



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. **Peatland restoration** – Verified hectares delivery for 2024/25 is 2,181, over 600 hectares more than the target of 1,573. The current focus is on project design and tendering for projects in the 2025/26 delivery pipeline. Increased resource within the Peatland ACTION team is facilitating the development of multi-year plans. Funding from the Peatland ACTION grants is being made available specifically towards development of the future project pipeline by third parties. This will allow for a more strategic, longer-term view, build capacity within the private sector, and maximise efficiencies in the Park Authority staff resource.
2. **Climate Adaptation Fund** - This year's fund attracted over 60 expressions of interest and more than 30 full applications. An announcement on those that have received funding will be made in early July.
3. **Nature Restoration Funding** - The Park Authority has secured significant funding to support delivery of the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan and progress actions that tackle the biodiversity crisis. An announcement on the funding will be made in early July.
4. **Strategic Land Management Plans** - As an indication of the positive engagement from many landowners, the Cairngorms 2030 funding available to Deer Management Groups in the South of the Park was heavily oversubscribed with more than 30 different applications totalling £3.2 million. Expressions of interest (EoI) were assessed against the overall ambitions in the Cairngorms 2030 programme for Innovation, Transformation and Collaboration and the desire to



support land managers in tackling the twin crises. Land managers have been informed of the process, its outcomes and the next steps. This includes working with applicants to identify opportunities to develop Eol's into project plans and / or support land managers in delivering potential projects via alternative funding streams where more appropriate.

5. **Gamebird release report** – Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) have produced a report on Scottish gamebird releases which includes a specific analysis of releases in the National Park. National Gamebird Census (NGC) data from estates across Scotland were used to compare gamebird release densities. Information from the Cairngorms was derived from interviews with 10 out of a total of 22 identified shoots of different sizes. Establishing baseline data is an action in the National Park Partnership Plan. The information will form the basis of further study into biodiversity impacts of released gamebirds, regarding the specific conditions in Cairngorms National Park. The report will be published in July.

Planning and Place

6. Paths and long-distance routes:

- a) **Speyside Way** - The contractor began Gate Replacement work from Cromdale to Mains of Dalvey (Park boundary) at the end of April and has removed most of the outdated “rambler” style gates on this section. Replacement self-closing pedestrian gates (where a replacement gate was still required) now accommodate bikes and horses making this section much more user friendly. The Park Authority was approached by Insh Community Holdings with a proposal to upgrade a section that runs behind Insh towards Inveruglas. Our Clerk of Works has drawn up designs and associated costs for a tender this Autumn.
- b) **Deeside Way** - At the beginning of April, the Park Authority hosted the first project advisory group for taking forward the Deeside Way Extension. Focus initially is on developing the vision and objectives and a scoring system for considering route options before more detailed conversation can occur with landowners.

7. **Visitor infrastructure** – A planned preventative maintenance survey has been undertaken for the three Snow Roads Installations - Still, the Watchers and Connecting Contours. A five-year programme of works including repairs and



enhanced access will commence in late 2025. The Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme grant scheme ran during April / May with offers made to six projects. The scheme was brought forward compared to previous years to assist partners by giving a longer delivery period. A bid submitted to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund for funding towards a £250,000 project to improve Loch Morlich beach car park and sections of the Old Logging way with a response anticipated by early July.

8. **Ranger services** – A full team of rangers is now in place with the two-part time (weekend) rangers and the four trainees starting in mid-June. Patrols so far this year have typically found visitor numbers to be fairly busy but manageable although there have still been a small number of incidents including fires and anti-social behaviour. Some higher numbers of campers were seen during the fine weather during May but encouragingly most visitors did respond well to advice – notably on the very high fire risk at the time.
9. **Volunteering and health walks** – 24 new volunteer rangers were recruited this spring and finished training on 31 May so have been out on the ground helping welcome visitors and reporting on any issues. The Park authority hosted a successful annual gathering of the Health Walk leaders from across the Park in late May. A new health walk in Kincaig started up in June. With Beaver kits in a number of areas a programme of volunteer watches began in June giving staff volunteering opportunities that support the work by the beaver officers.
10. **Active and sustainable transport** – work continues under the four transport strands within the Cairngorms 2030 programme:
 - a) **Sustainable Transport** - Bus stop infrastructure audits are complete with walkability audits underway at a selection of these to identify priorities for improvements to meet the needs of residents. A bus infrastructure working group with HITRANS has been established and a Badenoch and Strathspey Transport Forum has been set up by the Highland Council with support from the Park Authority transport team. The Park Authority hosts the first meeting on 23 June. Investment has been made to enable cycles on buses in Deeside in partnership with NESTRANS and Aberdeenshire Council. Funding has also been confirmed towards the design phase for a Ballater mobility hub that will support both public transport and active travel.



