



For information

Title: CEO 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.

Nature and Climate Change

- 1. Deer and herbivore impacts:** In 2024/25 the Park Authority piloted a venison subsidy scheme designed to incentivise increased culls in parts of the National Park with highest densities. Cull targets for these areas were achieved and populations reduced. NatureScot also trialled incentive schemes in two other pilot areas which targeted roe deer in Central Scotland and sika on the south-east side of Loch Ness. We will trial a similar scheme in the red deer hind season of 2025/26. This will again aim to incentivise achieving cull targets in high density areas. The level of incentive and the cull targets which will apply will be discussed with Deer Management Groups (DMG) at their next round of meetings.
- 2. Gamebird management:** [The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust report](#) provides the first detailed assessment of gamebird release numbers and densities in the National Park. The survey drew on data from the National Gamebird Census (NGC) between 2000 and 2023 and from interviews with shoot managers on 10 estates from the 22 which are thought to release gamebirds within the National Park. The total number of birds released by the ten estates, averaged across the three most recent seasons (since 2022), were 53,966 pheasants and 24,413 red legged partridges. The next step is to investigate what the impacts of these releases are, both positive and negative on the biodiversity of the Cairngorms.
- 3. Fire management:** The Dava wildfire in late June covered some 10,000 hectares (ha) and was the biggest Scottish wildfire in recorded memory. Over 100 people from estates, farms and nature reserves tackled the fire. The Park Authority Granttown Office was used as the Incident Command Head Quarters by Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and as a central point to gather provisions for the firefighting efforts from the local community. The Park Authority has helped organise visits to the fire site by the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity and



for the Director of Agriculture and Rural Economy. The Muirburn Code Working Group also visited.

The Park Authority is providing funding, administered by Scottish Land and Estates (SLE), to help cover the cost of equipment and vehicles breakages incurred by the private sector during firefighting on Dava. The Integrated Wildfire Management Plan (IWMP) covers many of the issues raised and staff have been working with a number of estates on developing fire management plans.

4. **Species recovery:**

- a) **Beaver:** 33 beavers have been released, as part of the five-year license agreement for 'up to 15 families of pairs, or 50 individuals. 66 people were involved in 60 beaver kit watches in spring / summer 2025, helping us confirm breeding at eight of the nine beaver territories. Eight of the pairs produced 17 kits. The annual survey of the Spey has just been completed. Spey Dam to Grantown-on-Spey, results are being mapped and prepared. The beaver management and mitigation group continue to meet and discuss how the Park Authority's response to managing the impacts of beavers is working on-the-ground.
Funding was secured from the National Parks UK's partnership initiative with Pearl and Dean to highlight the beauty and importance of UK National Parks through cinema advertising. A [cinema advert](#) has been produced to showcase the project.
- b) **Freshwater pearl mussel:** The Park Authority convened a partnership of eleven organisations in June, to establish the Cairngorms Freshwater Pearl Mussel strategy group that will have oversight and support the development and delivery of the recovery plan. To support future translocation action, electrofishing and survey work to establish spat dates has been undertaken and genetic assessment is underway. Due to low water levels on the Spey, the Park Authority, NatureScot and Spey Fishery Board staff moved around 2,500 mussels into deeper water.
- c) **Nature Restoration Fund:** Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, Gillian Martin MSP, made the announcement on the Park Authority's £1.2 million Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) award on a visit to Anagach Woods in August. Work underway includes establishment of wood ant and narrow headed ant captive breeding facility and the UK's first narrow headed ant translocation to Mar Lodge in August. The Dee Resilience officer has been recruited, Dr Rachel Helliwell is being seconded into this role from



James Hutton Institute (JHI) and CREW- Scotland's Centre of Expertise on Waters. Rachel starts in post in November. Work is also under way on aspen, freshwater pearl mussel and capercaillie emergency plan.

