



For discussion

Title: Cairngorms 2030 programme update: quarter one 2026
(January to March)

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 January to March 2026, and updated where appropriate to reflect current position as at the time of writing, and the planned work to end June 2026.

Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to:

- a) Note progress to date and future for C2030 delivery.
- b) Note specific points of C2030 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. 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 Q1 2026 (see Annex 1 for component project Red Amber Green (RAG) status).



Performance Measure	Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status			Issue/mitigation
	Q1 26 (current)	Q1 trend	Q2 26 (expected)	
Programme risk profile	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme level risk remains Green.
Delivery of Transport Scotland funded projects	Amber		Amber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two additional transport projects have raised RAG status from Green to Amber: Changing Travel Behaviours and Sustainable Transport. The annualised funding awards made by Transport Scotland and delay in decision making on their funding allocations until well into each financial year continues to create significant uncertainties in project development and planning. This is compounded by their cessation of £20,000 annual funding support to the delivery Behaviour change post. The current and projected amber rating signify this uncertainty. A reprioritisation of transport theme projects will be completed by August / September once Transport Scotland funding decisions are communicated.
Future funding profile	Green		Amber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future risk is set at amber given uncertainties around transport funding referenced above and other partner funding streams which remain to be finalised. An updated cash flow has been developed which assumes funding will be received in future quarters. A full financial reappraisal will be



				undertaken in August / September when key funding decisions on transport and other project areas will be better understood.
Finance: impact on Park Authority budget management	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No significant impact on 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 and built into 2026/27 budget proposals. Overall budget management impacts remain within the total agreed budget.
Procurement	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement schedule for 2026 in place.
Staffing	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No staff resource issues.

Note:

- a) Quarter one (Q1) 2026 risks present the assessed risk status as at end of the quarter.
- b) Q1 2026 trend presents the direction of risk drivers and influencers impacting risk assessment over the quarter.
- c) Quarter two (Q2) 2026 expected risk levels give a sense of where we currently expect risks to land in final assessment at the end of June 2026 should current management and risk mitigation actions impact on risk as planned.

Key Risks

4. Programme risk level remains at green.
5. **The key delivery risk: Transport Scotland funded projects** - The overall risk position within the Transforming Transport theme has increased during Q1 2026, with three of the four transport projects now reporting at RAG Amber status. While delivery activity continues across the theme, there are now several interconnected strategic, financial and programme management risks that require active



mitigation and reassessment during Q2 and Q3 2026. Key areas of increased risk include:

- a) **Active Communities** - The principal risk relates to funding applications, delivery timescales and the ability to complete planned outputs within the remaining programme period. Current pressures around procurement, partner capacity and sequencing of activity are creating increasing schedule risk across elements of delivery.
- b) **Sustainable Transport** - Several initiatives identified and agreed with partners during the development phase have not translated into deliverable projects within anticipated timescales. There is therefore now a need to reassess delivery priorities, strategic focus and achievable outputs for the remaining programme period.
- c) **Changing Travel Behaviours** - The project has lost approximately £20,000 per annum of Hitrans match funding linked to wider Transport Scotland funding reductions. This creates a direct pressure on delivery capacity and resourcing for the project officer post. Although significant positive delivery continues across workplace cycling, Bike Buses and community engagement activity, the project now requires financial reassessment and prioritisation to maintain delivery within available resources.
- d) Taken collectively, these issues now represent a significant thematic delivery risk for the wider Transforming Transport programme. Mitigation activity over the coming months will therefore need to focus on:
 - i. Strategic reprioritisation of transport activity.
 - ii. Reassessment of delivery scope against available resources and remaining programme timeframe.
 - iii. Increased focus on deliverable, lower risk and partnership supported activity.
 - iv. Review of governance, delivery models and partner responsibilities across transport projects.
 - v. Strengthened programme oversight and escalation arrangements where projects are not progressing as anticipated.
 - vi. Identification of opportunities to consolidate activity around highest impact and most achievable outcomes.
- e) Despite the increased risk position, there remain strong examples of successful delivery across active travel design, behaviour change, workplace engagement and community cycling initiatives. The key challenge for Q2 and



Q3 2026 will be ensuring that available capacity and funding are aligned to the most deliverable and strategically valuable elements of the transport programme.

