



For decision

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 before the 18-person panel meets for the first time at the end of March.

Recommendations

The Board is invited 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 will also be built around the three core principles set out in the C2030 Activity Plan. Specifically, it will prioritise:
 - a) **Co-design** – The fund will be designed with, not for, our target audiences and they will feel a real sense of ownership over the outcomes.
 - b) **Widening participation** – We will be 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 A1 – net zero, B2 – wellbeing economy, B5 – community assets and land, B6 – new approaches to citizen participation, B7 – community-led planning and development, B10 – a Park for All, C3 – housing and community benefit, C4 – villages and town centres and 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.
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 will be designed by a panel of 18 representatives who live in - or have a close connection to - the National Park.
8. Recruitment for panel members opened on 07 January 2026 and lasted for six weeks, closing 22 February. Recruitment included a geographically targeted digital and video campaign and close work with local and national press with a variety of interviews, press articles and opinion pieces. A postcard sent to every residential property in the National Park and surrounding postcodes (over 30,000 in total), and



key partners and large employers were engaged to help spread the word about the application process.

9. We received expressions of interest from over 250 people, covering every major town and village in the National Park and every age group, with applicants ranging from 16 to 85 years old. All seven of our C2030 target audiences were well represented and we had strong engagement from a range of under-represented groups, including ethnic minorities and disabled people. Just under half of applicants reported having 'minimal' or 'no previous contact' with the Park Authority.
10. Involve are currently in the process of confirming and contacting the final 18 selected panel members. They will meet for the first time on 25 March, with seven sessions to follow over the coming few months (35 hours in total).



Risk register for the C2030 Communities Fund

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
1.	Insufficient interest in the project leads to a smaller / less representative group than anticipated.	N/A (Low)	N/A (High)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Targeted recruitment efforts lasting several months, identifying specific partners and individuals within each of our six target audiences across the whole National Park geography.• Sense-checking applications on at least a fortnightly basis to quickly identify gaps and target future comms / engagement effort.• Working with subject area experts (Involve Foundation) who have significant experience in delivering similar projects at scale.• Advisory group established with first meeting taking place early April.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 250 unique Expression of Interests (EOIs) received, giving a large pool to ensure varied representation.• Sense checking ensured that gaps could be addressed and targeted with ongoing recruitment campaign. <p>Update: Risk fully managed and to be removed.</p>



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2.	Difficulty recruiting 'less heard' voices, leading to a lack of balance on the co-design panel.	N/A (Low)	N/A (High)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All participants to be remunerated for their time at roughly 1.5 x Real Living Wage, recognising the significant time commitment people will need to make. Travel expenses and childcare / caring costs also reimbursed to encourage those who otherwise would not be able to attend. Specific strand of our communications and engagement activity will target under-represented communities and those who are typically 'time poor' (eg by going to the spaces they regularly frequent, rather than expecting them to come to us). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 62 expressions of interest identified themselves as part of the under-represented groups. 7.5% ethnic minority applicants, 11% LGBTQ+ and 13.6% disabled people. <p>Update: Risk fully managed and to be removed.</p>
3.	Final co-design panel does not represent the varied geography and interests of the National Park.	N/A (Low)	N/A (High)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific, published criteria – including participant profiles – explaining how the 18 panellists will be selected and what we are looking for. Soft 'targets' for each target audience (community groups, land managers, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EOIs received from all communities of the National Park and all target audiences.



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				<p>businesses, young people etc) and overall geographical spread.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sizeable recruitment effort to try and secure hundreds of applications, giving us the largest possible pool of candidates to select from.• Element of random / blind selection in the process to limit subjective decision-making.• Milestone decision point: Grant design process will not be taken forward if this risk is not managed at panel recruitment stage.	<p>Update: Risk fully managed and to be removed.</p>
4.	<p>Varying aspirations and multiple different priorities identified by co-design participants lead to ineffective or unworkable grant criteria.</p>	<p>Medium (Medium)</p>	<p>Medium (Medium)</p>	<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).	<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.



