



For discussion

Title: Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund – risk register
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Purpose

To update board members on the progress of a £1 million Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Communities Fund, which will be co-designed by a wide range of the communities of the Cairngorms National Park, and to review the project risk register as the panel nears the end of the design phase, having met for the first time at the end of March.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Review the risk register, identify any gaps and agree the overall approach to this piece of work.

Strategic context

1. The development of a community-managed climate grant scheme was one of 20 core projects signed off as part of the wider C2030 programme. Specifically, the project aims to “give communities the power to co-design, fund and deliver projects that build resilience and mitigate climate impacts”.
2. The C2030 communities fund is also built around the three core principles set out in the C2030 Activity Plan. Specifically, it prioritises:
 - a) **Co-design** – the fund is designed with, not for, our target audiences and they will feel a real sense of ownership over the outcomes.
 - b) **Widening participation** – we have been proactive in ensuring that everyone has a chance to shape the C2030 communities fund, irrespective of their background or circumstances.



- c) **Working in partnership** – we will seek advice and expertise from a range of partners with intimate knowledge of our target audiences, from the design of the fund itself to its wider promotion.
3. In addition to the above C2030 outcomes, the communities fund also delivers on a number of Partnership Plan objectives, including:
- a) A1 – net zero
 - b) B2 – wellbeing economy
 - c) B5 – community assets and land
 - d) B6 – new approaches to citizen participation
 - e) B7 – community-led planning and development
 - f) B10 – a Park for All
 - g) C3 – housing and community benefit
 - h) C4 – villages and town centres
 - i) C10 – cultural heritage.

Background

4. At the board business session on 26 September 2025 at the Highland Wildlife Park, the Head of Communications and Engagement, and Kelly McBride, Director at the Involve Foundation, outlined our approach to the creation of a £1 million C2030 Communities Fund.
5. At the formal board on 28 November 2025, the Head of Communications and Engagement updated on project progress so far and presented a risk register for discussion and approval. This was subsequently updated by the Communities and Rural Development Manager at formal board on 27 March 2026.
6. The C2030 Communities Fund will link with other C2030 projects to give communities the power to define, design, fund and deliver projects that help achieve the aims of C2030, ie:
- a) Transforming the way land is managed and used to benefit nature.
 - b) Empowering communities to shape the future of their local area.
 - c) Making getting around the Cairngorms easier, safer and greener.
 - d) Fostering healthier, happier communities with wellbeing at their heart.



7. Community groups and communities of interest (both within and outside the National Park) will be able to apply to a fund of £1 million from its launch in summer 2026 until the end of the programme in 2028. The fund has been designed by a panel of 18 representatives who live in - or have a close connection to - the National Park.
8. At the time of writing, the panel have so far met seven times, with a mixture of online and offline meetings. Two meetings are to be completed on 17 June and 24 June. The 24 June meeting is an additional meeting, added for final considerations of any design issues highlighted to or by the Panel as an element of risk mitigation to help ensure a viable end product from the design phase.
9. Throughout the process, our communications have focussed on telling the story of the panel through their own words, rather than highlighting specific decisions. This has included a various social media videos featuring interviews with panel members, and a blog piece from the Park Authority including panel member quotes.

Strategic Risk Management

10. In taking forward the community grants fund project within the Cairngorms 2030 programme, the Park Authority has adopted an 'open' risk appetite to this work. This recognises the necessary open approach to innovation and trialling new forms of citizen participation and participative democracy in developing and delivering a new community led grant fund. As an activity with 'open' risk appetite, the Park Authority is willing to take risk in pursuit of objectives, within limits.
11. The project risk register establishes the risk limits identified for the activity and presents the actions designed to mitigate risk and maintain overall exposure to risks at an acceptable level.

Next Steps

12. Next steps for this piece of work across June and July include turning the panels' recommendations into reality via grant design, a full communications launch, and animation with communities to prepare for application and decision-making processes. There is also the evaluation phase of the project.



13. An update on the Panel's design work will be presented to the board on 26 June following these Panel meetings. The project risk register, updated to reflect current risk management status, is presented in the following section of this paper. Where risks are noted as "retained", these risk considerations will be carried forward as part of the risk management supporting the delivery phase of the project



Risk register for the C2030 Communities Fund

14. The following risk register has been developed by Park Authority officers, in collaboration with our appointed consultants Involve UK. It is designed to capture the main risks facing the Park Authority from a recruitment, delivery and reputation standpoint, plus relevant mitigation measures. This will be reviewed on a regular basis as the project progresses. Unless otherwise stated, the risk owner is the Head of Communications and Engagement. Likelihood and impact from the last update are included in brackets.

