



For Information

**Title: Community Led Local Development and Partnership
Work with The Cairngorms Trust**

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to update the Park Authority Board on the progress made by the Cairngorms Trust in delivering funding to projects across the Cairngorms. In 2026, it will be the 10-year anniversary of the Cairngorms Trust becoming a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), marking a significant milestone in its development.

This paper highlights the impact and outcomes of the Trust's funded initiatives to date and seeks views from the Park Authority board on the charity's potential future operations.

The paper also presents progress in the evolution of new approaches to Community Led Local Development (CLLD) funding, following the loss of European Union (EU) LEADER funding as a consequence of the UK's exit from the EU.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Note progress to date in delivery of National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) and Corporate Plan objectives in respect of CLLD.
- b) Discuss value of CLLD actions and development of Cairngorms Trust to date.
- c) Discuss and provide strategic advice on forward plans in support of future CLLD programmes of work and the interaction of the Park Authority and Cairngorms Trust.

Strategic context

1. The Cairngorms NPPP for 2022 to 2027 includes within priority "B7: Community Led Planning and Development" a need to support communities through local



community funding which was previously delivered through the EU-funded LEADER programme. We want to ensure that the aspirations of communities are met, community resilience is enhanced and that a community development fund appropriate for the National Park is developed and in place during this plan period. The associated NPPP target is for a new funding scheme to be put in place to deliver funding for communities, of a scale at least equivalent to the old LEADER programme. The Cairngorms Trust is explicitly recognised as a delivery partner in this element of the NPPP.

2. More widely, the Cairngorms Trust has an impact in the delivery of a range of NPPP priorities, in particular:
 - a) A1 Net Zero – contributing to the Cairngorms National Park reaching net zero by offering grant programmes and supporting projects which focus on climate action and / or which have positive climate impacts. The Active Cairngorms E-bike (ACE) provides four-to-six-week loans of e-bikes which as part of the project encourage use of the e-bikes for regular journeys for shopping, commuting and school drop offs.
 - b) A10 Ecological Networks – engaging and funding community led activities delivering ecological network targets. The Networks for Nature fund have delivered on this priority. Funded projects have included community wildflower planting, tree planting, and habitat restoration.
 - c) B1 Working age population – with specific regard to the Cairngorms Trust providing the charitable structure through which the Cairngorms Youth Local Action Group, one of the first such groups in Scotland, has been able to secure funding and disperse grant awards.
 - d) B3 Real Living Wage – with the payment of the real living wage a key assessment criteria in all Cairngorms Trust funding decisions.
 - e) B5 Community assets and land – as a key funding source giving communities more power to own or manage assets (including land); The Cairngorms Trust has funded a couple of projects to own assets. Braemar Community Ltd bought Tomrichton Woods with support from the Cairngorms Trust and Glenmore and Aviemore Community Trust have had support for both the Ice Rink in Aviemore and the purchase of the Glenmore Community Cafe.
 - f) B6 New approaches to citizen participation – as a registered charity led by community-based volunteer trustees and in supporting community capacity of community led projects; Both our youth LAG and Park for All lived experience



panel have developed and co-designed and delivered funding to specific groups within the Cairngorms.

- g) C10 Cultural heritage – supporting delivery and financing community led cultural heritage projects. The Cairngorms Trust has supported Castle Roy in its redevelopment of the Castle Grounds over a number of years; we have also been supporting St Margarets in Braemar. Other projects that we have supported have been musical cultural projects through Feis Spe, shinty projects through the Camanadh Association and Art projects in a variety of communities throughout the Cairngorms.

- 3. The work of the Cairngorms Trust therefore has a wealth of touch points with delivery of the NPPP.