Planning and Place

5. **Paths and long-distance routes:** Improvement works on the Speyside Way have continued with more minor works during the peak season before the programme of gate replacement to make the route more accessible continues in late summer. Work to identify potential routes for the extension of the Deeside Way from Ballater to Crathie and then onwards to Braemar has continued with input from a steering group set up to include partners and communities.
6. **Core Paths Plan Review:** An informal consultation of the Core Paths Plan and proposed amendments ran from May – August 2025, with 155 comments being submitted via the online map and a further 48 comments received directly (by phone, email or in person). As part of this informal review the Outdoor Access Team sought views on amendments taking the form of re-alignments (corrections), removals (de-designations) and suggestions for additional paths to be designated as core paths (additions). The next steps will be for the team to produce a consultation report for the Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF) in November, assess the responses and further develop the plan for formal consultation in 2026.
7. **Visitor infrastructure:** A number of grant offers had been made utilising funds from the Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme with these accepted in early summer. This allows recipients to progress works more quickly than in previous years helping to avoid less favourable winter weather.
8. **Ranger services:** A ranger team of five permanent rangers, 12 seasonal rangers and four trainee rangers were in place in time for the main summer holiday period. This period saw fairly frequent fine weather and a number of high fire risk warnings meaning there was a focus on fire related engagement on many patrols. Despite more fine weather during the main holiday period than in 2024 including over the summer bank holiday weekend the number of live fires encountered fell from 135 in both 2023 and 2024 to 74. When variations in the number of patrols is taken into account, the numbers have almost halved from 0.22 fires encountered per patrol in 2023 to 0.18 in 2024 and 0.12 in 2025 suggesting the significant focus on fire messaging is influencing visitor behaviour.

A gathering of Park Authority rangers and the wider family of rangers employed by partners took place on 12 September taking a look back at the season as well as looking ahead to 2026 and most notably the implications for rangers of the proposed fire byelaw.



9. **Volunteering and health walks:** The new intake of 24 volunteer rangers who finished training at the beginning of June have been out on the ground helping to welcome visitors and look after the area. The new health walks in Aviemore and Kincaig that began in the spring have now reached the point that they are operating independently with local volunteers.
10. **Active and sustainable transport:** A procurement exercise for the next stage of design work for active travel improvements in Aviemore, Boat of Garten with the option of an extensions to cover Nethy Bridge and Newtonmore was completed in late July. Engagement with the preferred bidder is now under way with a view to design and public engagement work taking place over the winter.
11. **Local Development Plan (LDP):** Work continues on finalising the evidence base for the next LDP. Engagement is currently underway on topic papers covering housing, climate change, local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods, retail and town centres, and flood risk and water management. The consultation period on these topic papers ends on 26 September 2025 (see [Have Your Say Today - Cairngorms Local Development Plan - Commonplace](#)). A final set of evidence topic papers will be published for consultation in late September, with the team then working towards finalising the Evidence Report for the next LDP by the end of this year. Officers have also supported Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey and the Marr Area Partnership to provide mapping input for the Grantown-on-Spey and Strathdon Community Action Plans.
12. **Planning casework:** The Planning Committee has met twice since the last formal Board meeting on 27 June 2025. The Committee has approved planning permissions for a floodplain restoration scheme on the River Dee near Braemar, 14 new affordable homes at Morlich Court in Aviemore, two plot amendments at the ongoing housing development at Dalfaber in Aviemore, and a partly retrospective track application on the Muckrach Estate near Dulnain Bridge. The Committee also resolved to grant planning permission for 35 new homes on land south of Lynstock Park in Nethy Bridge, pending the developer entering into a legal agreement to secure a financial contribution towards community facilities in the local area. In addition, the Committee agreed to submit objections to three major windfarm proposals located just outside the National Park boundary. Scottish Ministers notified us that they would not call in the application for a new warehouse at the House of Bruar, which enabled planning permission to be issued in line with the Planning Committee's decisions of 25 April and 13 June 2025. Scottish Ministers also notified us of their decision on the planning application for 22 self-catering apartments, shops, hotel and underground parking at Laurel Bank in Aviemore, which they called in for determination in 2023. They intend to grant planning permission subject to the developer entering into a legal agreement to secure a financial contribution towards active travel improvements. Officers are currently



liaising with the developer with a view to reaching agreement on a fair and reasonable contribution, which would then enable Scottish Ministers to issue the planning permission.