#	Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	Comments
4.	Varying aspirations and multiple different priorities identified by co-design participants lead to ineffective or unworkable grant criteria.	Medium (Medium)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sizeable funds available (£1 million), with plenty of opportunities for a wide variety of projects to be funded.• Training and development provided by Involve Foundation for all participants in how co-design works.• Clear facilitation of all sessions from industry experts (Involve Foundation).• Participants encouraged to share ideas and perspectives in a 'safe space', where all viewpoints are welcome. They will also hear from third-party experts as required to help shape their decisions.• Transparent code of conduct agreed from the outset for all participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is a risk inherent in any co-design process, which is why we have appointed expert consultants to help guide us (and the panel) through this process.• The panel are principally tasked with designing what the fund looks like at first, rather than what specific projects it will fund. This should help



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					reduce direct conflicts between different participants / priorities. Update: Risk managed to date. Final design outcome to be reviewed.
5.	Potential conflict of interest for co-design panellists who may wish to apply for funding themselves.	Low (Low)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential conflicts of interest captured at an early stage and reported transparently.• Clear process developed by the panel – published in full on the Park Authority’s website – which sets out how conflicts of interest will be handled within the process they design (eg panellists absent themselves from discussions about projects they are involved in).• Learning from similar projects – through Involve, Park Authority-led funds and via partners such as the Cairngorms Trust –	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As the Cairngorms National Park has a largely remote, rural geography, we believe it would be unrealistic (and likely unhelpful) to bar co-design panellists from potentially applying for funding in future. What we will do instead is establish



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				applied and fed back to co-design panellists.	clear and transparent parameters for this to take place. Update: Retain risk.
6.	Confusion between this fund and a range of other community funds (including those run by the Park Authority / Cairngorms Trust).	Medium (Medium)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New dedicated funding opportunities section within the National Park website, bringing all funds together in one place. • Single, streamlined process for all Park Authority and Cairngorms Trust-led funds, with the same grants team helping fulfil all of them. • We will work closely with the co-design panel to ensure the fund wording (and accompanying comms / engagement activity) is written in plain English and that what is in / out of scope is as clear as possible to potential applicants. • Park Authority / Cairngorms Trust's established network of contacts will be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the fund sits alongside others in the landscape – and whether we will accept these as match funding for C2030 Communities Fund projects – has been a key consideration for the co-design panel and will be worked into the communications plan for the funding launch.



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				<p>advantageous here in terms of coordinating timings etc with other funds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park Authority and Cairngorms Trust representatives will brief the co-design panel on other funds available and their criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will also review timeframes / criteria for overlapping funds led by the Park Authority / Cairngorms Trust, eg Climate Adaptation Fund, Community Led Local Vision Fund. <p>Update: Retain risk.</p>
7.	Potential for panel to be criticised for the decisions they make / if funded projects do not go according to plan.	Medium (Medium)	High (High)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the initial stage, the co-design group will be responsible for what the fund looks like / what it would potentially fund; they will not be making decisions on exactly which projects are funded. This latter decision is something that will be discussed with the co-design panel as part of their deliberations, including the pros and cons of various decision-making methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will be clear in all communications around the fund exactly where the panel's decision-making remit begins and ends. We will also field any questions about the funding



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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park Authority to act as the accountable body for the fund, providing level of legal / governance assurance to process. 	<p>process on behalf of (but in discussion with) the panellists.</p> <p>Update: Retain risk.</p>
8.	Innovative nature and impact of fund is lost when the C2030 programme ends.	Low (Low)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park Authority and partners including the Cairngorms Trust are committed to taking the learnings from this process and applying them to future funds, beyond the scope of the C2030 programme. Key outcome of C2030 – and The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) – is to share our learnings with local and national partners / equivalent projects. These will be captured and published in full on our website at the end of the programme. Alongside this, we are committed to capturing the story of the fund (plus those who helped shape it and benefitted from it) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public communications thus far have focussed on the overarching ‘story’ of the process as it develops, from the earliest training sessions to shaping the fund, and will continue all the way through to projects being awarded funding and work happening on the ground.



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				<p>as it progresses via our comms and evaluation activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on panel availability, interest and future funding, we are open to exploring additional opportunities for the co-design panel to be involved in decision-making, eg helping feed into the development of the next National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP). 	<p>Update: Retain risk.</p>
9.	Less than two years to decide on a funding approach and distribute £1 million to community projects.	Low (Low)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Park Authority / Cairngorms Trust have significant experience in distributing large sums (eg £450,000 per annum through Cairngorms Community Led Vision (CCLV) / LEADER) to community projects within the National Park. Establishing a clear and transparent framework for funding decisions (what is in / out of scope, how large or small funding awards can be, how funds will be distributed, how many rounds we have etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This topic formed part of discussions with the co-design panel around how to balance ambition (funding projects that deliver real impact) with pragmatism (funding projects that can deliver those impacts in good time).