Supporting information – theme lead highlights

6. **Restoring and enhancing landscapes** - Delivery across the Restoring and Enhancing Landscapes theme continues to progress positively, with strong partnership engagement supporting landscape scale climate, biodiversity and resilience outcomes across the National Park.
7. All seven projects remain at Green RAG status and are progressing broadly in line with approved plans and milestones. Strong collaboration between estates, communities, agencies and land management organisations continues to be a major strength of the theme. Key progress during Q1 2026 includes:
 - a) Continued advancement of woodland expansion, peatland restoration and nature recovery activity, contributing to long term climate resilience and biodiversity recovery objectives.
 - b) Ongoing development of the Cairngorms Future Farming workstream, supporting collaboration with land managers and farming partners around regenerative land management, biodiversity enhancement and lower carbon farming practices.
 - c) Progression of climate resilient catchment projects, strengthening integrated approaches to flood resilience, water management and landscape adaptation.
 - d) Continued development of green finance and community wealth building approaches, supporting exploration of longer-term sustainable investment mechanisms and local economic benefit.
 - e) Strong partnership delivery and pipeline development across the theme, with substantial activity progressing across multiple projects and landscapes.
 - f) The theme remains in a strong delivery position entering Q2 2026. However, external cost pressures and timing risks associated with several major capital elements will require continued monitoring and active management over the coming quarters.
8. **Empowerment** - The Empowerment theme remains Green across all projects and continues to build strong momentum around community participation, organisational engagement practice and creative approaches to climate learning and empowerment across the National Park.



9. The theme is making a significant contribution to one of the programme's core strategic objectives: enabling long term community empowerment, participation and systems change through locally led action, collaboration and knowledge exchange. Key progress during Q1 2026 includes:
 - a) Continued development of community engagement and participatory approaches, supporting greater local involvement in climate action and programme delivery.
 - b) Progression of climate learning and education activity, helping build awareness, skills and understanding around climate adaptation, sustainability and green skills.
 - c) Ongoing development of climate conscious community initiatives, supporting behaviour change and locally led responses to climate and environmental challenges.
 - d) Advancement of community arts and culture activity, helping connect communities with climate, landscape and place through creative and cultural engagement.
 - e) Continued development of the C2030 Community Fund governance and codesign process, supporting transparent, participatory and community led allocation approaches aligned with the approved NLHF programme framework.
 - f) Ongoing partnership development and knowledge exchange activity, strengthening collaboration across communities, delivery partners and organisations throughout the National Park.
10. The theme continues to demonstrate strong delivery momentum and positive community engagement outcomes. Key strategic challenges relate primarily to partner capacity, maintaining delivery pace and managing increasingly complex stakeholder relationships as projects continue to scale and mature.
11. **Transport** - The Transforming Transport theme continues to deliver significant activity across active travel infrastructure, behaviour change, workplace engagement and community cycling initiatives.
12. Key delivery progress during Q1 2026 included advancement of the Aviemore, Boat of Garten, Newtonmore and Nethy Bridge projects, continued development of the Aviemore public cycle hire scheme, rollout of cycling infrastructure procurement and ongoing Bike Bus and workplace cycling activity. However, as outlined in the programme risk section above, the overall thematic risk position has increased



during Q1 2026, with three of the four projects now reporting at Amber RAG status. The principal challenges relate to delivery timescales, funding uncertainty, project sequencing, partner capacity and strategic prioritisation across remaining programme activity.

13. Mitigation activity during Q2 and Q3 2026 will focus on strategic reprioritisation of transport activity, reassessment of delivery scope and strengthening governance and programme oversight arrangements in preparation for future Transport Scotland funding decisions.
14. Despite the increased risk profile, the theme continues to demonstrate strong community demand, positive partnership engagement and good progress across several active travel, cycle infrastructure and behaviour change initiatives
15. **Health and Wellbeing** - All projects at RAG green status.
16. The Health and Wellbeing theme continues to perform strongly, with both projects remaining at Green RAG status and demonstrating strong partnership delivery, innovation and increasing participant engagement across the National Park.
17. The theme continues to demonstrate strong alignment between nature, public health and community wellbeing objectives, while supporting integrated delivery across health, transport, inclusion and outdoor access agendas.
18. Key priorities during Q1 2026 focused on strengthening operational procedures, expanding delivery capacity and embedding longer term legacy approaches:
 - a) Continued delivery of outdoor health and wellbeing activity, supporting improved access to nature-based health interventions and preventative health approaches.
 - b) Ongoing development of the Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre and associated partnership working, strengthening inclusive access to outdoor environments and wellbeing support.
 - c) Continued collaboration with health, community and third sector partners to help embed wellbeing outcomes across wider C2030 activity.
 - d) Increasing integration between active travel, outdoor access and health improvement agendas, supporting more joined up delivery across programme themes.
 - e) Positive engagement with communities and delivery partners, supporting longer term legacy planning and development of scalable wellbeing approaches.



