



For discussion

**Title: Cairngorms 2030 programme update: quarter two 2026
(April to June)**

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

Recommendations

The Board 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 Q2 2026 (see Annex 1 for component project Red Amber Green (RAG) status).

Performance Measure	Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status			Issue/mitigation
	Q2 26 (current)	Q2 trend	Q3 26 (expected)	
Programme risk profile	Green		Green	- Programme level risk remains Green. - The principal areas requiring active management are Transport Scotland funding uncertainty and the new Amber position for Nature Recovery and Peatland Restoration.
Delivery of Transport Scotland funded projects	Amber		Amber	- Transport Scotland funding for 2026/27 remains unconfirmed and there is no confirmed date for notification despite continued engagement, including at Chief Executive level. - The uncertainty continues to affect delivery sequencing, partner confidence and the ability to move several infrastructure projects from design into construction. - Project teams are progressing design, approvals and preparatory activity wherever possible while the funding decision remains outstanding.
Nature Recovery and Peatland projects	Amber		Green	- Nature Recovery has moved from Green to Amber because woodland projects have not yet been confirmed. - The main issue is the gap between available public funding and the actual cost of technically challenging woodland schemes, creating financial liability for landowners.



Performance Measure	Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status			Issue/mitigation
	Q2 26 (current)	Q2 trend	Q3 26 (expected)	
				- Confirmed projects, costs and approval expected end September 2026 when RAG status moves back to green. - Peatland Restoration has been assessed as Amber due to operational risks arising from the July wildfire and associated delivery uncertainty. The project remains on track to achieve its annual outputs through active contingency planning and identification of substitute sites where required. - Discussions with project teams give confidence that work is on track to address all issues and return project to green by end September, hence positive forward risk profile.
Future funding profile	Amber		Amber	- Future risk remains Amber because Transport Scotland funding and several partner match funding streams remain unresolved. - The programme cash flow will be updated following confirmation of transport and landscape funding decisions.
Finance: impact on Park Authority budget management	Green		Green	- No significant impact on the Park Authority budget is currently identified. - Potential implications remain within the total agreed programme budget and will be managed through re-profiling and formal change control where required.



Performance Measure	Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status			Issue/mitigation
	Q2 26 (current)	Q2 trend	Q3 26 (expected)	
Procurement	Green		Green	Procurement activity remains in place and is being managed through the agreed programme processes.
Staffing	Green		Green	No programme wide staffing risk is currently identified, although communications capacity will require active management during wildfire response and planned staff changes in Q3 and Q4.

Note:

- a) Q2 2026 risks present the assessed risk status as at end of the quarter.
- b) Q2 2026 trend presents the direction of risk drivers and influencers impacting risk assessment over the quarter.
- c) Q3 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. The programme risk level remains Green.
5. Transport Scotland funded projects:
 - a) The most significant programme delivery risk remains uncertainty over Transport Scotland funding. At the time of writing, 2026/27 funding has not been confirmed, and no date has been provided for notification, despite continued engagement including at Chief Executive level. This uncertainty affects Active Communities projects and limits the programme's ability to confirm delivery sequencing and move infrastructure projects from design into construction.



- b) Mitigation during Q3 will continue to focus on progressing next stage design preparation and lower risk activity wherever possible, while maintaining senior engagement and preparing options for reprioritisation once the funding position is confirmed.

6. Nature Recovery woodland and grazing projects:

- a) Nature Recovery has moved to Amber because of delays in confirming the proposed woodland and conservation grazing projects. The principal issue is the affordability of technically challenging woodland schemes and the gap between available public funding and actual delivery costs. Landowner agreement remains dependent on resolving financial liability and identifying an approach that delivers sufficient ecological value. The position now requires urgent decision making on the preferred project or projects, potential scope adjustment and any reallocation of the Nature Recovery budget. Formal NLHF approval is required before revised delivery arrangements can proceed.

7. Cairngorms wildfire and climate resilience:

- a) The significant Cairngorms wildfire in July 2026 occurred after the Q2 reporting period but has affected programme operations and communications capacity and at the start of Q3. It has also provided a clear and immediate reminder of the increasing climate risks facing the National Park.
- b) The wildfire has resulted in Peatland Restoration moving to Amber. While procurement, grant awards and project development continue to progress well, assessments are underway to determine whether any planned restoration sites have been affected, whether substitute sites will be required, and whether there is ongoing land management appetite for peatland restoration in the context of competing priorities.
- c) The incident reinforces the relevance of C2030 investment in peatland restoration, woodland and habitat resilience, climate resilient catchments, sustainable land management, community preparedness and climate engagement. Care will be taken not to overstate direct causal links between individual projects and wildfire prevention, while recognising that the programme is responding to current and emerging climate impacts rather than distant theoretical risks.