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				<p>will be the first priority for the co-design panel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment process for the co-design panel will be a good opportunity to raise awareness amongst potential applicants about the fund and timings involved. Multi-year funding approach gives greater clarity to potential applicants and helps us plan over a longer-term funding cycle (vs typical year-to-year funding). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The time constraints here are not particularly significant compared with equivalent funds, particularly those that are only available for a single year. <p>Recommendation: Retain risk.</p>
10.	The Park Authority itself suffers reputational damage as a consequence of unpopular / unsuccessful funding decisions.	Medium (High)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision-making mechanisms are yet to be resolved by the co-design group, and this risk will be factored into their discussions at the earliest opportunity. Evolution of development of decision-making processes will be tested against this risk over the period of the co-design work. Park Authority to act as the accountable body for the fund, providing opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Park Authority has long-term experience of devolving funding decision-making through eg the Cairngorms Trust. This experience has been brought into panel discussion and



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				for high level scrutiny and assurance of potential funding decisions.	decision-making on this matter Update: Retain risk.
11	High level of interest in recruitment and large number of unsuccessful applicants leads to dissatisfaction and reputational damage.	Medium (Medium)	Low (Low)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All expressions of interest will be contacted by the Park Authority whether successful or unsuccessful. Future opportunities highlighted. EOI group could be utilised as a sounding board for panel decisions eg given early sight of proposals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park Authority lead on communication with unsuccessful EOIs to use as opportunity to highlight future opportunities, ie Youth Local Action Group (YLAG) recruitment. Update: Risk fully managed and to be removed.
12	Panel members resign part way through codesign process or fail to attend meetings	Medium (Medium)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to the process and capacity to attend all pre-advertised dates has been a key element of the selection process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our consultants have broad experience of similar codesign processes and have



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	impacting the robustness of the codesign process.			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing commitment to the process will be monitored and reinforced as part of each panel meeting. • Pre-set dates will be adhered to, supporting commitment to those dates. • Contingency plans for any unavoidable gaps in meeting attendance will be established. 	<p>supported mitigation of this risk.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one member withdrew from the process part way through, and this was managed effectively. • Continuity of the process has been retained. <p>Update: Risk fully managed and to be removed.</p>
13	Dominant voices emerge within the Panel which restrict the capacity for all members to contribute.	Medium (Medium)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel meetings will be facilitated by our consultants with wide experience of these events and with a focus on ensuring all views are heard and respected. • Panel members will be contacted individually at points of the process to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our consultants have broad experience of similar codesign processes and will support mitigation of this risk.



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				gauge their satisfaction with their input to the panel.	Update: Risk retained (to be mitigated and removed after completion of 24 June meeting)
14	The Panel's codesign timetable is not adhered to, delaying launch of the fund and / or restricting the available time for supporting projects	Medium (Medium)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A clear focus on the predetermined timetable will form a key part of the management of the codesign process. Delivery against this timetable will be closely monitored at each panel meeting.• Any identified requirement to extend or adapt the timetable will be carefully evaluated in terms of potential future impacts of timetable alterations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thus far, the panel are on schedule. At the time of writing, there are two meetings to go, with one agreed additional session (highlighted above). Update: Risk retained, (to be mitigated and removed after completion of 24 June meeting)



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15	Codesign process lacks transparency and accountability and fails to ensure codesign panel decisions are appropriately implemented.	Low (Low)	High (High)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultants will provide a transparent record of discussion points, actions and evolution of the grant design. Records of codesign panel meetings will be held and provide evidence of design process leading to outputs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public communications around the project have retained showcasing the story of the process. <p>Update: Risk retained</p>
16	Codesign panel suffers reputational damage by failing to design a grant fund that is recognised as valuable to and providing opportunity for communities and potential applicants.	Low (Low)	High (High)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The successful recruitment to the codesign panel of a wide range of community-based members represents a key mitigation of this risk. The codesign panel will be asked to consider this risk at key stages of their development process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added to reflect board comments at November 2025 meeting. <p>Update: Risk retained.</p>
17	NEW:	Medium (n/a)	Medium (n/a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants team and Communities and Rural Development team have worked closely to 	



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	The incoming shift from design phase to delivery phase poses a new risk of loss of momentum and loss of continuity of direction.			<p>date on the method of turning the design into operational practicality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consideration will be given to continuity and momentum when developing community-led grant decision-making mechanisms.	
18	<p>NEW:</p> <p>As the panel's involvement in this process comes to an end, they could feel a sense of loss.</p>	(n/a)	(n/a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will keep the panel updated and involved.• There will be follow up remunerated opportunities for evaluation that the panel members may wish to apply for.	

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