Communications and Engagement

- 13. Community and stakeholder engagement:** With the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Engagement team back up to full strength after two recent appointments, their first task was to coordinate our attendance at this year's the Grantown and Greentown Shows, with good attendance and feedback at both events. 233 people visited the Park Authority's Grantown Show stand during the day (up from 207 last year), with the wide range of exhibits a potential factor. This included the farm machinery loan scheme, updates on the Cairngorms Future Farming and beaver projects, the Strathspey Wetlands and Waders Initiative, our ranger team and an update on wildfire management in the National Park.

211 people visited our stand at the Greentown Show, with exhibits including C2030 transport and nature prescription projects, beaver and ant conservation work, the LDP and our ranger team. Next up are community roadshow events in Strathdon and Aviemore, plus the Ballater Winter Festival later in the year.

- 14. Cultural Heritage Network:** A short-term working group made up of nine individuals from a range of different cultural heritage backgrounds (from farming to museums and local artists) have helped co-design an event at Boat Hall on 09 October. The event aims to bring people together from across the National Park to network and explore collaboration opportunities; hear from experts in the field; develop a shared voice for cultural heritage; and consider how to influence future policy, funding and practice.
- 15. C2030 participatory democracy:** The Grants and Communities / Rural Development teams have been busy shaping the early stages of a new £1 million C2030 communities fund, to be designed in tandem with communities from across the National Park and further afield. Next steps include recruiting a co-design group during the autumn, who will then receive training on fund design and participatory democracy methods, before beginning to develop the fund in early 2026.
- 16. Pledge Process Planet exhibition:** Working with the Cairngorms Creative Network (which now has over 80 members), the C2030 arts and culture project has secured funding from the Cairngorms Trust to develop a touring version of their successful Pledge Process Planet exhibition, which was created in partnership with the sector. The art exhibition – which is designed to connect landscape and community and inspire collective action on climate change – will now go on tour to Braemar and Kingussie in October.



17. **Corporate communications:** The period was dominated by the large wildfire to the north of the National Park in late June / early July. As well as coordinating multiple statements and reactive media lines (in partnership with the SFRS), we also issued various high and extreme fire risks, which were distributed both through our own channels (on and offline) and to a wider audience via paid-for social media posts. An insert was also created for *Cairn* residents' magazine, expressing our thanks to the hundreds of gamekeepers, firefighters, foresters, stalkers, farmers, land managers and others who helped tackle the blaze, and asking residents to help share the message about wildfire prevention in the National Park. We also issued a tender for the development of a comms and engagement framework relating to the potential introduction of a recreational fire byelaw.
18. Over the summer we secured significant coverage of stories on a range of topics, including the [Climate Adaptation Fund](#), [Nature Restoration Fund](#) and the five-year anniversary of our ranger service. These included features on BBC Radio Scotland and Reporting Scotland, as well as national and [specialist press](#). We also expect to be included in a special report on the wildfires on BBC Landward at the end of this month.
19. **Website and social media:** The new National Park website went live in June and initial feedback has been positive, with the new wildlife, towns / villages, projects and news / views sections all heavily visited. We have also launched a new consultations module on the site, with the Core Paths Plan being the first project to go live (over 150 people responded). Next up is the development of a mapping module, which will allow us to create bespoke maps for everything from community assets to funding opportunities, paths and trails, and conservation projects.

Digital activity over the period was impacted by the departure of our Digital Content Coordinator in July, but we were delighted to welcome Beth Reid as her replacement in early September.

Between 01 June and 01 September 2025, we received 2.1 million impressions (up 111% on the previous year) and 132,816 engagements (up 156% on the previous year). Our engagement rate is 6% (up 21.6% on the previous year) and our net audience growth in this period was 4,946, taking us to a total audience of 74,177 across Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and Bluesky (up from just over 60,000 a year ago). Video views totalled just over half a million.

