



For information

Title: National Park Partnership Plan annual update

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Purpose

This paper summarises the monitoring framework for the [National Park Partnership Plan](#) (NPPP) and identifies some of the key areas where indicators show progress or where officers expect progress to be demonstrated in final year of delivery of the current NPPP to 2027.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Note the overall progress in delivery of the NPPP summarised in the paper and in Annex 1.

Strategic context

1. The [NPPP](#) identifies the long term objectives for the National Park that will support the delivery of the three long term outcomes for 2045 under the sections of Nature, People and Place. Each long-term objective has an indicator identified to help assess progress to the long-term objectives and outcomes. This paper summarises the data available for the indicators for 2025/26, the fourth year of delivery of the current NPPP and identifies the areas of significant progress or of significant challenge and any changes in delivery to address issues.
2. The indicators are made up of a range of data, some of which is collected annually or more frequently, some of which is only reviewed every few years, and some of which requires new work to identify in future. They are intended to be most effective over the full life of the NPPP and in showing progress or identifying problems towards the outcomes for 2045. Some are effective indicators at this early point in the delivery of the Partnership Plan. Others require more time to be effective so can be supplemented with other data or examples of work.



3. The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) project [Cairngorms 2030](#) (C2030) is now established and delivering across its range of projects, so some of the progress reported here now reflects that increasing contribution of the project to the National Park. The C2030 programme is reported regularly to the [Park Authority Performance Committee](#).

Strategic policy consideration

4. Delivery of the NPPP is at the core of the Board's role and this annual update provides a strategic overview of the monitoring framework of the entire Partnership Plan. It supplements and should be read in the context of other reports on work given through the regular Chief Executive Officer (CEO) updates to Board, other board papers and reports to the Performance Committee, and the updates and information shared at board business sessions throughout the year.

Implications

5. The report uses a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating and directional assessment to provide a more nuanced summary against Partnership Plan objectives, with the narrative providing a summary of the evidence, rationale for the assessment and any significant changes in work identified to address issues. The sections below are intended to pick out some of the key highlights from the year but has a greater focus on the objectives that are currently considered at an amber or red state, either because of the practical challenges faced in delivering change, or because work we expect to deliver change in future cannot yet be evidenced to have done so. This is intended to inform and to reassure board members and be considered in the context of that many objectives, targets and indicators are for periods beyond the five-year Partnership Plan timescale.

Summary of progress by 2025/26

6. The following three sections summarise progress under the Nature, People and Place themes of the NPPP. Annex 1 to the paper provides a summary of progress and RAG ratings to the end of 2025/26.



Nature

7. The long-term outcome for People is a carbon negative and biodiversity rich National Park with better functioning, better connected and more resilient ecosystems.
8. Of the 14 objectives under the Nature theme, nine are considered to be green, with highlights including: continued delivery of above-target levels of peatland under restoration management (1814 Ha); delivery of substantial river restoration projects; £1.01 million Nature Restoration Funding has been secured to deliver species recovery work on freshwater pearl mussel, capercaillie (where male numbers had increased by 30% during the spring 2026 lek counts) and wood ants as well as supporting pond, aspen and montane nature network delivery.
9. Six of the 14 objectives are considered to be amber, though the work on each is progressing steadily and none are considered to be exceptions requiring any changes of direction in work:
 - a) **A5. Moorland management:** The objective is about increasing the sustainability of moorland management in the National Park to ensure greater species and structural diversity in moorland areas of the National Park. While there are national changes in the regulation of moorland management that will help this objective, accurate data on species and habitat diversity will only become available as the Cairngorms Nature Index is developed.
 - b) **A6. Gamebird management:** The objective is about ensuring that all pheasant and partridge shoots adhere to best practice and that all gamebird releases are sustainable and do not negatively impact on native biodiversity. Work by Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) has established a baseline of the numbers of gamebirds being released in the National Park and work will now focus on the impacts of releases on native biodiversity.
 - c) **A7. Fire Management:** The Integrated Fire Management Plan for the National Park was agreed in 2025, the fire management byelaw has been introduced this year and the muirburn licencing scheme will apply from 15 September 2026. However, the significant wildfire in Abernethy and Glenmore in July and August 2026 demonstrates that further work to implement the integrated fire management plan at estate scales will be needed along with enhanced planning for wildfire management and control given the likelihood of more frequent wildfire events.



- d) **A12. Cairngorms Nature Index:** The Cairngorms Nature Index will provide a scientifically robust way of assessing the health of ecosystems in the National Park. Progress to develop the index had been slower than expected due to complexity of data and availability of expert staff, but significant progress has been made since 2025, and the index should be completed by the end of this financial year.
- e) **A13. Species Recovery:** The objective is about ensuring priority species thrive and is linked to species recovery curves as part of Cairngorms Nature. The final report on the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan established a baseline and the next Cairngorms Nature Action Plan will establish new targets for species recovery curves.
- f) **A14. Green Investment:** The objective is about increasing private green finance in nature recovery projects and while there is some evidence that investing is increasing, the overall approach has not matured as quickly as was thought when the current partnership plan was written. Accurate peatland and woodland code registration data for the National Park should be available over the coming months and provide a more reliable indicator for future years.

People

- 10. The long-term outcome for People is a wellbeing economy that works for all the people of the Cairngorms.
- 11. Of the 11 objectives under the People theme, eight are considered to be green. The highlights of the year are: the embedding of the Green Health referral system in all the GP practices of Badenoch and Strathspey (a C2030 project lead by NHS Highland) where the project now has successful completions of green prescriptions and is improving its delivery models; the continued support for communities via the Cairngorms Trust and Scottish Government Community Led Local Development (CLLD) funding, as well as the successful development by numerous communities across the National Park of projects that help them; and the continued successful recruitment and training of volunteer rangers, creating a significant additional resource to support visitor management and activities of partners on the ground. The recent development of the community managed climate grant scheme through C2030 has also trialled innovative approaches to participation in developing the grant fund.