Strategic policy consideration

- 4. The Cairngorms Trust (full registered title, Cairngorms Local Action Group Trust with registered charity number SC046495) will reach its tenth anniversary of operations in 2026.
- 5. The Trust remains at the centre of delivery of Scottish Government's domestic funding supporting CLLD and replacing EU LEADER funds. The Trust acts as one of 20 Local Action Groups (LAGs) covering island and rural Scotland: establishing plans through which to support local communities meet their development aspirations and taking responsibility for disbursement of funding made available by Scottish Government. The Park Authority supports the Trust in this work through hosting and managing staff; and by providing HR, administration, governance and accounting support.
- 6. The last EU funded LEADER programme provided £2.27 million in grant support to the Cairngorms over a six-year programme period with total project value of £3.88 million. To date, domestic support for CLLD has been through annual funding allocations to LAGs, rather than a multi-year programme. This previous LEADER programme funding level equates to annual funding of between £300,000 and £400,000. Over the current NPPP period, funding allocations secured have totalled £405,000 in 2023/24, £461,000 in 2024/25, and £242,000 to date in 2025/26 with a potential second allocation of funding to be awarded: a total within the current



NPPP period to date of £1.108 million, and broadly commensurate in total with the NPPP objective.

7. Annualised funding allocations have impacted on the nature of CLLD activity, switching focus necessarily by the Cairngorms Trust to supporting in year, short-term priorities rather than working with community led organisations over time to secure long-term, step change aspirations.
8. The Trust has also been active in seeking other funding streams, both in bidding to other funding sources and seeking voluntary donations to support the charity's work.
9. Approaches by the Trust to secure voluntary donations have been particularly challenging in a crowded charity landscape. Work in this area has also been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and in the recovery from that. To date, evidence shows that the cost to benefit of working to secure a flow of voluntary charitable donations does not support the continued investment of significant time and resource into this area of activity. Furthermore, as the Cairngorms Trust is supported by a part time (0.4 full time equivalent) Trust Manager, the prioritisation and deployment of staff capacity has to be carefully considered to ensure the Trust runs efficiently. Evidence to date suggests that a much greater staff capacity would be required if significant inroad to voluntary giving is to be made.
10. The Trust has also formed effective partnerships with the Park Authority in delivery of community focused investment programmes. The Trust partnered with the Park Authority in two rounds of Green Recovery Funding supporting communities and businesses in their recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Trust has more recently partnered with the Park Authority's conservation team in running community led local development initiatives supporting development and evolution of nature networks.
11. The existence of a vibrant charity operating to support delivery of the NPPP priorities also affords a mechanism to accept community benefit funding from projects within the Cairngorms and disburse those finances to community led development priorities. This potential has not been significantly deployed as yet,



with the Trust to date identified as a recipient of community funding for one, trial private finance development.

12. The operation of the Cairngorms Trust as an independent charity delivering CLLD has a high profile in Scottish Government. It has been recognised as a good practice governance model for Local Action Group (LAG) and it also recognised for its innovative approaches in governance and CLLD approaches, for example in establishing a Youth LAG within its charity structure.
13. The Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Programme will be trialling new approaches to citizen participation and participative democracy in grant funding programmes. There is a clear connection between the work and position of the Cairngorms Trust with this work, and potential implications for the role of the Trust depending on the outcomes of the current work considering options in this policy area. The Trust will be fully engaged with the evolution of thinking on potential new approaches to citizen participation and able to inform this work from the experience of the Trust in CLLD over the last decade.
14. We have been able to capture a significant element of CLLD finance managed by the Trust as a C2030 delivery partner over the period since January 2024 as an aspect of match funding supporting the overall C2030 programme budget.

Strategic risk management

15. The Cairngorms Trust fulfils two aspects of the Park Authority's risk mitigation strategy around the strategic risk one: Public sector finances constrain capacity to allocate sufficient resources to deliver corporate plan. The mitigations are:
 - a) Focus resource on diversification of income streams to alternative, non-public income generation.
 - b) Continuing to support "delivery bodies" such as Cairngorms Nature, Cairngorms Trust in securing inward investment.
16. As covered in other sections of this paper, the Cairngorms Trust has achieved considerable success in securing targeted inward investments. There has been little progress made to date in supporting a diversification of income streams toward alternative, non-public income sources.



17. There are no new or escalating risks identified in consideration of matters covered by this paper.

Implications

18. The financial implications to the Park Authority of supporting the Cairngorms Trust as a charitable mechanism and LAG which able to secure inward investment to the Cairngorms of significant additional government funding is relatively minimal. The Park Authority supports the employment costs of the Cairngorms Trust Manager, a 0.2 full-time equivalent role. The Park Authority has also provided some grant support to cover administrative costs in order that the Trust is able to commit to investing 100% of voluntary donations and sponsorships received into community led projects.
19. The Trust has developed a revised brand position over the last few years to align with the development of the Cairngorms National Park brands.



