



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 (NPPP).

Nature and Climate Change

1. **Wildfire:** following on from the Wildfire Summit held by the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, conversations about wildfire have continued. Park staff attended the South Grampian Wildfire Group (SGWG) and discussed how the byelaw might operate in 2026. The SGWG is the only functioning wildfire group in the Park and its systems provide a model for how other collaborative groups might work. Park staff also attended the Wildfire Ready meeting at Rottal, Glen Clova which was largely attended by a farming audience.
2. **Peatland restoration:** is progressing well in 2026. The annual target is 1700 hectares (ha) and it is estimated some 1100ha have been brought under restoration by October. Currently 15 projects are being worked on or are already completed. Multi-year restoration plans are being developed for some large estates to help secure a pipeline of projects for future years.
3. **Nature Restoration Fund:** Good progress is being made on projects to protect nature and strengthen our resilience to climate change. Priority actions in the Capercaillie Emergency Plan are moving ahead, with redundant fences being removed to reduce collision risks, dense heather cut, and cattle grazing expanded to create more diversity in our woodlands. In Strathspey, surveys of key aspen sites and investment in a local tree nursery will help protect rare lichens and strengthen the aspen network for the future. Significant progress is also being made on insect recovery, with new methods for rearing wood ant and narrow-headed ant colonies proving successful and potential release sites being mapped across Deeside, Angus and Perthshire.



4. **Freshwater pearl mussel:** Together with the Spey Fishery Board, NatureScot and John Hutton Institute (JHI) the Park organised a fact-finding trip to mussel conservation breeding facilities in the Lake District and Cumbria - investigation underway into the feasibility of setting up facilities within the National Park. Habitat assessment work on the Dee and some of the tributaries of the Spey is underway to identify potential release sites for mussels in the future.
5. **Dee Resilience Strategy Group:** Working with the River Dee Trust to fund and manage a contract to develop a hydrological model of the upper catchment - the required first part of work to determine where nature-based solutions will have the greatest impact for drought and flood resilience to 'smooth the flow'. We are linking with a nature-based finance model developed by NatureScot. The Dee Resilience Officer Rachel Helliwell starts on the 23 November.

Planning and Place

6. **Paths and long-distance routes:** A contract was let for further improvement works to the Speyside Way at Insh and Inveruglas with work started in mid-November. Gate removal / replacement work has been completed on the Cromdale to the Park boundary section and more work with local landowners is underway between Grantown and Nethy Bridge. These improvements will make the route more usable by cyclists and horse riders in particular while also making it more accessible for those with wheelchairs, buggies etc. Work is under way with the new Carrbridge Community Council and other local stakeholders to finalise details for the path linking the new housing development on Carr Road to the village centre with a planning application for the preferred route expected to be submitted in early 2026.
7. **Core Paths Plan Review:** An informal consultation on a review of the Core Paths Plan closed in August with 208 responses received. The Access team have been working through the responses and assessing suggestions with these helping inform the development of a draft Core Paths Plan which will be formally consulted on in 2026. A consultation report was also produced for the Local Outdoor Access Forum. Preparatory work is also under way regarding the assessments necessary on the draft Plan – Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitats Regulation Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment.
8. **Local Outdoor Access Forum (LOAF):** The LOAF considered the Core Paths Plan consultation report at their meeting in November and discussed in more detail some of the more complex route suggestions that required consideration before inclusion in the draft plan. The LOAF also considered future membership and the election of a new convener as John Grierson is stepping down after six years in the role.



9. **Visitor infrastructure:** Approximately £325,000 has been allocated and grants offered from the Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme held by the Park Authority. They include projects such as paths works at Loch an Eilean, the Cairns on Balmoral Estate and in Glen Quoich as well as smaller grants for development including feasibility work on a Braemar Aire site and an allocation of match funding towards a Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund bid for Glenmore Beach Car Park improvements.
10. **Accessibility Internship:** The Park Authority employed an intern from July until October 2025 to undertake some dedicated work on accessibility. This included working with the Badenoch and Strathspey Access Panel to assist them in updating their access guide while also collating equivalent information for other areas of the National Park with a view to this then providing better accessibility information on the National Park website. Work was also undertaken to identify and survey accessible Paths with three paths (in Nethy Bridge, Boat of Garten and Kingussie) measured against the accessible path standard. These will be promoted on the Accessibility page of the Park website, and the individual path pages will provide more detailed information about the routes. This work also led to a “toolkit” that will be used by other officers in the coming months to identify and support further accessible routes including bringing more paths up to accessible standard.
11. **Ranger services:** The team of 12 seasonal rangers that were in place for the summer finished in mid-October with the regular patrols also finishing at this time. Work is under way to undertake a restructure of the ranger service to reflect the additional requirements that will come with commencement of the fire byelaw as well as providing an enhanced Park Authority ranger presence in the southern part of the park from spring 2026.
12. **Transport – Cycling and behaviour change activity:** The first set of organised led rides to school known as “Bike buses” and prioritised for younger children in Primary one to Primary three, took place over summer at Aviemore, Grantown and Deshar (Boat of Garten) primary schools before finishing at the start of the October school holidays. 71 children signed up for bike buses across the three schools. A user / parent survey has taken place and while response numbers were quite low these indicated a 23% increase in children cycling as their normal way of getting to school, and an associated 23% decrease in children being driven as their normal way of getting to school as well as encouraging more cycling on other days. Work is now under way on a new contract for 2026 to continue the existing routes while transitioning them to a parent / volunteer led while also adding further routes including bike buses for Newtonmore and Nethy Bridge primary schools.



