



For discussion

Title: Cairngorms 2030 programme update: 2024 and quarter one 2025 (January – March)

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Purpose

1. This paper presents the status of programme and risk management, based on information in project reports for the first year of the delivery phase (2024) and the period from January to March 2025, and updated where appropriate to reflect current position as at the time of writing together with the planned work to end June 2025.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- a) Note progress to date and future plans for Cairngorms 2030 delivery.
- b) Note specific points of Cairngorms 2030 delivery risk.
- c) Highlight any issues arising that members may feel need specific consideration by staff from a strategic and board perspective.







Strategic context

2. Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) will inspire people and communities in the National Park to act in tackling the nature and climate crisis. Bringing together 20 long-term projects on transforming landscapes, empowering communities, rethinking how we travel and championing wellbeing.
3. The Park Authority was awarded £12.5 million by The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to develop and deliver C2030 and become the UK's first net zero national park. The five-year delivery phase commenced in January 2024.

Strategic risk management

4. A standardised performance dashboard for major programmes has been agreed with the board's Performance Committee. We have been reporting on this basis each quarter since commencement of the delivery phase to the Committee. The performance dashboard at Programme level as at the end of quarter one (Q1) 2025 is presented here (see Annex 1 for projects).



Performance Measure	Red Amber Green (RAG) status		Issue/mitigation
Programme risk profile	Amber		Risk profile remains static for another quarter as we await Transport Scotland active travel match funding award letter and resolve Active Communities procurement delays. Confirmation now expected June / July 2025.
Future funding profile	Amber		Risk profile remains static for another quarter as we await Transport Scotland active travel match funding award letter. Confirmation now expected June/July 2025.
Finance: impact on Park Authority budget management	Green		No significant impact current or projected identified. The potential financial implications for C2030 programme delivery are a key element of 2025/26 budget plans as board and management consider deployment of financial allocations for the next financial year. Overall budget management impacts remain within the total agreed budget and total park authority programme contributions.
Procurement	Green		While this aspect remains green overall, covering a large volume of work and value of procurement, there are some procurement challenges with complexity of the Active Communities tender. But legal advice has been sought, and a revised tender will be published mid-June. The resulting 30-day delay is expected not to significantly impact delivery, while further delay could result in challenges in fitting work required within time available.
Staffing	Amber		Two engagement team resignations over the last three months, which will impact programme engagement delivery plans. Recruitment completed for both posts, commencing at the end of May and July. Vacancies have therefore been short lived. Risk trend is upward pending staff induction and ensuring work schedules are adequately picked up.
Delivery of Transport	Amber		Transport Scotland active travel match funding award letter has not been received as expected.



Scotland funded projects			This is not a critical path given the required extension of the procurement process. Active Communities project risk profile remains at amber until July 2025.
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2024 Programme delivery highlights

5. Programme:
 - a) Cairngorms 2030 has successfully completed the first year of its five-year delivery phase. Please see Annex 2 for the annual review leaflet submitted to NLHF.
 - b) The full complement of 21 project delivery staff is now employed across the programme. There are three additional intern posts (three months each) awaiting to be recruited when Transport funding is confirmed and design projects are fully underway.
 - c) 24 Invitations to Tender (ITT) were issued and awarded over the year.
6. Key risks:
 - a) The risk profile has remained at amber during 2024.
 - b) The main programme delivery risk during 2024 and extending into 2025 is the Active Communities project. We await Transport Scotland's active travel match funding award letter, which is now expected June / July 2025.
 - c) Further delay in receiving the funding award letter will add increased pressure to the procurement timeline and may raise the delivery risk profile for the project and the programme to Red, Amber, Green (RAG) status Red in Q2 2025 reporting. Mitigation will include a formal review of deliverables and negotiation with NLHF and Transport Scotland on what design and construction is realistically achievable by end December 2028.
 - d) NLHF are fully briefed regularly on the programme risk position and our management action. To date, NLHF are content with progress and risk management action underway.
 - e) The risks around transport projects have now been escalated into the Park Authority strategic risk register to enhance profile of this within the Park Authority's overall strategic risk management.
7. Transforming landscapes:
 - a) During 2024 we delivered 517 hectares (ha) of new native woodland planted at Atholl.