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20. The Trust has worked since incorporation as a charity to establish a clear, separate identity from the Park Authority, while seeking to recognise its links with the Park Authority and role as a delivery partner of the NPPP. There is now a more evolved sense of public understanding of the Trust as an independent entity, and not a part of the Park Authority. There does remain a degree of blurring of public perception of actions and investment made by each organisation, which to some extent is understandable given the extent of joint working and collaboration between the Trust and the Park Authority.

Success measures

21. The continued attraction of significant Scottish Government CLLD funding into the Cairngorms remains the key success measure for the Cairngorms Trust's contribution to the NPPP.



22. Scottish Government has commissioned a significant research programme on the place of CLLD, Scottish Rural Network, and Scottish Rural Action. This is being conducted over the course of 2025/26 and is expected to inform government policy direction on the priority of CLLD, levels of investment and approach to investment in the next Parliamentary period.
23. The Trust is currently leading an initiative along with others in the sector to develop a new CLLD Network, to more effectively drawn together the 20 LAGs in sharing knowledge and establishing a sectoral voice able to comment on relevant issues.

Next Steps

24. A memorandum of understanding has established the working relationship between the Park Authority and the Trust since its establishment as a charity. This memorandum of understanding now needs to be refreshed to reflect the current operating environment and position of each organisation. The board discussions on this paper will help inform the development of this revised memorandum of understanding.

Supporting information

25. The Cairngorms Trust's mission is to encourage sustainable and community-led development throughout the Cairngorms National Park. Its vision is to be recognised as a valued organisation advocating rural development and supporting local priorities and solutions.
26. The Trust's values are to be responsive to community needs, knowledgeable about our communities and in providing support, ambitious for the Cairngorms Trust and for our communities, innovative in shaping our future.
27. **Funding to Communities** - Over the past 10 years in addition to LEADER funding which concluded in 2020, the Cairngorms Trust has distributed a total of £1,526,635 to community projects across the Cairngorms. This includes:
 - a) £1,156,635 through Community Grants and other core funding streams.
 - b) An additional £370,000 from the Park Authority for the Green Recovery Fund.



- c) These funds have supported a wide range of initiatives, including CLLD funds, delivered in partnership with the Scottish Government, with the Park Authority acting as the accountable body.
28. Looking ahead, there is an indicative figure of £284,000 available for community projects in 2025/26.
29. **Wider Cairngorms Trust Funding** - Since 2019, the Trust has distributed funding to a variety of projects with a strong focus on nature and community outcomes:
- a) £153,200 awarded to 31 projects within the Nature space.
 - b) For 2025, £50,000 is available, with project scoring being guided by the Park Authority Nature Team to align with the NPPP.
 - c) £17,000 awarded to two community-led path maintenance projects, with an additional £8,000 anticipated this year.
30. **Youth-Led Funding** - The Youth LAG has been a standout success:
- a) £92,717 awarded to 99 projects across five rounds of youth-led funding.
 - b) Round six is now open, with an anticipated £25,000, which will bring the total to over £100,000 and 100 projects.
 - c) This milestone is being actively featured in publicity and media campaigns.
31. **Inclusive Funding Initiatives** - The Trust has also worked with lived experience groups to co-design and deliver inclusive funding. The Park for All Fund, aimed at supporting Black Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, has awarded £7,292 to five projects, with one additional project being transferred to the CLLD fund.
32. **Active Travel: Active Cairngorms E-bike (ACE) Bike Project** - The Active Cairngorms E-bike (ACE Bike) project, managed day to day by Aviemore Bikes, continues to be a success. It has significantly informed parts of the development of the Cairngorms 2030 transport project and remains a key example of community-led active travel innovation, working in partnership with local business. The Cairngorms 2030 project has supported the ACE project in 2025/26 with two grants totalling £22,500 to develop work with businesses using cargo e-bikes and bikes during the working day and to encourage staff to commute to workplaces



and with the second for the expansion and continued running of the project in 2025/26.

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