Workplace activity has also taken place including organised cycle repair workshops reaching over 50 employees to support them with their cycling at work needs. This builds on an identified need to build cycle confidence including cycle maintenance checks and repairs as well as cycle riding skills to encourage more cycling. As with the schools' activities planning is now under way to develop a further programme to support workplaces in 2026.

13. **Transport - Active Communities:** Design development activity is now under way for Aviemore and Boat of Garten with a design review to identify risks with the original concept designs developed in the Cairngorms 2030 Development phase. An extension to the contract with the consultants is being agreed to cover further design development in both Nethy Bridge and Newtonmore. Public engagement for community led feedback on design needs is planned for early December.
14. **Public Transport Improvements:** With support from the Park Authority, funding has been secured by the Highland Council to invest in bus stop improvements along the Glenmore corridor to encourage public transport use. Construction of new bus shelters is expected by March 2026.
15. **Local Development Plan (LDP):** Work on compiling evidence for the next LDP is drawing to a close. Engagement on topic papers is now complete, with consultation on the final papers covering policy monitoring, blue and green infrastructure, and play, sport and recreation ending on 31 October 2025. The team are now finalising the formal Evidence Report, which will be reported to Board for approval in early 2026 before being submitted for an independent 'gate check' assessment by Scottish Government's Division of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA). An annual update to the Development Plan Scheme, which sets out the timetable for the next stages in preparing the new LDP, is reported to Board for approval at this meeting.
16. **Planning casework:** The planning committee met on 14 November 2025 to consider a planning application for realignment of a 400m stretch of the River Tromie close to its confluence with the River Spey, and two retrospective planning applications for track upgrades on the Muckrach Estate near Carrbridge. The committee will meet once more this year, on 12 December 2025.

Communications and Engagement

17. **Engagement events:** The team have facilitated and organised two roadshow events during this period. The Strathdon drop-in roadshow on 24 September, which included the launch of the local Community Action Plan, was attended by 35 people, plus a further 25 attending a bespoke session with the local Silver Circle group beforehand. The Kincaig fun day took place on 27 September, with over 400 local community members in attendance. We delivered sessions on beavers,



Cairngorms 2030 and nature storytelling, with 84 people directly engaged at the stall. Elsewhere, the successful '[Pledge Process Planet](#)' exhibition - led by artists from the National Park - has been on tour in Kingussie and Braemar throughout October, sparking conversations around climate change.

18. **Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP):** The CBP conference took place on 12 November, supported by the Park Authority. The Communities and Rural Development and Beaver teams were in attendance to provide information on Cairngorms 2030, transport and active travel, the upcoming Communities Fund and our beaver work. Elsewhere, we are supporting CBP to deliver a winter marketing campaign - 'Where Winter Comes to Life' - for a fourth successive year. Working closely with local businesses across the region, this year's campaign will include a blend of PR opportunities, digital and Spotify advertising and press visits.
19. **Cultural heritage networking event:** Designed by 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), a cultural heritage event took place on 09 October at Boat of Garten Hall. 65 people from across the National Park with a wide range of cultural heritage interests took part. There was excellent energy in the room for developing a network for the sector and we will publish a follow up report on 05 December summarising next steps (including a second event in March).
20. **Communities and cultural heritage fund:** Launched at the cultural heritage networking event, the Park Authority have granted the Cairngorms Trust £50,000 to deliver a fund for community organisations, focused on communities and culture priorities from Community Action Plans. Grants ranging from £2,500 to £10,000 are available, covering both revenue and capital costs, and projects must be completed by 10 February 2027.
21. **Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund:** The Grants and Communities / Rural Development teams have been busy shaping the early stages of a new £1 million Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund, to be designed by communities from across the National Park and further afield. Next steps include recruiting a co-design group of 18 people, recruitment for which will begin in January. The group will then receive training on fund design and different methods of decision-making, before beginning to develop the fund ready for launch in summer 2026.
22. **Corporate communications:** The approval of the fire byelaw by ministers in September had extensive media coverage, [leading the north STV News at Six programme](#) and featuring prominently on BBC Reporting Scotland and across radio, print and digital outlets (total reach of 266 stories, or an estimated reach of 700 million). There was also significant press interest in the wildfire summit hosted



by Scottish Government (SG) in Grantown a few weeks later, leading to follow-up articles in [national and local media](#), some of which referenced the byelaw and other fire mitigation work in the National Park.