- b) More than 2,000 ha of peatland underwent restoration in 2024.
- c) Two new community deer larders have been delivered and have started to distribute venison to communities.
- d) £1.5 million plus Nature recovery grant scheme started seeking expressions of interest from Deer Management Group (DMG) partners engaged in the development phase to restore nature and having community benefits.
- e) Six farms participating in regenerative farming project – looking to reduce chemical inputs, improve habitats for wildlife and reduce their carbon footprints.
- f) River restoration projects on Dee and Spey going through planning and / or final design stage.
- g) 'Community Benefits from Nature Officer' recruited by Scottish Land Commission. The role will build understanding and support for best practice in embedding community benefits from values-led natural capital investment and responsible land use change across the Cairngorms Park, and specifically through one-to-one support and advice to identified projects.
- h) 150 people took part in the 'Best views of the Cairngorms survey'.
- i) Climate Resilient Catchments – Dalgety floodplain project was cancelled due to the discovery of an intermediate pressure gas pipeline crossing the floodplain at a shallow depth (pipeline was exposed during recent floods), making this project unviable. The project will be replaced by a new collaboration between the Park Authority and the Ballater Flood Issues Group (FIG). The project will support FIG in improving the flood resilience of Ballater. FIG have commissioned an options and modelling study and Cairngorms 2030 will provide funds and project staff time to support FIG to:
 - i. engage landowners and the community on the study and preferred options.
 - ii. contract the detailed design of some options.
 - iii. obtain permissions and consents to carry out the design.
 - iv. contract the ground works of the design.

8. Empowerment:

- a) Over 10,000 people will have seen C2030 staff at events across the Park in 2024.
- b) At least 1,200 people engaged with personally at events.
- c) 835 in-depth, conversations with local community members (just counting attendance, as individual conversations with project leads would be multiplied



many times – eg 11 projects represented at the Kingussie roadshow event and 100 attendees counted).

- d) Significant progress with the codesign method for the Creatives Arts and Culture project short-term working group, which will be presented for acceptance to the creative community in Q1 2025.
- e) Participatory democracy consultancy tender awarded and now underway.
- f) The Park Authority designed its refreshed community grants scheme, which was launched on 10 February 2025. The simplified expression of interest process has covered all Park Authority and Cairngorms 2030 available grants.

9. Transport:

- a) The following Stages three to four, Detailed Design projects, which have previously been submitted to Places for Everyone, were passed to Transport Scotland Active Travel Infrastructure Fund (ATIF) Tier two directly, with no requirement for a new application. Funding for these projects is still subject to submission of the final award notification.
 - i. CNP-PFE-4369 - ATI - Boat of Garten
 - ii. CNP-PFE-4397 - ATI - Aviemore Arterial Routes North
 - iii. CNP-PFE-4383 - ATI - Carrbridge
 - iv. CNP-PFE-4384 - ATI - Newtonmore
 - v. CNP-PFE-4387 - ATI - Nethy Bridge
- b) Stages three to four Unsuccessful: The Stages three to four, Detailed Design projects for Dulnain Bridge would not have been successful through Places for Everyone. Feedback did not recommend applying to ATIF for funding.
- c) The Park Authority will progress the active travel design procurement of Aviemore, Boat of Garten, Newtonmore and Nethy Bridge.
- d) Due to recent tender submission costs being more than project budget Aviemore and Boat of Garten contracts will be offered together as a package and as separate contracts.
- e) The Park Authority will delay active travel design procurement in Carrbridge to allow additional community engagement and support to be agreed before the project proceeds.
- f) Due to the lack of funding support, the Park Authority will not progress the design procurement for Dulnain Bridge. However, the existing Transport Scotland funded Dulnain Bridge to Grantown on active travel link will be progressed subject to funding application.



- g) Built cycling confidence with school pupils through bike maintenance sessions.

10. Health and Wellbeing:

- a) 39 Green Health referrals in 2024, with 25 participants active and 13 who have completed the programme.
- b) Over 1,000 people benefitted from attending the Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre in 2024.

11. Finance:

- a) Total expenditure: £6.06 million.
- b) Total NLHF claims made / received: £1.672 million - full 100% claimed was approved and paid out.
- c) Partner income received: £875,000.
- d) Peatland cost through project (figure included in above expenditure): £3.05 million and claimed £843,000 from NLHF.
- e) Community Managed Community Grant Scheme cost through project (figure included in above expenditure): £522,000 and claimed £144,000 from NLHF.
- f) Woodland Expansion cost through project (figure included in above expenditure): £965,000 and claimed £266,000 from NLHF.
- g) The Park Authority payroll costs: £978,600.
- h) The Park Authority non-cash in-kind contribution: £542,000.