Supporting information: theme and programme wide highlights

Restoring and enhancing landscapes.

8. Delivery across the Restoring and Enhancing Landscapes theme remains strategically strong, with extensive partnership activity supporting landscape scale climate, biodiversity and resilience outcomes across the National Park. Five projects are Green, while Nature Recovery and Peatland Restoration are Amber. Both Amber projects have active mitigation in place and remain deliverable within the programme.
- a) Woodland Expansion remained Green. Dalnamein phase two planting, community forestry training and website content were completed. Aspen survey activity has been adjusted to use additional paid survey capacity following internal GIS delays, protecting the wider delivery timetable.
 - b) Nature Recovery moved to Amber because of delays confirming woodland and grazing projects. Deer larder and rural skills work continue to progress well.
 - c) Cairngorms Future Farming continued to perform strongly, with regenerative transition support, scenario modelling, pilot farm monitoring and Groundswell activity progressing.
 - d) Climate Resilient Catchments remained Green. Upper Dee is moving towards construction, while Slugain Burn and Ballater have experienced design and sequencing changes that are being actively managed.
 - e) Green Finance and Community Wealth Building continued to develop community benefit plans at Dorback, Dalnacardoch and Glen Prosen, while strengthening learning, policy influence and legacy planning.
 - f) Landscape and Communities maintained good engagement momentum and generated a substantial volume of high-quality data from a broader demographic range than anticipated.
 - g) Peatland Restoration moved to Amber. Procurement and project development continued to progress well, with Park Authority led projects and external grant awards creating a strong pipeline of works. The Amber rating reflects operational risks arising from the July wildfire, planning constraints and site availability rather than delivery performance.



Empowerment

9. All Empowerment projects remain Green. The theme is increasingly demonstrating how Cairngorms 2030 is moving beyond consultation towards community leadership, shared decision making and lasting organisational change.
- a) Effective Community Engagement completed the participatory democracy panel process and continued embedding engagement systems, training and innovative approaches across the organisation.
 - b) Climate Learning and Education delivered strong activity across partner schools, including volunteer action days, outdoor learning, the travelling gallery and practical climate projects.
 - c) Climate Conscious Communities continued to support climate hubs, local groups and climate cafes, adapting from formal hub meetings towards direct engagement where this has proved more effective.
 - d) Community Arts and Culture made strong progress towards establishing the Cairngorms Creative Collective as an independent community interest company, alongside residencies, workshops and the Inside Out collaboration.
 - e) The Community Managed Climate Grants co-design phase was completed successfully, with the panel agreeing the delivery model and the programme moving into implementation.
 - f) The planned launch of the Community Fund was delayed by approximately one month because of the July wildfire, protecting community capacity, communications quality and the integrity of the co-design process. However, this delay is not sufficiently significant to warrant a change in project risk profile

Transforming transport

10. The Transforming Transport theme remains Amber. Delivery continues to move steadily from planning into implementation, but funding uncertainty and infrastructure sequencing continue to affect confidence across three of the four projects.
- a) Cycle Friendly Cairngorms remained Green, with continued progress on cycle hubs, grant awards, cargo bikes, mapping and procurement.
 - b) Active Communities remained Amber. Delays continue to be driven by external funding decisions, planning, land acquisition and design sequencing, with mitigation actively managed.



- c) Sustainable Transport remained Amber following a necessary refocusing from a broad set of aspirational concepts towards a smaller number of deliverable interventions.
- d) Changing Travel Behaviours continued to deliver strong Bike Bus, workplace cycling and community activity despite the loss of HITRANS funding linked to Transport Scotland reductions.
- e) The theme is becoming more integrated, with growing links between infrastructure, cycle hubs, behaviour change and community activity. The principal constraint remains the absence of a confirmed Transport Scotland funding decision or notification timetable.

Health and wellbeing

- 11. Both Health and Wellbeing projects remain Green and continue to demonstrate mature delivery, strong partnership working and growing potential for national influence.
 - a) Public Health and the Outdoors continued to strengthen nature referral pathways, provider guidance, safeguarding arrangements, GP engagement and communications.
 - b) The Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre delivered 28 therapeutic nature-based activities with 278 attendances during the quarter.
 - c) The projects are increasingly embedding nature-based health approaches within mainstream services while developing transferable guidance, referral systems and communities of practice.
 - d) The theme is increasingly demonstrating how climate, nature, inclusion and preventative health outcomes can be delivered together through practical partnership working.