- f) The theme continues to demonstrate strong potential for long term social impact through integrated delivery linking environment, transport, inclusion and health outcomes.
- g) Key priorities for Q2 2026 will focus on strengthening referral pathways, embedding revised operational procedures, expanding national learning activity and continuing development of longer-term sustainability and legacy planning.

Stakeholder engagement

- 19. **Communications** - Communications activity during Q1 2026 continued to support strong public awareness, engagement and participation across the C2030 programme. Activity focused on increasing visibility of key projects, promoting community participation opportunities and strengthening public understanding of the programme's climate, nature, transport and wellbeing objectives.
- 20. Delivery during the quarter included coordinated press activity, social media campaigns, films, blogs, community promotion and printed materials, with particular emphasis on the establishment of the of the C2030 Community Fund codesign panel, active travel engagement, climate resilience storytelling and community arts activity.
- 21. The communications approach continues to evolve positively, with increasing use of targeted digital advertising, short-form video, Instagram carousel content and audience testing to improve reach and engagement. This has contributed to strong engagement levels across multiple channels and increased participation from communities and groups not previously engaged with the Park Authority.
- 22. Q1 communications activity generated:
 - a) 25 pieces of press coverage with an estimated reach of more than 402,000 people.
 - b) 37 dedicated C2030 social media posts.
 - c) More than 43,000 social media engagements across programme activity.
 - d) Over 34,000 views for the "Ballater after disaster" climate resilience film.
- 23. The communications function continues to provide significant cross programme support through branding, community engagement materials, film production, publications, partner communications and promotional activity across multiple C2030 themes and projects.



24. Press releases - Four proactive press releases issued during Q1 2026:
 - a) New cycle hub fund calls for wheely good ideas
 - b) Cairngorms 2030 artist in residence announced
 - c) New £1 million communities fund to be designed by National Park residents
 - d) Safer and easier travel around Boat of Garten for all

25. **Cairn magazine** - Spring edition distributed to more than 12,000 households and all 18,000 residents across the National Park. Coverage included:
 - a) Ballater Flood Issues Group film
 - b) Aviemore and Boat of Garten travel consultations
 - c) C2030 Community Fund
 - d) Landscapes survey
 - e) Wider C2030 programme update

26. **Cairngorms Voices (online blogs and stories)** - Five C2030 related blogs and stories published:
 - a) Communities Fund panel update
 - b) Storm Frank: a community's response
 - c) Digging deeper – peatland restoration archaeology feature
 - d) [Jean's story: What Ruthven Barracks means to me](#)
 - e) Finding 'win-win-wins' in farming

27. **Other press activity** - 25 pieces of press coverage achieved during Q1, including:
 - a) Nine online articles
 - b) 14 print articles
 - c) Estimated reach of more than 402,000
 - d) International German TV coverage focused on the deer larder project
 - e) Coverage focused primarily on local and regional media outlets including:
 - i. The Dundee Courier
 - ii. Angus County Press
 - iii. Badenoch and Strathspey Herald
 - iv. Press and Journal
 - v. Deeside Piper

28. **Social media** - 37 C2030 social media posts delivered during Q1. Social media highlights included:
 - a) C2030 Community Fund codesign panel established



- b) Jean's Story dementia feature
 - c) Bothy Project artist announcement
 - d) Climate resilience film promotion
 - e) Instagram carousel content and targeted reels
 - f) Promotion of the film "Ballater after disaster | Restoring nature and adapting to a changing climate" exceeded 34,000 views across channels.
 - g) Targeted online advertising and community promotion for the Community Fund generated 265 applications from a diverse range of communities and backgrounds.
 - h) Total social media engagement across C2030 activity reached 43,694 interactions during Q1.
29. **Other online and offline activity** - Completion and promotion of the film "Ballater after disaster | Restoring nature and adapting to a changing climate".
30. **Knowledge and Research Exchange** - The Knowledge Exchange and Research project remains at Green RAG status and continues to provide strategic monitoring, evaluation and learning support across the wider C2030 programme.
31. Activity during Q1 2026 focused on consolidating year two programme data, strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems and progressing research, learning and knowledge exchange activity to support long term programme legacy and organisational learning. Key progress during Q1 2026:
- a) Completion of the year two data review and annual programme review process, including analysis of engagement activity, interim case studies and local authority delivery information.
 - b) Continued development of monitoring and evaluation systems to support programme learning, reporting and long-term legacy planning.
 - c) Progression of PhD fieldwork linked to the C2030 Community Fund design phase and wider programme research activity.
 - d) Delivery of the first internal knowledge exchange event, including the Community Wealth Building workshop delivered in March 2026.
 - e) Continued development of case studies, video outputs and programme learning materials to support knowledge sharing across multiple audiences.
 - f) Ongoing support to project teams and delivery partners around participant monitoring, engagement tracking and evaluation activity.
 - g) Increased external engagement through conference participation, research enquiries and collaboration with academic and policy partners, including



support for research proposals linked to wildfire resilience and geography-based PhD activity.

