee Rangers completed their three-months seasonal contracts – Bernice Swift, Emma Tivey, Jake Duncan and Kirsty Barr.
    b) Our Seasonal Rangers also completed their contracts – Fiona Brewis, Jade Lennox, Jenny Holgate, Lucy Topalian, Mike Ramsay, Nadja Weigel, Amelie Mackrory-Bowden, Andrew Ross, Annie Evans, Carol-Ann Glass, Craig Fraser, Georgia Sloan, Jayne Brown and Josh Sloan. Charlotte Robertson also finished this role but has also stayed on for other work.

29. **Staff joining the organisation:**
    a) Martin Mackenzie joined as Conservation Grazing Coordinator on a six-month contract.

30. **Staff appointments:**
    a) Louise Took was promoted to the Media Communications Manager post, covering Kaye Nicolson's maternity leave on a 12-month appointment.
    b) Marie Smith was appointed to the Data and Information Assistant role.
    c) Josie Slade was promoted to the Rural Development and Communities Manager post, covering Eilidh Todd's maternity leave, an 11-month appointment.

31. **Live recruitment:**
    a) We are currently recruiting to backfill the following vacancies created by staff appointments / promotions:

i. C2030 Administration Officer, backfilling Marie Smith.
ii. Communications and Design Coordinator, backfilling Louise Took.

32. **Organisational Development:**
    a) **Policy development**: We continue to develop our thinking around succession planning, skills passports and innovative approaches to supporting a more agile workforce. We expect to be in a position to consult with staff in January on the proposed direction of travel. We are also in the process of developing an AI Policy and Guidance document, which follows extensive engagement with staff on AI, including internal workshops and a presentation at the All Staff Away Day.
    b) **Organisational culture:** An external consultant was contracted to facilitate a session at the Staff Away Day focussing on what it means to bring the Park Authority's principles to life in the way we work together, starting with ourselves, before we ask others to find common ground.

33. **Wellbeing, engagement and equalities:**
    a) **Equalities Advisory Panel:** We have successfully appointed four new members to the EAP. These members represent a mix of expertise on issues relating to immigration, inclusive and equitable design of services, intersectionality and awareness and allyship to marginalised communities, human rights policy, gender-based violence, people experiencing poverty, LGBTQ+ and neurodiversity

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12 November 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.

1. **Cabinet Secretary** – Provided further feedback in conjunction with the Park Authority's CEO to the Cabinet Secretary Climate Action and Rural Affairs on strategic issues and priorities for further action following the Glenmore / Abernethy wildfire.

2. **Jim Fairlie** – Met with Jim Fairlie MSP, Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands, discussing Glenmore / Abernethy wildfire issues, areas for further action, and Scottish Government / inter-agency strategic communications.

3. **Director General Net Zero** – Attended strategic discussions with Scottish Government's Director General Net Zero, including Public Service Reform, follow-up on the Glenmore / Abernethy wildfire, the draft National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP), and Scottish Government / inter-agency communications.

4. **Wildfire Meeting** – Attended public meeting organised by Cairngorms Crofters and Farmers Community and the British Association of Shooting and Conservation, amid calls for urgent actions from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Scottish Government following lessons learned from the Glenmore / Abernethy, Dava / Carrbridge and other wildfires.

5. **Graham Leadbitter** – Met with Graham Leadbitter MP for Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey, discussing actions following the Glenmore / Abernethy wildfire, the need to develop further resilience, and the potential for closer cross-UK collaboration.

6. **Alistair Carmichael** – Met with Alistair Carmichael MP for Orkney and Shetland, Chair of the UK Parliament's Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee,

discussing the incidence of wildfires across the UK and the scope for initiatives to tackle a common and growing threat.

7. **Mairi Gougeon** – Met with Mairi Gougeon, former MSP for Angus North and Mearns, and Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, discussing outstanding issues following the Dava / Carrbridge and Glenmore / Abernethy wildfires.

8. **Audrey Nicoll** – Met with Audrey Nicoll, former MSP for Aberdeen South and North Kincarine, and Scottish Parliament Species Champion, updating on landscape-scale habitat restoration initiatives and issues following the Dava / Carrbidge and Glenmore / Abernethy wildfires.