- b) **Behaviour Change** – The first two bike buses are up and running successfully with Aviemore and Deshar Primary schools with positive feedback from parents and pupils. Grantown-on-Spey bike bus to start after the summer holidays. Further led rides for adults (“Joy rides”) running weekly from Aviemore and Boat of Garten with Grantown-on-Spey started in June. Also delivered one-to-one cycle confidence sessions and work with the Active Cairngorms E-bike (ACE) project (Cairngorms Trust and Mikes Bikes Aviemore) to help adults get cycling to work and local facilities. Support is also in place for training and capacity building in skills for cycle maintenance at eight primary schools in Badenoch and Strathspey. Funding has also been provided to support cycle skills schools at the four Aberdeenshire primary schools within the Park. 12 workplaces are being supported with access to bikes and skills training through our support to the ACE bikes project.
- c) **Cycle Friendly Cairngorms** – Supported bike hub at community run Glenmore Visitor Centre with tool station and e-bike charging. Elsewhere we’ve confirmed investment in secure cycle parking through a community led project working with visitor focussed businesses in Blair Atholl. Delivery of staff bikes to be used for varying activities including rangers using cargo bikes took place in May and these were used to help showcase transport activity as part of the National Heritage Lottery visit to Aviemore and Glenmore in June. A staff bike launch planned for end of June once operating procedures have been finalised.
- d) **Active Travel** – A formal offer of funding from Transport Scotland in relation to previously submitted bids for the next stage of design work is still awaited. Work has continued to issue an Invitation to Tender (ITT) initially for Aviemore and Boat of Garten but with options to extend the contract in future.

11. **Local Development Plan (LDP)** – Work continues on building the evidence base for the next LDP, with ongoing engagement on topic papers and staff attending public engagement sessions and local events. Consultation is currently underway on topic papers covering Natural Heritage, Economic Development, and Health and Safety, with the consultation on these papers ending on 11 July (see [Have Your Say Today - Cairngorms Local Development Plan - Commonplace](#)). The team is working towards formal submission of the Evidence Report for the next LDP towards the end of this year. Officers have also supported Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) to undertake consultation events on the Grantown-on-Spey



Community Action Plan. An updated Delivery Programme, which monitors progress in delivering the current LDP, was approved at the last Board meeting on 28 March 2025 and has since been published online and submitted to Scottish Ministers.

12. **Planning casework** – The Planning Committee has met twice since the last formal Board meeting on 28 March 2025. The Committee has determined planning applications for a telecoms mast at Gael Charn in Glen Avon, extensions and alterations at the Abernethy Outdoor Centre, and restoration of the March Burn in Glen Clova. The Committee has also determined that planning permission should be granted for a new warehouse at the House of Bruar, although this application has now been referred to Scottish Ministers who may decide to call it in for determination themselves due to an outstanding objection from Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) on flood risk grounds. The Park Authority has recently called-in planning applications for a non-motorised user route / path between Aviemore and Carrbridge, reconfiguration of house plots at the ongoing Dalfaber development in Aviemore, and a number of forestry tracks at the Muckrach Estate. These applications will be reported to the Planning Committee for determination in due course.

Communications and Engagement

13. **Community and stakeholder engagement** – A review of the first year of Cairngorms 2030 programme engagement activity has revealed that over 10,000 people will have seen us at events across 2024 and over 1,000 directly interacted with staff across 13 different projects. Included in the tally are three bespoke community roadshows, two Highland games, two community festivals and one agricultural show. After a period of recruitment for two new Engagement Coordinators (both in post by July 2025), the team are now finalising plans for engagement over the second half of the year.
14. Over 30 representatives from community councils and development trusts from across the Cairngorms gathered at the Victoria Halls in Ballater for a packed day of discussions in April. Topics included volunteering, succession planning and community fundraising. We plan to host these events at least annually, with the agenda and location set by the community groups themselves.



15. **Visitor and resident surveys** – Fieldwork for our fifth National Park visitor survey concluded on 30 April, with a total of 1,348 face-to-face interviews conducted and a further 1,008 online responses received. Our independent research partners MEL Research are currently pulling together a headline report, which is likely to be published in early / mid-July. As MEL also delivered the first resident and worker survey for the National Park, we have been able to ask several core questions across both pieces of work, allowing for a more detailed comparison between audiences. This will form part of MEL's main report.
16. **Corporate communications** – We have been the subject of prominent media coverage across television, radio and print outlets over the past three months. One of the main stories was about the Cairngorms 2030 Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre inspiring a second center in Edinburgh, opened by Alzheimer Scotland at the start of this month. The story reached millions of viewers, airing on ITV News, STV News and BBC Beechgrove Garden. BBC Radio Scotland's Out of Doors programme also featured the story. The show carried separate pieces on our capercaillie work and the artists in residence at Glen Tanar as part of Cairngorms 2030.
17. STV's current affairs programme, Scotland Tonight aired a long form feature on green jobs on 26 June. With a sole focus on the Cairngorms, the piece focused on the beaver project, our peatland work and the impact on local contractors, and green prescriptions, including an interview with a participant. Meanwhile, our pioneering work on the narrow-headed ants project was covered by the Sunday Post and the Mail on Sunday.
18. **Website and social media** – After over a year of complex development work, the new Cairngorms National Park website was launched on 11 June 2025. The site includes a number of new [communities](#), [wildlife](#) and [landscape](#) pages – capitalising on high Google search traffic for these topics – as well as over [50 project pages](#) covering the work of the Park Authority and partners.
19. A new site-wide alerts system – linked directly to our social media posts – allows us to provide critical updates on emerging issues such as wildfires and extreme weather, path closures etc, and to automatically serve these messages on every webpage where they are relevant. An Ordnance Survey-powered mapping tool