Stakeholder engagement

Communications

- 12. Communications activity during Q2 continued to support strong visibility and engagement across the programme. The team provided coordinated press, digital, print, film and project support across all four themes.
 - a) Thirteen pieces of media coverage achieved a combined estimated reach of just over 1.2 million.
 - b) Thirty dedicated C2030 social media posts generated 18,663 engagements.



- c) The summer Cairn magazine included ten C2030 features covering peatland, river restoration, farming, travel, green health, community benefits, climate cafes, cycle hubs, the Community Fund and climate learning.
- d) Four Cairngorms Voices blogs were published during the quarter.
 - i. From ambition to reality - the Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund – an update on the progress of the Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund panel (C2030 Community Fund).
 - ii. Prescribing nature: Dr Mary Cauldbeck on green health – a blog from Dr Cauldbeck, one of the GP's supporting nature prescriptions (Public health and the outdoors).
 - iii. Paving the way to better transport – a roundup blog on Transport work both completed and in progress (Transforming transport).
 - iv. Shetland learnings – a blog from Peatland ACTION Project Officer on peatland restoration in both Shetland and the Cairngorms National Park (Peatland restoration).
- e) There were two proactive press releases during this period.
 - i. Cairngorms 2030 drop-in event for Laggan and Dalwhinnie communities - Promotion of a roadshow event run by our engagement team for people living and working in Laggan and Dalwhinnie.
 - ii. Blair Atholl community invited to Cairngorms 2030 drop-in event - Promotion of a roadshow event run by our engagement team for people living and working in Blair Atholl.
- f) The peatland “anti AI, pro bog” social media post reached almost 170,000 views, with 87 per cent of views from non-followers, demonstrating the value of creative and audience-led communications.
- g) Planned staffing changes in the communications team may reduce capacity during Q3 and Q4 and will require active prioritisation.

Knowledge exchange and research

- 13. The Knowledge Exchange and Research project remains Green and continues to provide monitoring, evaluation, research and learning support across the programme.
 - a) Specific evaluation plans were developed and implemented for the Community Fund design phase and regenerative transition support for farmers.



- b) Monitoring and reporting resources continued to be developed with delivery partners and project teams.
- c) The programme contributed to a University of Edinburgh MSc field course attended by 20 students from 14 countries, focused on partnership working and relationships of trust and purpose.
- d) Planning continued for internal and external knowledge exchange activity, including the National Parks UK conference.
- e) The embedded PhD student has taken a short interruption of studies for personal reasons. The delay is being actively managed and there is flexibility within the programme timetable.
- f) With most monitoring systems now established, the focus is beginning to shift towards analysing evidence, identifying patterns, sharing learning and preparing the programme evaluation and legacy approach.

Volunteer activity

14. Q2 was the strongest quarter for direct volunteering delivery since C2030 reporting began in 2024.
- a) 23 Volunteer Rangers contributed 114 hours directly to C2030 projects, more than double the Q1 total.
 - b) Nine funded or linked public sessions generated 362 volunteering hours.
 - c) The Cairngorms Environmental Volunteers Festival brought together 27 volunteers from nine organisations and provided valuable direct feedback on barriers to participation.
 - d) The Volunteer Experience Programme delivered events with carers, trauma recovery and sexual violence support organisations, with further sessions planned.
 - e) Peatland volunteering has been prepared safely and is expected to begin once protected waders have left the site.
 - f) The emerging Volunteering Voices approach will capture volunteer journeys, feedback, skill sharing, wellbeing and sense of belonging as part of the programme legacy.

Staffing and recruitment

- a) There were no changes to the core NLHF funded programme staff complement during Q2.



- b) An NLHF change request was submitted to extend the employment contract of the project manager for Green Finance and Community Wealth Building project. This Scottish Land Commission managed post will be extended by two years until the end of the programme.
- c) Planned communications team changes will require prioritisation of programme support during Q3 and Q4, but do not currently represent a programme-wide staffing risk.

Governance

- 15. Programme governance and partnership arrangements continue to function effectively. The programme is increasingly focused on moving from delivery set-up towards evidence, learning, legacy and long-term stewardship.
 - a) The Community Fund co-design process has concluded successfully and provides a strong example of participatory governance. The agreed model is now being embedded into Park Authority processes before the Fund opens.
 - b) Monitoring and evaluation systems continue to strengthen, with more project specific evaluation plans in place and increasing use of evidence to inform delivery and improvement.
 - c) Cross-theme collaboration continues to increase, particularly between engagement, community grants, arts, climate action, communications, volunteering and knowledge exchange.
 - d) During Q3 the programme will also be agreeing the scope and timing of an independent Mid Programme Review. The review will assess programme governance, delivery, financial management, benefits realisation and reporting arrangements, providing assurance to the Board and identifying opportunities to strengthen delivery during the second half of the programme.

