



For discussion

**Title: Cairngorms 2030 programme update: quarter three 2025
(July – September)**

Prepared by: David Clyne, Head of Cairngorms 2030

Purpose

This paper presents the status of the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) programme and risk management, based on information in project reports for the period from April to June 2025, and updated where appropriate to reflect current position as at the time of writing, and the planned work to end September 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

1. Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) will inspire people and communities in the National Park to act and tackle the nature and climate crisis. Bringing together 20 long-term projects on transforming landscapes, empowering communities, rethinking how we travel and championing wellbeing.
2. 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

3. Performance dashboard: Programme level quarter three (Q3) 2025 (see Annex 1 for projects).

Performance Measure	Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status			Issue/mitigation
	Q3 25 (current)	Q3 trend	Q4 25 (expected)	
Programme risk profile	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme level risk trend has decreased from Amber to Green. Park Authority has received Transport Scotland active travel match funding award for 2025/26.
Delivery of Transport Scotland funded projects	Amber		Amber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active Communities project level risk decreased from Red to Amber. Transport Scotland active travel design funding award letter has been received. Amber RAG status reflects the timing challenge of delivering the Active Communities projects by end of financial year 2025/26. Amber RAG status will likely be retained until March 2026. Risk mitigation measures have been introduced including new project governance structures and risk escalation procedures.
Future funding profile	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future funding risk trend has decreased in line with active travel funding certainty.



Performance Measure	Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status			Issue/mitigation
	Q3 25 (current)	Q3 trend	Q4 25 (expected)	
Finance: impact on Park Authority budget management	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No significant impact current or projected Park Authority budget identified. The potential financial implications for C2030 programme delivery are an integral element of approved 2025/26 budget plans. Overall budget management impacts remain within the total agreed budget.
Procurement	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing Active Communities contracts continues to help develop teams' procedures and expertise. Procurement plans in place and shared with NLHF.
Staffing	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective community engagement team at full strength. Staff training continues. Peatland team resourcing challenges continue requiring work planning changes.

Note:

- Q3 risks present the assessed risk status as at end of the quarter.
- Q3 trend presents the direction of risk drivers and influencers impacting risk assessment over the quarter.
- Q4 expected risk levels give a sense of where we currently expect risks to land in final assessment at the end of December should current management and risk mitigation actions impact on risk as planned.



Key risks

4. Programme risk level has decreased. Transport Scotland active travel match funding award letter has been received.
 - a) The Active Communities project risk status has decreased from red to amber.
 - b) Amber RAG status reflects the timing challenge of delivering the Active Communities Projects by end of the financial year. Amber RAG status will likely be retained until March 2026.
 - c) Risk mitigation measures have been introduced including new project governance structures and risk escalation procedures.
 - d) Design consultants have been appointed and commenced project delivery. A project steering group has been set up with key delivery partners.
 - e) Monthly progress reporting to Transport Scotland has commenced.
 - f) Risks being managed include local authority sign off on concept design road safety, design standards (road width, footway width, permitted development) and roles and responsibilities for progressing land negotiations and construction phase.
 - g) Active travel design community engagement event has been scheduled in Aviemore on 11 December 2025.

Supporting information: theme lead highlights

Restoring and enhancing landscapes:

5. All projects at RAG status green.
6. **Woodland expansion:** Angus Glens new tree nursery grant award drafted.
7. **Peatland restoration:** Despite staffing resource constraints, momentum remains strong, and we are on track to meet our targets for the year.
8. **Nature recovery:**
 - a) Community deer larder strategy has been drafted and submitted to Park Authority management team for approval. Two new deer larders have been proposed, and project initiation documents (PID) and investment plans are being drafted.