Agricultural Adviser Malcolm Smith is due to make his debut as a columnist in the Press and Journal farming section on Saturday 29 November. The P&J will run a column from him every two months, presenting an exciting new opportunity to update the farming community on our agriculture work and on Malcolm's activities in particular.

Earlier this month, BBC Landward carried a piece on the eDNA freshwater research being carried out by the Park Authority in partnership with UHI, featuring Beaver Project Manager, Jonathan Willet.

23. **Branding and publications:** The winter edition of *Cairn* magazine has been delivered to residents in the National Park over the past couple of weeks. It's a packed issue, with highlights including features on the community impact of grant funding across the National Park, the progress of Nature Restoration Fund projects – with particular focus on ants and freshwater pearl mussels – and an introduction to the new Dùthchas Award.

We've worked with two new photographers to commission engaging fresh imagery of our peatland restoration work and of families and young people out and about enjoying in the National Park. Meanwhile, the interpretation project at the new Tomintoul Sky Hide is progressing well, and upgrades to panels at the Bellabeg shop in Strathdon, the visitor information board at Nethy Bridge and Drumochter are also in the works.

24. **Social media and website:** Between 01 September and 05 November we received over three million impressions (up 154% on the previous year) and 120,385 engagements (up 193% on the previous year) across all channels. Our engagement rate is 4% (up 15.2% on the previous year) and our net audience growth in this period was 5,116, taking us to a total of 79,241 across Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and Bluesky (up from just over 60,000 a year ago). Video views totalled almost 600,000.

We have been exploring different ways of presenting content around cultural heritage ([example here](#)) and conservation ([example here](#)), with the results of these experiments being captured and used to inform future content development.

The new website had just over 82,000 views during the period, with popular pages including things to do, paths and trails and the map. Development work continues on the creation of a new mapping module, which will allow us to create bespoke



maps for everything from paths and trails to points of interest, community assets and specific ecological features.

A major focus for the whole team over the coming months will be the creation of materials to support the new fire management byelaw. In early November we hosted some of the creative team who will be working on the project. They met with individuals and partners in the east and west of the National Park to hear more about the issues at hand, spoke to rangers on the ground, and got a sense of community concerns and aspirations for the byelaw itself.

Organisational Development

25. **Staffing update:** Since September, the following staff changes took place:
26. Staff leaving the organisation:
 - a) Barnaby Fogg completed his internship as Disability Access Intern.
 - b) Simon Thomas resigned from his role as Peatland Action Project Officer to join another organisation.
 - c) Colin Bryans resigned from his role as Senior Planning Officer to join another organisation.
 - d) Craig Lews resigned from his role as payroll, Accounts and Finance Officer to go travelling.
27. **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) Rachel Helliwell joined the organisation as River Dee Catchment Officer. This is a new fixed term post for 18 months.
28. **Ranger update:** The Seasonal Rangers and Trainee Rangers' contract ended in October. Recruitment will commence for next season's cohort in early 2026.
29. **Staff appointments:** There were no internal staff appointment in the reporting period
30. **Roles appointed for future dates**



- a) We have successfully appointed to the Conservation Officer – Nature Restoration Fund. This is a new post, fixed term for 18-month commencing in December.

31. Live recruitment: posts currently being recruited are:

- a) Senior Planning Officer, to replace Colin Bryans.
- b) Finance Assistant, to replace Craig Lewis.

32. Organisational Development: The biennial Best Companies staff survey was launched in November. This survey is a key tool to inform organisation development activity for the next two years. It measures staff engagement across eight factors: Leadership, My Manager, Wellbeing, My Company, My Team, Fair Deal, Giving Something Back, Personal Growth. It also provides staff with the opportunity to comment on what makes the Park Authority a great place to work for, and what would make it a better place. The survey is conducted externally, and all responses are anonymous. We expect to get results back by early January and will report these to board via the Resources Committee.

33. Equality: The Park Authority entered and won the Herad and S1Jobs Top Employer award in the “Best Diversity and Inclusion Dynamic in the Workplace” category. The judges key points from our entry leading to the win were:
“Cairngorms National Park Authority were chosen as the winner for their exceptional, organisation-wide leadership in embedding equality, diversity and inclusion. Through bold policies, lived-experience partnerships and measurable impact, it has created a thriving, diverse workforce and delivered innovative initiatives that make the Park - and the organisation itself - a truly inclusive “Park for All.”