Q1 2025 Progress report

Stakeholder engagement

12. Communications:

- a) Total engagements - that is people who have liked, shared, watched and interacted with materials - of all C2030 activity across social media: 63,271 - an increase of 352% on last quarter. This large rise is due to the deer larder film which received 52,500 engagements alone.
- b) There were 24 pieces of press coverage from 01 January to 31 March that mention Cairngorms 2030 and / or the NLHF.
- c) There were two press releases during the period:
 - i. Transforming Transport grant funding announcement, [read here](#).
 - ii. Announcement of the innovative deer larder project, [read here](#)
- d) The spring issue of Cairn hit doorsteps on 07 April with the deer larder story as the main feature as well as three other articles covering Fèis Spè, green



health walks and the Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre. You can read the magazine [here](#).

- e) Cairngorms Voices (online blog / photo stories) interview with James Ade, Learning Coordinator (Climate and Community Arts) on working with young people through Cairngorms 2030. Read [here](#).
- f) Other press activity:
 - i. Visit to Knockbarry farm with First Minister John Swinney MSP. A highlight of this was the release of the first deer larder film, telling the story of Knockbarry farm and the delivery of venison to food banks. This video has received over 100,000 views thus far.
 - ii. Social media activity in this period continued with a total of 20 posts including announcements and micro-updates that kept Cairngorms 2030 present on our social media channels.
- g) A summary of the social media activity is given in the following reports:
 - i. [February communications update](#)
 - ii. [March communications update](#)

13. Volunteer activity:

- a) Eight individual Volunteer Rangers have been directly involved with C2030 projects, for a total of 42 Volunteer hours. This was through work at the Outdoor Dementia resource centre, and Aspen planting at C2030 farms. This is greater than 2024 Q4 by 3.5 hours.
- b) There have been no C2030 funded or linked public sessions in this time frame. This is no change from 2024 Q4.
- c) 87 public volunteers have created a volunteering account with the Park Authority in this timeframe.
- d) Our model for working with the Changing Travel Behaviours project is established following successful appointment of the contractor. For both 'bike bus' volunteers and 'social ride' volunteers the contractor will establish the volunteer-involving activities with the Park Authority oversight, rather than the Park Authority delivering volunteer support directly. These volunteers are likely to be fully involved in Q3.
- e) Volunteer Rangers have supported the Cairngorms Future Farming project over the course of two days with two different farms.
- f) Discussions regarding collaboration for volunteer involvement between Butterfly Conservation Scotland and C2030 continue, with a provisional site



- (and associated land owning / managing partner) identified as part of the Peatland Restoration project.
- g) Working with the Woodland Expansion project to further develop proposals for three strands of volunteering with a focus on inclusion and innovation, with a clear proposed approach expected to be established in the following quarter.
 - h) Feedback from volunteering leads across the 15 National Parks has been sought regarding 'what works' when developing 'family volunteering' opportunities, with the potential to pilot this approach identified with the Climate Learning and Education project (discussions at a very early stage).
 - i) Identifying opportunities for volunteer skills development in plant monitoring and surveying through the Nature Recovery project.
 - j) Volunteer Ranger recruitment has been ongoing during this quarter, with 51 completed applications received. The Volunteer Cairngorms team have offered to meet all applicants and expect to offer 24 places for this intake bringing the total number of Volunteer Rangers recruited to date to 115.
 - k) Conversations with all project leads have now been completed or are scheduled in the first three weeks of Q2, completing all initial volunteering inception conversations across the programme.

Supporting information; theme lead highlights

14. Transforming landscapes:

- a) Peatland restoration has delivered above its target area (2100ha). Peatland team has recruited two new project officers, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) officer and technical assistant, increasing delivery capacity and improving team resilience.
- b) Two Deer larders are operational and have already delivered 1,000 kg of venison to local communities and schools.
- c) Woodland expansion has developed four new projects delivering more woodland, rare woodland types and community involvement.
- d) Nature Recovery Expression of Interest (EOI) process attracted 32 applications which have been distilled to three or four potential projects for further development.
- e) All six farms are now committed to at least one new regenerative farming technique and more are in planning. Knowledge exchange and carbon monitoring work has been planned for later in year.