- h) Continued development of learning and legacy approaches to ensure programme innovation, evidence and lessons learned are captured and shared effectively beyond 2030.

32. **Volunteer activity** - Continued development of the C2030 Volunteering Strategy, supporting delivery planning for the remaining programme period and longer-term legacy development.

- a) Recruitment and induction of nine new Volunteer Rangers completed during Q1, with 270 hours of training delivered.
- b) Progression of new Volunteer Experience Programme partnerships, with agreements completed for five partner organisations and events now scheduled.
- c) Continued development of volunteering activity linked to peatland restoration, woodland expansion and Cairngorms Future Farming projects.
- d) Planning progressed for the Cairngorms Environmental Volunteers Festival, including invitations issued to 43 environmental volunteering groups and organisations across the National Park.
- e) Volunteer Ranger support delivered through the Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre, contributing 48.5 volunteering hours linked directly to C2030 activity.
- f) Continued collaboration with underrepresented and inclusion-focused partner organisations including:
 - i. Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland
 - ii. Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre Perth and Kinross
 - iii. Trauma Healing Perth and Kinross
 - iv. Homestart East Highland
 - v. Connecting Carers

Staffing and recruitment

33. No staffing changes within the NLHF funded staff complement.

Governance

34. The C2030 Year two Programme Management Review was completed in March 2026. It provided a strategic midpoint assessment of programme delivery, governance, staffing, delivery confidence and legacy planning across the five-year delivery phase to 2028. The review concluded that the programme remains



strategically on track, with strong evidence of innovation, partnership working, community benefit and delivery against approved NLHF purposes across the programme. The review drew on structured consultation with programme staff, project leads and Theme Leads to identify key strengths, emerging delivery risks and priority areas requiring senior management attention. All recommendations within the review were accepted by the Park Authority Senior Management Team and delivery of the agreed actions is now underway.

35. Partnership governance arrangements are functioning effectively across multiple delivery partners and geographic areas.
36. Procurement and contract management arrangements are robust, with supplier appointments completed successfully and delivery mobilised on schedule.
37. Monitoring and evaluation systems continue to strengthen.
38. Cross-organisational collaboration between transport, education, community and workplace stakeholders is supporting integrated delivery.

Budget and cash flow

39. A revised cash flow statement has been prepared for NLHF, which sets out the funding position for the calendar year.
40. Receipt of match income has been delayed for several projects / partners and has been actively chased. Where there is uncertainty over the availability of funding from a particular source, this income has been retained within the cash flow but is projected into the programme's later years.
41. Highlands and Islands (HIE) £600,000 match funding application has progressed well and is nearing completion.
42. Changing Travel Behaviours project has lost approximately £20,000 per annum of Hitrans match funding linked to wider Transport Scotland funding reductions. This creates a direct pressure on delivery capacity and resourcing for the project officer post. The project now requires financial reassessment and prioritisation to maintain delivery within available resources.



Legal agreements

43. Draft Memorandum of Understandings (MoU) in progress:
- a) Community deer larders: Atholl Estate
 - b) Climate Resilient Catchments Upper Dee: Invercauld Estate
 - c) Climate Resilient Catchments Upper Dee: Marr Lodge
 - d) Climate Resilient Catchments: Ballater Flood Group Initiative.
 - e) Hitrans RTP – Hi-Bikes Aviemore agreement as part of Cycle Friendly Cairngorms
 - f) Woodland expansion: Montane planting with NTS, Marr Lodge Estate.

Programme delivery actions to end June 2026

44. Restoring and enhancing landscapes:
- a) Community deer larders: Atholl Estate grant award signed
 - b) Climate Resilient Catchments Upper Dee: Invercauld Estate MoU signed
 - c) Climate Resilient Catchments Upper Dee: Marr Lodge MoU signed
 - d) Nature Recovery Future Skills ITT awarded
 - e) Nature Recovery projects selected and PIDS agreed by NLHF (woodland planting and conservation grazing).
 - f) Expansion of volunteer and school engagement activity linked to woodland propagation, including up to 30,000 native seedlings.
 - g) Progression of peatland restoration delivery and pipeline development for 2026/27 projects.
 - h) Continued development of Cairngorms Future Farming case studies, scenario modelling and farm engagement.
 - i) Progression of Upper Dee and Ballater resilience projects and ongoing Slugain Burn design and consenting work.
 - j) Further development of Community Benefit Plans and green finance partnership activity.
45. Empowerment:
- a) Continued rollout of community engagement and participatory activity across multiple projects.
 - b) Ongoing delivery of climate learning and education activity within partner schools.
 - c) Progression of the Cairngorms Creative Collective towards Community Interest Company registration.