Procurement

34. Training was provided for the wider staff group by Scotland Excel. Three full-day sessions were provided covering:

- a) Specification writing and development.
- b) Use of evaluation criteria for supplier selection and contract award.
- c) Contract and supplier management.

35. The Procurement Officer attended the Procurex conference in Glasgow. This is the main event of the year for suppliers and public sector professionals. The key topics for discussion were community wealth-building and sustainability.



Cairngorms
National Park Authority

Ùghdarras Pàirc Nàiseanta a'
Mhonaidh Ruaidh

Formal Board Paper 1

28 November 2025

Page **9** of **12**

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13 November 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. **Active Travel** – Undertook multiple in-person and video meetings, and follow-up email exchanges with Scottish Government ministers and senior officials to help secure design-stage funding for our Cairngorms 2030 Active Travel projects, in collaboration with our CEO and senior management team, finally securing £854,000 of funding for projects at Aviemore, Boat of Garten, Nethy Bridge and Newtonmore.
2. **Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI)** – Attended COHI on Arran, co-chaired by Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes and Public Finance Minister Ivan McKee, contributing to the main discussion on Community Wealth Building and the opportunities and potential challenges presented by upcoming legislation.
3. **The Environment and Forestry Directorate (EnFor) Chairs** – Attended EnFor in Edinburgh, discussing preliminary guidance on future budget settlements, the effectiveness of Scottish Government and Inter Agency Communications, and a range of issues affecting public bodies.
4. **Gillian Martin** – Meeting with Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy on delivery of the Park Authority and stakeholder projects to meet Scottish Government biodiversity targets, and the scope for further engagement on key areas of interest.
5. **Business Conference** – Attended annual conference of the Cairngorms Business Partnership, meeting with owners of small and medium-sized businesses across the Park, discussing a range of issues including the serious constraints posed by a shortage of affordable housing.



6. **Strathdon** – Attended Strathdon Community engagement day, combined with launch of Development Trust Action Plan. Meeting Trust members and local residents, discussing the Park Authority's responses to the multiple challenges facing the area and potential route-maps to resolving long-standing issues.
7. **Cultural Heritage** – Attended National Park-wide event at the Boat of Garten Hall, supported by the Park Authority, bringing together people involved in cultural heritage to collaborate, share ideas and discuss key priorities for the coming years.
8. **EnFor Talk** – Delivered inaugural Non-Departmental Public Bodies Chairs talk to 60 staff of the Environment and Forestry Directorate on leadership experiences, lessons learned, and approaches to public policy challenges.
9. **National Parks** – Attended National Parks Partnership Forum, agreeing responses to UK-wide challenges and discussing and approving the full activation of a National Park Partnership Foundation to source significant corporate funding to support the work of individual National Parks.
10. **King's Foundation** – Met King's Foundation Trustee to provide the latest update on National Park activities and preparations for work on the next stages of development of the Local Development Plan (LDP) and the NPPP.
11. **Media** – Provided comments for media on Ministerial approval for the Park Authority's recreational fires byelaw, the process of gaining widespread public support, and next steps on implementation, along with regular columns for local newspapers on community, farming and project-development issues.
12. **Business Chairs** – Attended meeting of the Chairs and CEOs of the Cairngorms Business Partnership, discussing strategic priorities for the year ahead.
13. **Business / Legislation** – Met individual representative of the Cairngorms Business Partnership, discussing the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill and the listings of National Park aims.
14. **Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)** – Met with the Chief Executive of HIE, discussing the range of Community Wealth Building initiatives around the National



Park, the implications of new legislation, and other opportunities for economic development.

15. **Nature Awards** – Attended Nature of Scotland awards, meeting representatives of the Park Authority's partner and stakeholder organisations.
16. **Hutton** – Met with the CEO and senior staff of the James Hutton Institute, discussing strategic relationships and the potential for expanded facilities to support the work of the Park Authority and partner organisations.
17. **Catchment Strategy** – Attended introductory meeting with the newly-appointed Project Officer supporting the work of the Dee Resilience Strategy Group, discussing stakeholder priorities and the urgency of delivering results for nature and communities.
18. **Big Picture** – First meeting with new CEO of the Scotland the Big Picture group, discussing public engagement initiatives and the timescales for development of the next NPPP.
19. **National Park Conveners** – Met regularly with the Convener of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Board to discuss issues of mutual interest.
20. **Park Authority Liaison** – Attended weekly liaison meetings with the Park Authority Deputy Convener, CEO and Deputy CEO.
21. 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.

Sandy Bremner,

13 November 2025

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