- f) Catchment project is working to develop a co-creative approach to flood management with local community in Ballater, this is an alternative to the defunct Brechin work. Upper Deeside project may be delayed until 2026 due to delays in obtaining consents.
- g) Community Benefits from Nature Investment project is now working on three possible projects with landowners across the National Park.
- h) Landscape and Communities work has been affected by both engagement coordinators leaving but recruitment has been successful for their replacements. The first survey still going online in late spring / summer 25.

15. Empowerment:

- a) Effective Engagement: This project has been marked as Amber due to the staffing shortage impact on the wider programme. The mitigation is that we have recruited two new staff and are reworking this year's engagement plan based on that capacity. Testing and delivery of the gamification event in Aviemore was a real highlight of this quarter.
- b) Community Climate Grants: The appointment of the Involve Foundation as our participatory democracy consultant for this strand of work is a major step forward to the delivery of this project of work and the work rate is likely to now ramp up.
- c) The finalisation of the Wellbeing Economy Action Plan has now allowed this project to be mapped out, and a route set for the contributions it will make to the Park Authority and Cairngorms 2030 monitoring and evaluation.
- d) Partnership working and event delivery underway with Community Climate Hubs.
- e) Community Arts and Culture highlight is the approval of the action plan co-designed by the creatives network. Many lessons learnt from the ongoing development of the codesign process and the impacts on predicted timescales.

Transport

16. Active Communities:

- a) Progress on priority projects has been delayed as we await a decision on the exact award amount from Transport Scotland. We have provided a large amount of information and research to inform our exact award request.
- b) The Aviemore Active Communities design works has been completed and invitations to tender issued on Public Contracts Scotland. Resulting queries



from applicants has resulted in a pause in the contract, whilst we seek further legal advice. The contract will be re-issued in June 2025 resulting in a 60-day delay, which is not classed as a significant delivery risk at this stage in the project. Any further delay from this point is likely to impact time sensitive elements of project delivery.

- c) Local community stakeholder engagement workshop was hosted in Glenmore corridor with relationships being built and views gathered on options for potential new path and bus infrastructure improvement.

17. Cycle friendly Cairngorms:

- a) The Cairngorms 2030 project delivered by Strathspey Pedal Initiative has continued to deliver activities to communities and schools with a total of 132 participants this quarter. They have maintained school bike fleets, delivered skills and maintenance classes and offered Dr Bike sessions to pupils, with 59 pupils from Primary one to Primary seven participating.
- b) Purchase of workplace cycles for the Park Authority staff such as the ranger service to pilot as workplace demonstration of cargo cycles.
- c) Preparation for the procurement process to purchase equipment for cycle hubs has resulted in an agreed delivery strategy. We will seek community delivery partners to host cycle hubs and facilities such as lease cycles, shelters, parking, storage and recharging for e-bikes through C2030 support.

18. Sustainable transport bus stop:

- a) A sustainable transport bus stop audit was undertaken with findings identifying common themes for improvements to be made.

19. Changing travel behaviours:

- a) Key partnerships were developed for changing travel behaviours with plans to work with young people through active schools.
- b) Organised led rides programme was planned for delivery with contract awarded for 10 weeks of community rides and rides to and from school.
- c) A further contract has been awarded for a workplaces initiative to reach 12 local workplaces to offer cycle safety checks and organised rides.
- d) There have been two of 12 workplaces targeted so reaching new audiences and offering cycle safety checks, access to e-bikes and cargo bikes for longer term loan.
- e) Over 20 cycle safety checks have been completed to date.



Health and Wellbeing

20. Public Health and the Outdoors:

- a) Good, continued progress this quarter with new maternity cover in place and project performing well.
- b) An increase in additional working hours for one part time Green Health worker was required to address delivery and capacity issues.
- c) Supporting patients on a one-to-one to basis is resource intensive and additional time was required to deliver a high-quality service.
- d) Work continues to raise the profile of the project with health and social care staff.

21. Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre (ODRC):

- a) Consolidation for the project over the last three months.
- b) Developments have been made to the programmes offered through learning gained in the previous quarter.
- c) Storage issues have been resolved taking pressure away from the staff and the centre facilities providing a better experience for users.
- d) It has been identified that work on the sustainable future of the ODRC needs to begin soon.

22. Recruitment:

- a) Two new Engagement Co-ordinators have been recruited to fill recently vacated posts.
- b) Contract for Green Health Link worker has been extended by one day per week to help manage workload.