Budget and cash flow

- 16. The programme cash flow continues to be actively managed. Several funding streams remain subject to confirmation, most significantly Transport Scotland funding and the funding package for Nature Recovery woodland interventions.
 - a) No significant impact on the Park Authority budget is currently identified. Any required budget reallocation will be managed through programme governance and formal NLHF change control.



- b) Despite the delay confirming the Nature Recovery woodland options we are confident the proposals will be finalised in Q3 26 and deliver additional match funding into the programme.
- c) Highlands and Islands Enterprise are nearing completion of approval for a £600,000 funding package. Subject to final approval, this will contribute £500,000 towards Cycle Friendly Cairngorms delivery and £100,000 towards development of proposals for a new Park and Ride facility in Aviemore. This will strengthen delivery of the Transport theme and provide additional match funding for programme objectives.

Legal agreements

17. Legal agreements and grant arrangements progressed during the quarter, including work related to deer larders, climate resilient catchments, cycle hubs and community benefit plans. Outstanding agreements continue to be tracked through programme governance.

Programme delivery actions for quarter three 2026

18. Restoring and enhancing landscapes
- a) Confirm the preferred Nature Recovery woodland interventions and secure NLHF approval.
 - b) Progress the Dalnacardoch conservation grazing proposal and confirm revised delivery timescales.
 - c) Begin Upper Dee ground works and associated monitoring and engagement activity.
 - d) Complete Slugain Burn cost review and progress land management and contract arrangements.
 - e) Continue regenerative farming support, scenario modelling, monitoring and knowledge exchange.
 - f) Progress community benefit plans and the proposed completion and legacy phase for Green Finance and Community Wealth Building.
 - g) Progress Peatland Restoration procurement, contractor mobilisation and grant awards, while confirming wildfire impacts and implementing contingency sites where required.



19. Empowerment

- a) Embed the Community Fund co-design model into Park Authority processes and launch the first funding tier when wildfire-related communications and community capacity allow.
- b) Recruit and train the Community Fund decision-making panel.
- c) Continue school and outdoor learning delivery for the 2026/27 academic year.
- d) Progress Cairngorms Creative Collective registration, governance and autumn public workshop activity.
- e) Continue organisational engagement training, innovation testing and support to project teams.

20. Transforming transport

- a) Continue senior engagement to secure confirmation of Transport Scotland funding and a clear notification timetable.
- b) Progress deliverable design, approvals and procurement preparation while funding remains unresolved.
- c) Confirm the coordinated Cycle Friendly Cairngorms hub network scope and budget, with the hub-to-hub option as the initial delivery focus.
- d) Continue Bike Bus, workplace cycling and behaviour change delivery and consolidate the most deliverable Sustainable Transport interventions.

21. Health and wellbeing

- a) Continue strengthening nature referral pathways and GP engagement.
- b) Develop a long-term research proposal, in collaboration with NHS Highland, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Glasgow School of Art (GSA) Rural Lab and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) Highland Wildlife Park, to evidence the social and economic benefits of investing in outdoor health programmes.
- c) Progress national learning resources and communities of practice linked to outdoor dementia and green health.
- d) Develop longer term sustainability and scaling options across health board areas.

22. Programme-wide activity

- a) Begin detailed communications legacy planning and continue programme storytelling and film production.



- b) Finalise the C2030 Volunteering Strategy and begin Volunteering Voices delivery.
- c) Complete Community Fund design evaluation and develop cycle hub monitoring arrangements.
- d) Use the year three programme review and emerging evidence to shape close, learning and legacy planning.

Significant budget adjustments

- 23. No significant budget adjustment was approved during Q2. Potential changes associated with Nature Recovery and transport will be brought forward through the agreed programme and NLHF change control processes when the funding position is sufficiently clear.

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic Review

- 24. In conclusion, the following key operational programme risks under management are drawn to the Boards attention:
 - a) The C2030 programme continued to make good progress during Q2. Most projects remain on track, with significant milestones achieved across all four themes. A small number of strategic issues require continued attention, but these do not currently affect confidence in overall programme delivery.
 - 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 the remainder of 2026.
 - d) Alongside project delivery, the programme is increasingly strengthening the systems, partnerships and evidence that will support long term legacy beyond the delivery phase.
 - 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. Launching the C2030 Communities Fund.
- vi. Strengthening long term sustainability, learning and legacy planning across the programme.

25. The programme remains in a good position. The focus for the next quarter will be on confirming key funding decisions, progressing major capital projects into delivery, responding to the recommendations of the Mid Programme Review and maintaining delivery momentum across all four themes.

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