- b) Outline project scope for new rural skills training scheme has been drafted. Discussions underway with potential delivery partners with a full PID to be prepared by end of the year.
- 9. **Future Farming:** Enhanced training and advice plan for other farmers to maximise the learnings and benefits of the project.
- 10. **Climate resilient catchments:** Ballater flood resilience project terms of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) have been drafted and agreed, with signature by the relevant community bodies outstanding.
- 11. **Community benefits from nature investment:** A fourth landowner has shown active interest in joining the project and other conversations are in the pipeline, showing there is a level of interest in delivering community benefits among landowners.
- 12. **Landscape and communities:** New C2030 landscape survey was used in public for the first time at a community roadshow event. Good examples of cross C2030 project collaboration with creatives in the National Park to understand better the obstacles they face when bidding for landscape work and exploring the scope for rangers and volunteers to be involved with planned community engagement.

Empowerment:

- 13. All projects at RAG status green.
- 14. All projects have delivered well within this project, with a good balance between the internal preparation and planning work, paired with on the ground delivery across the board.
- 15. Effective community engagement team have successfully delivered four engagement events / roadshows this quarter including Grantown Show, Greentown Show, Strathdon community roadshow and Kincaig fun day.
- 16. Community managed climate grant project has stepped up activity, with the pre-engagement work being shaped and delivered, and the planning for the recruitment phase of the work.



Transport:

17. Active communities:

- a) Design consultancy procurement and contract awarded for the Active Communities projects in Aviemore and Boat of Garten now underway.
- b) Governance and risk reporting structures set up and meeting reporting underway.
- c) Contract extension to deliver designs for Newtonmore and Nethy Bridge to follow.

18. Changing Travel Behaviours:

- a) 71 pupils signed up to three Bike Buses in Aviemore, Boat of Garten and Grantown-on-Spey. Boat of Garten Deshar bike bus now fully volunteer run.
- b) 431 Bike Bus trips made.
- c) New bike bus in Grantown has started with high uptake and great parent / carer support and involvement.
- d) Strathspey Pedal Initiative (SPIN) has put together this impressive short [Film \(credit: Angus Trinder\)](#). Showcases the various activities C2030 is collaborating with SPIN to deliver.
- e) Conversations ongoing with Cairngorms Trust / Aviemore Bikes about the potential extension of the Workplace events. Scope of the Workplaces project in 2026 includes a contract extension with Cairngorms Trust with delivery plans for workplaces in 2026.

19. Cycling Friendly Cairngorms:

- a) Launch of the National Park Authority Fleet Cycles took place this quarter and has been well received by staff. Rangers have started a trial of cycles on Deeside and in the Angus Glens demonstrated good practice active travel at work to inspire other workplaces.
- b) Recommendation made and confirmed approval to proceed with four main cycle hubs in Aviemore, Grantown-on-Spey, Glenmore and Ballater with supporting hubs in Kingussie, Newtonmore, Boat of Garten, Nethy Bridge, Carrbridge, Dulnain Bridge, Braemar, Tomintoul, and Blair Atholl. The next quarter will focus on developing the required procurement programme to appoint suppliers for the necessary infrastructure including cycle parking and e-bike chargers.



- c) An impactful contract with SPIN has delivered a range of community events and activities this quarter Dr Bike at Community Events, Community bike maintenance classes at Carrbridge, Nethy Bridge, Kingussie and Newtonmore. Three classes (26 attendees) delivered as part of the YMCA's Grantown Climate Change Festival, to help the promotion of skill-sharing, active travel and a repair / reuse mindset.
- d) School Dr Bike sessions successful with option to extend this into year three being recommended.

20. Sustainable Transport:

- a) Recommendations from the bus stop audit proposed by project lead collated and advice sought from the Park Authority's Senior Management Team (SMT) on priorities.
- b) Investment proposals are opportunities for the Park Authority to deliver substantial impact for bus stop improvements, Myrtlefield Shopping Centre, Aviemore plus improved bus shelters, Glenmore corridor.

Health and Wellbeing:

21. Public health and the outdoors:

- a) A very good quarter consolidating a number of workstreams leading to increased awareness and understanding of the project amongst healthcare professionals and consequently a steady stream of referrals.
- b) As before this work throws up issues that are new; in this instance safeguarding concerns for referrals. These have been dealt with sensitively and efficiently making good use of the Park Authority's Safeguarding protocol and liaison with GP practices.
- c) Some excellent and innovative events delivered – Wee Wanders and the Festival of Access widen the scope of the project and reach new audiences.
- d) A continuing delay in some areas due to lack of capacity in other departments is a bit of a concern and needs addressing in the next quarter.