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				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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">• 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 reduce direct conflicts between different participants / priorities. <p>Update: Retain risk, with risk wording changed to reflect November 2025 board.</p>
5.	Potential conflict of interest for co-design panellists who may	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As the Cairngorms National Park has a largely remote, rural geography, we believe



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	wish to apply for funding themselves.			<p>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).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning from similar projects – through Involve, Park Authority-led funds and via partners such as the Cairngorms Trust – applied and fed back to co-design panellists. 	<p>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 clear and transparent parameters for this to take place.</p> <p>Update: Retain risk.</p>
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, 	<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



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				<p>with the same grants team helping fulfil all of them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 advantageous here in terms of coordinating timings etc with other funds. • Park Authority and Cairngorms Trust representatives will brief the co-design panel on other funds available and their criteria. 	<p>Communities Fund projects – will be a key consideration for the co-design panel to discuss and agree a position on.</p> <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	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 / 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will be clear in all communications



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	decisions they make / if funded projects do not go according to plan.			<p>what it would potentially fund; they will not be making decisions on exactly which projects are funded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Park Authority to act as the accountable body for the fund, providing level of legal / governance assurance to process. 	<p>around the fund exactly where the panel's decision-making remit begins and ends. We will also field any questions about the funding 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will make clear to panel participants from the outset that we are keen to capture the overarching 'story' of the process as it



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				<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alongside this, we are committed to capturing the story of the fund (plus those who helped shape it and benefitted from it) as it progresses via our comms and evaluation activity.• 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>develops, from the earliest training sessions to shaping the fund, all the way through to projects being awarded funding and work happening on the ground.</p> <p>Recommendation: Retain risk.</p>
9.	Less than two years to decide on a funding approach and distribute	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) /	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This topic will form part of discussions with the co-design panel around how to



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	£1 million to community projects.			<p>LEADER) to community projects within the National Park.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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) will be the first priority for the co-design panel. 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). 	<p>balance ambition (funding projects that deliver real impact) with pragmatism (funding projects that can deliver those impacts in good time).</p> <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	High (Medium)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision-making mechanisms are yet to be resolved by the co-design group, and this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Park Authority has long-term



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	damage as a consequence of unpopular / unsuccessful funding decisions.			<p>risk will be factored into their discussions at the earliest opportunity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 for high level scrutiny and assurance of potential funding decisions. 	<p>experience of devolving funding decision-making through eg the Cairngorms Trust. This experience will be brought into panel discussion and decision-making on this matter</p> <p>Update: Retain risk, risk profile escalated reflecting November 2025 board discussion.</p>
11	NEW: High level of interest in recruitment and large number of unsuccessful	Medium (n/a)	Low (n/a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All expressions of interest will be contacted by the Park Authority whether successful or unsuccessful. • Future opportunities highlighted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park Authority lead on communication with unsuccessful EOIs to use as opportunity to



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	applicants leads to dissatisfaction and reputational damage			<ul style="list-style-type: none">EOI group could be utilised as a sounding board for panel decisions eg given early sight of proposals.	highlight future opportunities, ie Youth Local Action Group (YLAG) recruitment.
12	NEW: Panel members resign part way through codesign process or fail to attend meetings impacting the robustness of the codesign process.	Medium (n/a)	Medium (n/a)	<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 processOngoing 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Our consultants have broad experience of similar codesign processes and will support mitigation of this risk.Risk added to reflect November 2025 board comments.
13	NEW: Dominant voices emerge within the Panel which restrict the capacity for all members to contribute.	Medium (n/a)	Medium (n/a)	<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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Our consultants have broad experience of similar codesign processes and will



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				<ul style="list-style-type: none">Panel members will be contacted individually at points of the process to gauge their satisfaction with their input to the panel.	support mitigation of this risk.
14	NEW: The Panel's codesign timetable is not adhered to, delaying launch of the fund and / or restricting the available time for supporting projects	Medium (n/a)	Medium (n/a)	<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.	
15	NEW: Codesign process lacks transparency and accountability and fails to ensure codesign panel decisions are appropriately implemented.	Low (n/a)	High (n/a)	<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">Added to reflect board comments at November 2025 meeting.



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16	NEW: 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 (n/a)	High (n/a)	<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.

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