20. **Branding and publications:** Copywriting is well underway for the winter edition of *Cairn* magazine, which will include a bumper update on the progress of those projects supported through the Nature Restoration Fund. We will also carry a piece highlighting the positive impact that grant funding has made in the National Park over recent years.



21. Interpretation projects include the new Tomintoul Sky Hide and refreshing community panels in Nethy Bridge and Strathdon. We are also commissioning photography across a number of themes (with a particular emphasis on the people of the National Park) and developing materials for the new Dùthchas Award scheme.

Organisational Development

22. **Staffing update:** Since June, the following staff changes took place:
23. **Staff leaving the organisation:**
- a) Joanna Hampson, Content Creation Coordinator left and moved to another organisation.
24. **Staff joining the organisation:** External recruitment activity is at a minimum, as the Park Authority is operating at full complement, and recruitment is typically only to replace vacant posts, or partner funded posts. Nevertheless, the Park Authority is attracting a large number of applications and is seen as a very good employer. Recent appointments are:
- a) Lawrence Murphy joined as C2030 Community Engagement Coordinator to replace a vacant post. This post attracted 57 applicants.
 - b) Beth Reid who joined us on a short-term internship as Content Creation Intern applied for the Content Creation Coordinator post vacated by Joanna Hampson and was successfully appointed to this role. She applied through the external recruitment process, which attracted nearly 50 applicants.
25. **Ranger Service:** We operated almost at full complement during the reporting period, with one seasonal ranger leaving early (in September rather than at the end of October) as she had been offered a job with another organisation. This position was not replaced.
26. **Staff appointments:** There were no internal staff appointments in the reporting period.
27. **Roles appointed for future start dates:** We have successfully appointed to the River Dee Catchment Officer post. This is an 18-month appointment, commencing at the end of November.
28. **Youth employment:**
- a) The four Trainee Rangers who were appointed for a period of three months (June – September), Adam Lovell, Georgia Soan, Isla Paton and Jack Capener



are progressing well and learning a plethora of new skills. It is encouraging to note that one of the four was a Junior Ranger previously. There were over 150 applicants for the four positions.

- b) Barnaby Fogg joined us on a short-term internship as Disability and Access Intern.

- 29. **Equalities:** The Park Authority hosted, 16 young people aged 13 to 18 from the Black Professionals UK network who spent an inspiring day in the National Park exploring careers in conservation and rural development with the Park Authority team. Sessions covered nature restoration, species reintroduction and planning, before the group enjoyed some hands-on time outdoors with the Park Authority ranger team. For many of the city-based young people, it was a chance to connect with nature, gain fresh perspectives and spark ambition on what rural careers look like.

Procurement

- 30. The procurement for the design of the Cairngorms 2030 Active Travel projects has now been completed. The successful contractor is Mott MacDonald, who submitted a very strong bid both in terms of quality and price. Contract discussions are now underway.
- 31. Training in the operational aspects of procurement has been arranged for the wider staff group and is scheduled for the end of September.

Grant Moir

11 September 2025

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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. **Gillian Martin MSP:** Hosted the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy on a site visit to the National Park, announcing £1.2 million Nature Restoration Fund grant for the Park Authority projects. Discussed a range of issues including those around the flexibility of land designations.
2. **National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF):** Contributed to a major visit to the Cairngorms by UK and Scottish representatives of the NHLF, highlighting the delivery of nature restoration priorities, community engagement work, and transformative landscape-scale collaboration, while exploring further opportunities for long-term strategic partnership.
3. **The Environment and Forestry Directorate (EnFor):** – Met in Edinburgh with senior Scottish Government EnFor officials and fellow Chairs of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), delivered a presentation on the scope to develop further government and inter-agency communications, and discussed a range of common issues.
4. **Cairngorms National Park Authority and Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA):** Co-hosted joint meeting in Pitlochry of Chairs, CEOs and Communications leaders of the Park Authority and LLTNPA, discussing implications of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill, strategic communications issues, Public Service Reform, and strategic issues arising over the next two years including National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) and LDP development.
5. **Marine Directorate:** Met senior civil servants from the Scottish Government's Marine Directorate on a river catchment tour, discussing strategic aspects of river



restoration plans and species recovery projects with respect to migratory fish species, freshwater ecosystems, and greater security for our communities.