22. Outdoor dementia resource centre:

- a) The project continues to push the boundaries of nature activities for people with dementia through influencing practice and activity in other organisations and sectors.



- b) The re-allocation of the budget to provide a brain health activity coordinator is a great example of testing and learning leading to an innovative result.
- c) A very successful quarter with good attendance and participation in the activity programme as well as a lot of media coverage.

Finance:

- 23. The £600,000 funding decision from the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) application remains to be confirmed. The funding would support the Community Climate Grants, Cycle Friendly Cairngorms, and Sustainable Transport projects.

Stakeholder engagement

Communications

- 24. **Press releases:**
 - a) One partner press release during this period, issued by Stagecoach on funding received to increase bike storage provisions on buses in Aberdeenshire. [Bike-friendly buses hit the road in northeast Scotland.](#)
- 25. Cairn magazine articles (note three issues per year, distributed to over 12,000 households and all 18,000 residents in the National Park).
 - a) Cairn hit doorsteps 04 August with a story on the Transforming Transport strand as the main feature and front cover. This is a bumper issue for Cairngorms 2030 stories featuring the Creatives exhibition (Community arts and culture), Alford Academy's volunteering days and Menstruation in the wild training sessions (Climate learning and education). Also featured is the new Nature Advisor role (Green finance and community wealth building), a focus on the future farming participating farms and aspen planting (Cairngorms future farming). The issue finishes with an interview on Community ConnXions social enterprise (Sustainable travel). [You can read the latest edition here.](#)
 - b) The winter edition of Cairn will feature an update on the deer larder (Nature recovery), school murals (Climate learning and education), Aviemore active travel developments (Active communities), the YMCA climate festival (Climate conscious communities) and Dee River restoration (Climate resilient catchments).



26. Cairngorms Voices (online blog / photo stories)

- a) There were four online blogs posted this quarter featuring Cairngorms 2030 projects:
 - i. ["If you build it, they will come"](#) - a blog on Peatland restoration
 - ii. [In conversation with Ali Marr – inclusive art sessions for people living with dementia](#) - an interview with a local artist who runs bespoke art sessions for people living with dementia and their carers.
 - iii. [New spin on the school run](#) - covering highlights on the Transport Team's work.
 - iv. [Community spirit drives connection](#) - an interview with Community ConnXions Donald Hall.
- b) Other press activity:
 - i. There were six pieces of press coverage from 01 July to 31 September that mention Cairngorms 2030 and / or the NLHF. Two were online articles and four were print, with a total predicted reach of over 68,000.

27. Social media

- a) Social media activity in this period continued with a total of 28 posts, including sharing the new deer larder film and micro-updates that kept Cairngorms 2030 present on our social media channels.
- b) A summary of the social media activity is given in the following reports:
 - i. September communications update.
 - ii. Total engagements - that is people who have liked, shared, watched and interacted with materials - of all Cairngorms 2030 activity across social media: 44,559 - up 74% on last quarter, this high statistic is due to the promotion and views of the Glenkilrie Larder film.

28. Other online / offline activity

- a) Ongoing work on two videos highlighting the work of the Cairngorms Creatives and co-design process (Community arts and culture).
- b) Promoting consultation and community engagement events (Climate resilient catchments, Effective community engagement).
- c) Assisting with posters, displays and promotional materials for engagement and project promotional activity.
- d) Working with videographers Cairn Media on the production of several films following C2030 projects.



- e) Collaborating with the Transport Team, Alan Jones Associates and Mott MacDonald on communications and engagement on the Active Aviemore project (Active Communities).
- f) Tender brief for Peatland restoration photography (Peatland restoration).
- g) Supporting the promotion of the Pledge Process Planet art exhibition (Community arts and culture).