23. Governance:

- a) Cairngorms 2030 programme risk management has been added to the Park Authority's senior management team meeting as a standing agenda item. Key risks and issues now documented and escalated for resolution, which is improving task management. The Board's Audit and Risk Committee also reviews programme risk management on a quarterly basis in tandem with consideration of the Park Authority's strategic risk management.

24. Budget and cash flow

- a) A new cash flow from Q1 2025 has been prepared and issued to NLHF.
- b) Peatland restoration 2025/26 budget confirmed by Scottish Government is £4.63 million with 17 projects in draft plan.



- c) A new £10,000 match funding contribution has been secured through contributions made by National Park Partnerships / BMW.

25. Procurement

- a) Some procurement challenges with the complexity of the Active Communities tender. But legal advice has been sought, and a revised tender will be published.

Forward look

26. Key delivery actions to end December 2025 include:

- a) The publication and award of Active Communities Invitations to Tender (ITT) on Public Contract Scotland. Active travel ITT design contracts include Aviemore, Boat of Garten, Nethybridge and Newtonmore. An additional active travel project to connect Dulnain Bridge and Grantown-on-Spey will be progressed with a separate Transport Scotland funding application. Further community engagement on active travel demand in Carrbridge will also be delivered.
- b) Successful delivery of Active Communities contracts supported by Transport Scotland funding by end March 2026.
- c) The new Ballater Community Climate Resilient Catchment project will commence with a new grant award and the selection of flood risk mitigation project options.
- d) The Participative democracy project to co-design a new Community Climate Grant will commence and is expected to be substantially complete by the end of March 2026. We expect to provide the board with an update on this work over the period of the consultancy contract.
- e) The Park Authority has nominated Alzheimer Scotland for a 'Nature of Scotland Award' for the C2030 Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre project. The shortlist will take place on 10 September 2025.
- f) The National Lottery Heritage Fund staff team (30 employees) will be visiting the Park on 16 and 17 September 2025.
- g) The strategy for delivering new Community Cycle Hubs will be agreed and procured. Priority locations include Aviemore, Glenmore, Grantown-on-Spey and Ballater. Other main residential centres will be proposed for a range of new cycle facilities from bike storage, e-bike chargers to behaviour change initiatives.



- h) Land managers who submitted an expression of interest to the C2030 £1.5 million Nature Recovery project will be contacted and supported through the application process with awards confirmed by Autumn 2025.
- i) Four new woodland expansion projects will be initiated and grant awarded. These include new montane woodland on Marr Lodge Estate, increasing the Aspen network with Trees for Life, a new Angus Glens Tree Nursery and a series of community workshops on filling the consultation and community benefit gap for Scottish Government grant funded woodland and forestry creation schemes.
- j) Long term strategic delivery and legacy planning with NHS Highland to ensure the sustainable future of the Public Health and the Outdoors green health referral project.

27. Significant Budget Adjustments

- a) None

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

- 28.** In conclusion, the following key operational programme risks under management are drawn to the Boards attention:
- a) Programme risk level remains at amber due to the delay in receiving Transport Scotland formal award letter. The continued delay is unfortunate, but it does not increase delivery risk as the offer has been agreed in principle. The issue has been escalated at a senior management level, and we expect formal grant award notification in June 2025. Any further delay will see the risk raise to RAG status red.
 - b) The view of programme managers is that these escalated risks can be effectively managed and there is no current need to escalate any risks to a more strategic level.

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Annex 1

Cairngorms 2030 Project Red Amber Green (RAG) status – Q1 2025

Cairngorms 2030: RAG status					
	RAG status by quarter				
Project Name	Jan-Mar 24	Apr-June 24	July-Sept 24	Oct-Dec 24	Jan - Mar 2025
Woodland Expansion	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Peatland restoration	Green	Amber	Amber	Green	Green
Nature recovery	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Cairngorms future farming	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green
Climate resilient catchments	Amber	Amber	Green	Amber	Green
Green finance & community wealth building	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Wellbeing economy	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Public health & the outdoors	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Outdoor dementia resource centre	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Landscape & communities	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Effective community engagement	Green	Green	Green	Green	Amber
Climate learning & education	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Climate conscious communities	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Community arts & culture	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Community managed climate grants	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Knowledge & exchange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Cycle friendly Cairngorms	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Active communities	Green	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber
Sustainable transport	Green	Amber	Green	Green	Green
Changing travel behaviours	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green