includes details on key communities, events, paths and points of interest, whilst our new content finder allows visitors to filter and search for content that would previously have been buried deep in the site structure. This includes a new Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven document summary feature, which means even previously inaccessible Portable Document Format (PDF) can be summarised and read eg by screen reader users.

20. In March we successfully merged our legacy Cairngorms Nature Facebook page with our existing National Park Facebook page, bringing our total audience to 82,000 across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and Bluesky (up from 66,000 pre-merger). Our net growth over the period – over and above account merging – was 5,530.
21. Between 22 November and 11 March, we received over 4.2 million impressions (up 78% on the previous year), 197,048 engagements (up 181%), 918,542 video views (up 166.9%). It is important to note that these results have been a combination of paid for and organic content, albeit the former was significantly impacted by a Scottish Government budget freeze post-October 2024.
22. **Branding and publications** – The summer edition of *Cairn* magazine is due to hit doorsteps from 21 July. The lead feature focuses on affordable housing, reflecting on the results of the resident and worker survey. Our transport work is another key theme, complemented by an interview with Donald Hall of Community ConnXions. The magazine is also packed with the latest community, nature and Cairngorms 2030 updates.
23. Work is underway on major interpretation projects, with the team working closely with the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust on new signage for the Glenmore Visitor Centre, as well as Glenlivet Estate on the new Sky Hide interpretation as part of the wider Dark Skies initiative.
24. Next week we welcome our new Content Creation Intern, who will be supporting the Communications Coordinator (Publications and Interpretation) over the summer.



Organisational Development

25. **Staffing update** – Since March, the following staff changes took place:
26. **Staff leaving the organisation:**
- a) Danie Ralph, Finance Manager, retired after nearly 12 years' service with the organisation.
 - b) Jo Rodgers left her role of C2030 Community Engagement Coordinator to move to another organisation.
27. **Staff joining the organisation:**
- a) Scott Shanks joined as Ecological Advice Officer (planning). This was a vacant post due to previous staff resignation.
 - b) Annabel Everard joined as Peatland Science and Monitoring Officer. This is a new post.
 - c) Katy Turton joined as C2030 Community Engagement Coordinator, replacing Jo Rodgers.
 - d) We appointed two Peatland Officers to support the increasing work within the Peatland Team, they are Alyson Price and Liberty Firby-Fisk
 - e) Katherine Malin-August joined us as Financial Accountant, to replace Danie Ralph.
28. **Ranger Service** - There has been a fair amount of movement within the Seasonal Ranger team, with a total of almost 200 applications for the posts, but the full team is now in post, as follows:
- a) Part Time, based in Badenoch and Strathspey: Ben Murphy and Josh Sloan.
 - b) Full Time, based in Badenoch and Strathspey: Caitlin Fox, Cam Fox-Clarke, Craig Fraser, Fiona Mansfield and Jade Lennox.
 - c) Full time based in Deeside: Carol-Ann Glass, Jayne Brown and Sarah Stevens.
 - d) Full time based in Angus Glens: Milly Revill-Hayward and Chloe Harkness.
29. **Staff appointments:**
- a) Emily Alsford (Seasonal Ranger) was promoted to Countryside Ranger, replacing Pete Short (who was seconded to the Beaver Project as Beaver Project Assistant).



30. Roles appointed for future start dates:

- a) Lawrence Murphy will be joining us in July, as C2030 Community Engagement Coordinator, replacing Fi Thomson.

31. Live recruitment:

- a) We are currently recruiting a River Dee Catchment Project Officer. This is a new post with several partners and funders.

32. Youth employment:

- a) **Internships** - Beth Reid has been appointed to the three-month internship as Content Creation Intern. We are also in the process of appointing a Disability Access Intern.
- b) **Trainee Rangers** - with more than 150 applicants for four posts, we appointed Adam Lovell and Jack Capener to the Deeside team; and Georgia Soan and Isla Paton to the Badenoch and Strathspey team.