Communications actions in next quarter

- 29. Publication of film focussing on the Cairngorms future farming project.
- 30. Support and promotion of community engagement events.
- 31. Social media reel following Fèis Spè and their work with Edinburgh University researchers.
- 32. Working with social media influencers to promote travel by public transport.
- 33. Collaboration with local bike bus parents in Grantown-on-Spey for blog / photo post.
- 34. Collecting statistics and quotes for the creation of the 2025 Cairngorms 2030 highlight leaflet.

Volunteer activity

- 35. This quarter has seen the number of volunteers engaging with C2030 projects continue to increase, both through our Volunteer Ranger programme and Cycle friendly Cairngorms volunteers. Our additional 24 Volunteer Rangers from Q2 have increased the volume of attended C2030-focused volunteering sessions, primarily with the Outdoor Brain Health and Dementia Resource Centre, but also with wider Cairngorms environmental volunteering.
- 36. Volunteer Cairngorms is now exploring directly running volunteer activities for other project leads, with the benefit of increasing the both the absolute number of volunteering sessions and the variety of projects that can now staff events.



- a) All project leads have had the opportunity to develop plans for volunteer involvement with the priority projects (in terms of timing and degree of development) being focused on for year 2026 deployment – namely peatland restoration, Cairngorms Future Farming tree planting and Woodland expansion volunteer montane willow planting. In Q4 our move from development support to direct involvement in delivery will allow us to work with these leads in scheduling and running volunteer involving events for year 2026.

Staffing and recruitment

- 37. The Park Authority has won The Herald and S1Jobs Top Employer Award, in the “Best Diversity and Inclusion Dynamic in the Workplace” category. The 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.”
- 38. Peatland team are under pressure due to another member moving on and a key member being on long term sickness. However, action has been approved to address these matters, for example, consultants are being brought in to increase the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) capability as one measure. Effects are expected to be short term.
- 39. Effective community engagement team has now reached full capacity during Q3 with second engagement coordinator starting with Park Authority end of July.
- 40. Brain Health Activity Coordinator to be recruited for Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre.

Governance

- 41. The NLHF staff and Scotland Investment Committee visited the Park on 17 September 2025. The Park Authority organised a series of talks for staff to learn more about the NLHF-funded C2030 programme, with a specific focus on nature conservation.



42. NLHF and Park Authority executive teams also met on the day to discuss future investment in the National Park as part of C2030 legacy. Additional CEO level discussions were scheduled for November 2026.

Budget and cash flow

43. No significant changes to budgets or cash flow during the quarter.

Legal agreements

44. Draft MoU in progress:
- a) Hitrans Regional transport partnerships (RTP) – agreement to deliver joint sustainable and active travel outcomes to boost C2030 delivery.
 - b) Glasgow School of Art (GSA): Rural Lab. Partnership on four elements of the NEXA model (research, education, enterprise / skills and innovation). And embedding PHD scholars in Park Authority project delivery.
 - c) Climate Resilient Catchments: Ballater Flood Group Initiative.
 - d) Woodland expansion: Glen Prosen Tree nursery with Alba Explorers.
 - e) Woodland expansion: Montane planting with National Trust Scotland (NTS), Marr Lodge Estate.

Programme delivery actions to end December 2025.

Draft GSA rural lab MoU prepared	14 November 25
Park Authority and NLHF Investment planning meeting	17 November 25
C2030 Programme board meeting	19 November 25
HIE funding meeting	21 November 25
C2030 staff annual review	26 November 25
Cairngorms 2030 Engagement Roadshow – Aviemore	11 December 25
Draft Hitrans MoU prepared	15 December 25

Significant Budget Adjustments

45. None



Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

46. In conclusion, the following key operational programme risks under management are drawn to the Boards attention:
- a) Programme risk level has decreased from amber to green after receiving confirmation of funding from Transport Scotland.
 - b) The Active Communities project risk status has decreased from red to amber. However, significant challenges remain in delivering the project due to the short timescales. Governance and risk management plans have been instigated.

David Clyne

20 November 2025

davidclyne@cairngorms.co.uk