9. **National Farmers' Union Scotland (NFUS)** – Introductory meeting with Stuart Head, new Regional Manager NFUS, discussing the Park Authority support for farmers and crofters, the Future Farming project, Climate Adaptation Fund, beaver management policies, the draft NPPP and the potential for further collaboration.

10. **Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) liaison** – Met with the Chief Executive of the CBP, along with the outgoing and incoming Chairs, discussing a range of issues including support for business following the Glenmore / Abernethy wildfire, strategic collaborations over the coming months, and plans for the Partnership's annual conference.

11. **CBP Conference** – Attended CBP's annual conference in Aviemore, meeting individual business owners and managers, discussing current and future support for the business community, and continuing initiatives to support businesses affected by the Glenmore / Abernethy wildfire.

12. **EnFor Chairs** – Met in Edinburgh with Chairs of Environment and Forestry Directorate Non-Departmental Public Bodies, discussing a range of mutual issues including Public Service Reform, agency collaboration, and Scottish Government / inter-agency strategic communications.

13. **National Parks Partnerships Governance** – Joined an online session chaired by the National Parks Partnerships, discussing the governance framework for a new

national philanthropic-giving body to maximise funding for national parks and landscapes under the Big Bounce Back title.

14. **National Parks Partnerships Forum** – Attended National Parks Partnership strategic forum and annual general meeting (AGM), focusing on the development of a national philanthropy programme. The decisions and direction from this forum will help shape the National Park family's collective fundraising and communications activity through to 2030.

15. **Nethy Bridge** – Attended Nethy Bridge community reception, recognising the work done by the community itself and the range of stakeholders involved in fighting the Glenmore / Abernethy wildfire and providing support throughout the incident.

16. **Media** – Gave a series of interviews for television and radio on a range of issues including the launch of the draft NPPP and specific initiatives to prevent, prepare for and tackle future wildfires in the Cairngorms and beyond, and wrote articles for newspaper / online publication reflecting on projects to tackle challenges facing people and nature.

17. **Land Managers** – Met a number of land managers, discussing the wide range of initiatives proposed in the draft NPPP, encouraging participation in the public consultation process now taking place.

18. **Stalkers** – Met informally with estate deer stalkers, discussing deer management issues and the draft NPPP's proposals including the proposed development of a stalker support scheme.

19. **Badenoch and Strathspey** – Attended Badenoch and Strathspey Community Networking Event, meeting members of the public and representatives of community and public organisations in the area, discussing the Park Authority support for a wide range of activities. Also met Trustees of the Newtonmore Community Village Hall, discussing how National Park, Highland Council, community and other partners have helped transform the building into a vibrant facility for the wider area.

20. **Taiwan** – Met Chi-Hua Ding, Director General of the Taipei Representative Office of Taiwan, discussing opportunities for the people of Taiwan to benefit from visitor offerings in the Cairngorms National Park, with a focus on shoulder-season tourism.

21. **Scottish Land and Estates (SLE)** – Attended Scottish Land and Estates Helping it Happen Awards, with shortlisted projects supported by the Park Authority including the River Dee Trust's Million Trees Campaign which won the 2026 Conservation Award.

22. **Nature of Scotland Awards (NoSA)** – Attended Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Nature of Scotland Awards where several Park Authority-supported projects were shortlisted for recognition in different categories.

23. **Community Recognition** – Attended Inspiring Aberdeenshire Awards, meeting local community leaders, Aberdeenshire Council's chief executive, and recipients of awards supporting people and the environment in the North East.

24. **Elphinstone Institute** – Delivered talk with questions and answers at Aberdeen University's Elphinstone Institute, on Scottish cultural portrayal and work to deliver the Park Authority's first aim to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area.

25. **Public Talks** – Delivered talks to public groups on the work of the Park Authority, the pioneering programmes already being delivered to support people and nature, and the ambitious proposals detailed in the draft NPPP.

26. **Dee Fishery Board** – Attended Dee District Salmon Fishery Board AGM, discussing with land managers, owners and other stakeholders the opportunity to take part in the consultation on the draft NPPP, highlighting specific proposals regarding catchment-scale objectives.

27. **National Park Conveners** – Met regularly with the Convener of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Board to discuss issues of mutual interest. Park Authority Liaison – Attended weekly liaison meetings with the Park Authority Deputy Convener, CEO and Deputy CEO.

28. 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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12 November 2026
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