6. **King's Foundation:** Provided further update to King's Foundation Trustee following last year's engagement day with Cairngorms landowners and managers at Mar Lodge on nature issues and housing.
7. **Scottish Government:** Met with Director General Net Zero and Director EnFor, providing routine updates on public body performance and compliance.
8. **Scottish Land and Estates (SLE):** Met with representative of SLE following wildfires, reviewing the progress made by the Park Authority in developing and launching an IWMP, noting the call by SLE to develop a national integrated wildfire plan.
9. **Major estates:** Met individually with the owners and land managers of several major estates, discussing approaches to overcoming a range of challenges and meeting the aims of the NPPP.
10. **Gamekeepers** – Met with representative of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, discussing the role of keepers in tackling the Dava / Carrbridge wildfires, the application of controlled burning techniques, and the importance of effective coordination, training and equipment availability across stakeholders.
11. **Aberdeenshire Council:** Met with Chief Executive, discussing work to support communities in the National Park and joint initiatives to bolster tourism opportunities. Separate discussion with the Provost of Aberdeenshire about catchment-scale work in the area, and with a local councillor re coordinating approaches to wildfire management.
12. **Business:** Met with Chair and Chief Executive of the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP), reviewing work delivered since our last meeting and exploring further opportunities for the Park Authority to support businesses in the Cairngorms.



13. **Fergus Ewing MSP:** Met with the MSP for Inverness and Nairn, discussing the aftermath of the Dava and Carrbridge fires, the development and implementation of the Park Authority's IWMP as the first of its kind in the UK, preparations for the application of the recreational fire byelaw, subject to Ministerial approval, and other aspects of the Park Authority's work to mitigate against wildfires.
14. **Graham Leadbitter MP:** Met MP for Moray West, Nairn and Strathspey, discussing issues affecting the people who live and work in the National Park and beyond, including questions around community benefits from energy developments.
15. **Grantown-on-Spey:** Attended annual Grantown Show, met with community leaders, and farmers' and crofters' representatives, discussing the Park Authority's work to help the sector and further opportunities to develop relationships.
16. **Strathdon:** Attended Lonach Gathering, meeting informally with local authority and other community leaders, discussing issues affecting the area. This was in addition to continuing meetings with the Park Authority members and staff to develop a long-term, strategic response to problems facing Strathdon.
17. **Carrbridge:** Attended the Carve Carrbridge event, meeting business owners and local residents including the Chair of Carrbridge Community Council, discussing current projects involving the Park Authority and future aspirations for the village.
18. **Braemar:** Attended Braemar Gathering, meeting local authority and community leaders, business owners, and representatives of stakeholder groups.
19. **Nethy Bridge:** Invited to serve as chieftain of the Abernethy Highland Games in a personal capacity, while underlining in my opening speech the Park Authority's commitment to helping communities thrive in the face of multiple challenges, including support for our natural and cultural heritage.
20. **Chairs Presentation:** Delivered the first in a series of talks by EnFor chairs to a range of Scottish Government staff, covering career experiences and the Park Authority convener responsibilities.



21. **Media:** Interviewed for broadcast and quoted on a range of stories from the issues raised by the Dava / Carrbridge wildfires to the announcement of recipients of the 2025 Climate Adaptation Fund. Produced columns for local newspapers on topics including the challenges facing farming and support for local culture.
22. **National Park Conveners:** Met regularly with the Convener of the LLTNPA Board to discuss issues of mutual interest.
23. **The Park Authority Liaison:** Attended weekly liaison meetings with the Park Authority Deputy Convener, CEO and Deputy CEO.
24. All meetings were in addition to individual meetings and discussions with Board members, senior officers, staff and other stakeholders on a wide range of subjects.

Sandy Bremner,

10 September 2025

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