- d) Continued development of the C2030 Community Fund and codesign process.
- e) Further climate conscious community engagement and local climate hub activity.

46. Transforming transport

- a) Reassessment of transport project scope, governance and delivery priorities.
- b) Progression of Aviemore, Boat of Garten, Newtonmore and Nethy Bridge active travel projects.
- c) Installation and rollout of cycle parking, e-bike charging and repair infrastructure.
- d) Development of the Aviemore public cycle hire scheme with Hitrans and HiBike.
- e) Continued workplace cycling, Bike Bus and community behaviour change activity.

47. Health and wellbeing

- a) Strengthening referral pathways and GP engagement for Nature Prescriptions activity.
- b) Completion of revised safeguarding, referral and operational procedures.
- c) Expansion of Green Health Week and wellbeing communications activity.
- d) Continued growth of Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre activity and Brain Health programming.
- e) Development of national learning and Community of Practice activity linked to dementia and green health delivery.

48. Volunteering

- a) Delivery of the Cairngorms Environmental Volunteers Festival on 07 June 2026.
- b) Development of the C2030 Volunteering Strategy and legacy planning.
- c) Delivery of Volunteer Experience Programme events with inclusion and wellbeing partners.
- d) Progression of volunteering activity linked to peatland restoration, woodland expansion and climate learning projects.
- e) Continued integration of volunteering support across C2030 delivery themes.



49. Communications
 - a) Publication of a new Cairngorms Future Farming film.
 - b) Continued support for community engagement events and Green Health Week promotion.
 - c) Delivery of additional blogs, reels, photography and social media content linked to Landscapes and Communities activity.
 - d) Continued collaboration with Cairn Media on future C2030 film production.
 - e) Production of further printed materials, engagement resources and programme statistics outputs.

50. Knowledge exchange and research
 - a) Continued development of monitoring, evaluation and research systems.
 - b) Ongoing PhD fieldwork and placement development linked to the Community Fund and wider programme learning.
 - c) Delivery planning for internal and external knowledge exchange events.
 - d) Production of additional programme case studies and video outputs.
 - e) Further development of long-term programme learning and legacy approaches to support post-2030 impact and knowledge sharing.

Significant Budget Adjustments

51. There were no significant budget adjustments over the quarter.

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

52. In conclusion, the following key operational programme risks under management are drawn to the Boards attention:
 - a) The C2030 programme continues to demonstrate strong overall delivery performance across most projects and themes, with significant progress being made in landscape restoration, community empowerment, health and wellbeing, volunteering, communications and programme learning activity.
 - b) Programme governance, partnership working, procurement and financial management arrangements remain stable and effective, with the overall programme risk position continuing at Green status.
 - c) The principal strategic delivery challenge remains within the Transforming Transport theme, where funding uncertainty, delivery timescales, partner



dependencies and programme sequencing have increased risk exposure across several projects. While these risks are considered manageable at present, they require continued active management, strategic reprioritisation and close oversight through Q2 and Q3 2026.

- d) Alongside risk management, the programme is continuing to mature positively through:
 - i. Increasing cross-theme integration.
 - ii. Strengthening community participation and codesign activity.
 - iii. Expansion of monitoring, evaluation and legacy planning activity
 - iv. Development of long-term partnership and delivery models.
 - v. Growing national profile and external engagement.
- e) The next quarter will be particularly important in:
 - i. Confirmation of the future Transport Scotland funding position.
 - ii. Consolidating delivery priorities across transport projects
 - iii. Advancing proposed major woodland projects into delivery phases.
 - iv. Progressing key legal agreements and procurement activity
 - v. Strengthening long term sustainability, learning and legacy planning across the programme.
- f) The programme remains in a positive delivery position, with strong evidence of partnership commitment, public engagement and strategic alignment with National Park Partnership Plan objectives. Continued strategic oversight and targeted management intervention within higher risk areas will be important to maintaining delivery confidence over the remainder of 2026.

David Clyne

davidclyne@cairngorms.co.uk

14 May 2026