12. The theme continues to have the only objective across all of the NPPP that is still considered be red and is likely to continue to remain so. That objective is **B1. Working-age population**, which aims to maintain the proportion of young and working-aged people in the population. This is probably one of the most challenging objectives within the NPPP as it attempts to change a national and rural trend that is influenced by many factors outside the influence of the partners who deliver the Plan, including longer life expectancy and national migration trends. It has been assessed as red because the most recent census results show both a reduction in number and proportion of young and working-aged people. However, for context, members should remember that over the long term, the National Park has consistently retained a larger proportion of young and working-aged people than comparable areas of Scotland. The work to increase supply of affordable and mid-market housing, support a resilient economy and ensure fair pay helps to support this objective.
13. Two of the 11 objectives are considered to be amber but for different reasons:
 - a) **B4. Skills and training.** The objective is about increasing skills and training opportunities for people in the National Park and ensuring that green jobs can be filled by residents and under-represented groups. Anecdotally, we know that the National Park area supports many green jobs and that some new models for the management of land can support as many jobs, including using the skills of traditional employees. Members will know from discussions about developing the next NPPP from 2027, that this area of work will continue to be a focus for targeted work in future years. In 2027, the Your Future Here initiative will be renewed with a longer-term plan for events over a number of years and with the ability to adapt it to smaller events and locations beyond Badenoch and Strathspey.
 - b) **B10. A Park for All.** The objective is about ensuring there are better opportunities for a diverse range of people to enjoy the National Park and that the visitor profile will be more diverse. Partners are supporting numerous projects that encourage people from different backgrounds to visit and to enjoy the National Park. However, the indicator that we have chosen to support the objective links the percentage of black and global majority group visitors to the National Park to the Scottish population. The most recent data



available shows a significant increase in the proportion of those visitors to the National Park though still short of the target.

Place

14. The long-term outcome for Place is a place that people want to live in, work in and visit that works for all.
15. Of the ten objectives under the Place theme, four are considered green and six are considered amber. The highlights of the year span both green and amber objectives, with the continued delivery of affordable and mid-market housing in Badenoch and Strathspey via Highland Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan; progress in active travel and public transport projects as part of C2030; continued improvement to paths across the National Park; the continued delivery of the ranger services across the National Park and implementation of the Fire Byelaw that has significantly reduced the numbers of fires and barbecues being lit during the season so far; and the start of a community heritage network as well as the launch of the [Communities and Cultural Heritage Fund](#) to support community cultural heritage projects.
16. The six objectives that are amber can be summarised as:
 - a) **C1. Access to housing:** The objective is about ensuring, there is sufficient affordable housing stock to enable people to live and work within the National Park, with a target of only 15% of housing stock being second homes, vacant or short-term lets by 2040. There are a number of tax, Council Tax and short term let licencing measures that may be increasing the availability of some property for sale on the open market, particularly in Badenoch and Strathspey where the short term let Control Area and significant increases in Council Tax for second homes appear to be having a positive effect on homes being available for people working in the area.
 - b) **C2. New Housing:** The objective is about as much new affordable and mid-market housing as possible being delivered and reaching a target of 75% of new housing being affordable by 2030. Significant progress is being made in Badenoch and Strathspey where delivery of affordable and mid-market housing in Badenoch and Strathspey via Highland Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan is sustaining historically high rates, but demand remains high, and delivery will not yet meet the 75% target.



- c) **C3. Housing and community benefit:** The objective aims to secure the control of housing land with communities and public bodies in order to deliver long term needs of the communities. The objective is considered to be amber because only a very small percentage is under the control of communities or public bodies.
- d) **C4. Villages and town centres:** The objective is to ensure villages and town centres in the National Park are thriving places where people live, shop and meet and its indicator is red to 20-minute neighbourhoods and the number of properties that fall inside appropriate categories of easy access to services. The objective is considered amber because while there is now a tool available to establish a baseline and some projects through C2030 that may increase accessibility, the delivery of those projects will happen in the future. Nevertheless, the continued progress with those C2030 active travel projects means that the position has improved since the last NPPP progress report in September 2025.
- e) **C7. Transport to and around the National Park:** The objective promotes a modal shift towards sustainable and active travel in the way visitors and commuters get to, and everyone moves around, the National Park. The target is simply to increase active travel and public transport use within the National Park and is considered to remain amber because while there are a number of projects to improve infrastructure, and change behaviours, as well as some early indications of change, these are all long-term projects where the significant changes in people's behaviour are expected in future years. However, there have been significant improvements in public transport through the operation of the Ember bus service in some parts of the National Park and significant active travel projects continue to move through the complex project development phases towards a delivery programme.
- f) **C10. Cultural heritage:** The objective is to safeguard and promote the National Park's cultural heritage and provide opportunities for everyone to experience and learn about the National Park's outstanding historic environment, history and culture. The indicator is the number of community-led heritage projects in the National Park and also has a target of establishing a cultural heritage network. A cultural heritage network has been initiated and the [Communities and Cultural Heritage Fund](#) is now entering a second year so should start to make a more significant contribution to this objective.



Next steps

17. All partners will continue to deliver their work and coordinate their work through the relevant partnerships or operational structures they have in place to support it. Monitoring of the plan and collation of data to assess progress will continue as part of that. The results of monitoring and challenges experienced in delivering the current NPPP have also informed the development of a draft NPPP the five years from 2027 that the Board will be asked to approve for public consultation later this year.

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