33. Equalities:

- a) We supported Black Scottish Adventures (BSA) with a walk from Feshiebridge via Ballintean to Uath Lochans. This involved approximately 50 walkers from the BSA network.
- b) We had a staff presence at Highland Pride in Inverness, with staff participation in the parade, and also manning a stand around C2030 Community Engagement. Approximately 130 people engaged with the stand and there was a very positive response to the Park Authority's presence at this event.
- c) We will be hosting a group of young people from the Black Professionals UK network to the Park Authority Office, to meet with various officers and hear about the career journeys.

34. Organisational Development – We have launched an action plan to enhance engagement with staff at Policy Officer and Middle Manager levels. Actions have been developed around the four principles, and include in-house, bite-sized training for all line managers on key policies; clarification on expectations of roles at the different grades via generic role descriptions for these grades; and refreshing the terms of reference for the Senior Management Team, Operational Management Group and Executive Team.



Procurement

35. The Transport and Procurement teams have been working closely with Harper McLeod to develop the procurement offering for design of the Cairngorms 2030 Active Travel projects; the work will be finalised within the next few days. We have developed a contract that provides suitable protection for the interests of the Park Authority, and that we believe will be an attractive offering to the market, providing opportunity for both large firms and smaller local designers.
36. We continue to develop our internal systems to streamline procurement processes and provide information for future reporting. The latest developments have been a database of procurement projects – those in progress and those in planning – and a register of contracts.

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13 June 2025

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Title: Convener's update

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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. **First Minister** – Discussion with the First Minister, covering how the Park Authority's projects and leveraged funding for landscape-scale initiatives are helping mitigate crises for people and nature.
2. **Cabinet Secretary** – Met with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands Mairi Gougeon, along with the Convener and Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) of Scotland's two National Parks, discussing implications and opportunities presented by the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill, including flexibility around land designations and the significance for the Park Authority of powers regarding fixed penalty notices in relation to fire byelaw proposals.
3. **Rural Affairs Committee** – Took part in community discussion session with members of the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, examining aspects of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill and their implications for the National Park. Participated in a subsequent day of evidence-gathering by Committee members on estate visits to Seafield, Dorback and Abernethy.
4. **National Farmers' Union Scotland (NFUS)** – Hosted meeting with the new president of NFUS Andrew Connon and policy director Jonathan Hall after inviting the president to visit the National Park to discuss issues of mutual interest and opportunities for further collaboration to support crofters and farmers. Topics included climate adaptation, food production, rural communities and bills currently going through parliament.
5. **Scottish Government** – Met with the Director of Environment and Forestry to review the past year's work of the National Park, next year's priorities and related issues.



6. **Scottish Land Commission** – Had separate discussions with the Commission Chairman and Chief Executive, looking at opportunities to promote the development of affordable housing in rural areas, and upcoming consultations on land reform.
7. **NatureScot** - Met with the Chair of NatureScot, discussing joint projects and the potential for further incentives for farmers, crofters and other land managers to enhance biodiversity and support community climate resilience.
8. **NatureScot CEO** – Introductory meeting with the Acting Chief Executive of NatureScot on current challenges and opportunities.
9. **King's Foundation** – Meeting with representative of the King's Foundation, discussing outcomes from the major landowner / land manager event hosted last year jointly by the Foundation and the Cairngorms National Park Authority, and the prospects for building on discussions about land management and increasing the supply of affordable housing.
10. **UK Chairs / CEO Forum** – Attended the National Park Chairs and CEOs Forum, hosted by the Peak District National Park, discussing collaborations to achieve mutual aims including action on wildfires, support for sustainable farming, use of new AI applications to support land policy strategies, ensuring we develop Parks for all, initiatives to deal with visitor pressures, developments to support nature restoration and adaptation, and work to achieve common messages to leverage external funding.
11. **Deer Larders** – Hosted visit with the First Minister to the Park Authority / National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) - supported deer larder project at Knockbarry Farm, near Moulin, reviewing progress and future potential with the owners and staff.
12. **Save the Spring** – Addressed the stakeholders' launch of the Save the Spring programme, a 20-year initiative to restore biodiversity and mitigate flooding and drought impacts in the Dee catchment, outlining the Park Authority's role in the initiative.



13. **Major estates** – Met individually with the owners and land managers of several major estates, discussing approaches to overcoming challenges and meeting the aims of the National Park Partnership Plan.
14. **National Parks Partnerships** – Attended online Extraordinary General Meeting of National Parks Partnerships to review and update banking arrangements.
15. **The Park Authority Liaison** – Attended weekly liaison meetings with the Park Authority Deputy Convener, CEO and Deputy CEO.
16. **National Park Conveners** – Met regularly with the Convener of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Board to discuss issues of mutual interest.
17. 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.

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06 June 2025

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