



For discussion

**Title: Cairngorms 2030 programme update: quarter four 2025
(October – December)**

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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 October to December 2025, and updated where appropriate to reflect current position as at the time of writing, and the planned work to end March 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 Quarter (Q)4 2025 (see Annex 1 for component project Red Amber Green (RAG) status).



Performance Measure	Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status			Issue / mitigation
	Q4 2025 (current)	Q3 trend	Q1 2026 (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"> Active Communities project level risk remains at Amber. Amber RAG status reflects annual budgeting constraints and the timing challenge of delivering the current design phase of the Active Communities projects by end of financial year 2025/26. Project scope change has been agreed in Aviemore (no segregated cycle path on Grampian Road) due to technical and community feedback. Project specific steering and risk management group proving effective in assessing and escalating issues for resolution. Transport theme position statement submitted (see Annex 2) to NLHF seeking approval for project changes to accommodate technical and community feedback.
Future funding profile	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future funding risk remains green.



Performance Measure	Red-Amber-Green (RAG) status			Issue/mitigation
	Q4 25 (current)	Q4 trend	Q1 26 (expected)	
Finance: Impact on Park Authority budget management	Green		Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No significant impact current or projected in 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.

4. Note:
- Q4 2025 risks present the assessed risk status as at end of the quarter.
 - Q4 2025 trend presents the direction of risk drivers and influencers impacting risk assessment over the quarter.
 - Q1 2026 expected risk levels give a sense of where we currently expect risks to land in final assessment at the end of March 2026 should current management and risk mitigation actions impact on risk as planned.

Key risks

- Programme risk level remains at green.
- The key delivery risk: Transport Scotland funded Active Communities projects.



- a) Amber RAG status reflects the timing challenge of delivering the Active Communities Projects by end of the financial year.
- b) Amber RAG status will likely be retained for the next financial year.
- c) Risk mitigation measures have been introduced including new project governance structures and risk escalation procedures which are proving effective.
- d) Review of the Aviemore concept design against the topographical survey shows unequivocally that there is not enough space for a bidirectional cycle path without substantial land take, mature tree removal, and carriageway realignment. Such significant considerations will not be achievable within the life of the programme, but the findings will inform future road corridor improvement plans and will be passed to the Highland Council for future capital investment consideration.
- e) Aviemore and Vicinity Community Council (AVCC) do not support designs which include a segregated cycle path on Grampian Road and favour public realm and pedestrian access improvements.
- f) The Active communities steering group has therefore agreed to remove the cycle path from the Aviemore concept design, and proceed with a project which instead focuses on walking and wheelchair provision by:
 - i. Widening and improving the existing pavement.
 - ii. Focusing on public realm enhancement.
 - iii. Focusing on bus stop integration.
 - iv. North of Dalfaber Drive only: providing a shared use path adjacent to Grampian Road to enhance a short stretch of Speyside Way which plugs a gap between further built-up area route developments and the start point of the Aviemore to Carrbridge non-motorised user route that Transport Scotland will deliver via the A9 dualling programme.
 - v. Introducing additional traffic calming measures on the main carriageway.
 - vi. Developing an alternative cycle friendly route on Dalfaber Road.
- g) A project change request paper (Annex 2) outlining these risks and mitigations has been approved by NLHF.



Supporting information; theme lead highlights

Restoring and enhancing landscapes

7. All projects at RAG status green.

8. Woodland expansion:
 - a) Delivery of the woodland expansion project will be completed in full, with all planned hectares successfully planted. The total cost of delivery has however been significantly lower than anticipated, around 50 percent below the original budget estimate. This variance reflects both efficient delivery and the fact that initial planting cost assumptions were higher than ultimately required. While this represents good value for money, it has also resulted in an underspend that affects the wider programme's planned match funding profile (see page 20 paragraph 55: Significant Budget Adjustments for more details).
 - b) Alba Explorers Angus Glens Tree Nursery grant award issued.

9. Peatland restoration:
 - a) Over 1,600 hectares (ha) of Peatland will be restored in 2025/26, exceeding the 1,300ha target for C2030 and we are on track to deliver 1,700ha by March 2026.
 - b) Recruitment for a Project Officer is underway, taking the number of Project Officers up to five.
 - c) There has been significant pipeline development work completed to secure the programme for 2026.

10. Nature recovery:
 - a) Project proposals focused within the West Grampian Deer Management Group (DMG) area have been approved in principle by NLHF. These include:
 - i. Community deer larder strategy (approved).
 - ii. Three proposals for new community deer larders proposed in Glen Clova (approved), Atholl (approved) and potentially Mar Area (in development).
 - iii. A future rural skills programme is in development, focusing on co-design with land managers of a training programme that will support land management businesses transition toward future business plans addressing climate change and retaining rural employment. Following



codesign, the project will coordinate delivery of the agreed training programme.

- iv. Woodland expansion targeted at strategic corridors to develop key woodland habitat network connections between the Tay, Dee and Spey River catchments.
- v. Upland grazing for conservation will be trialled at Dalnacardoch.

11. Future farming:

- a) Substantial progress has been made this quarter on developing ways of working with more farmers in the National Park.
- b) Detailed plans have been made around the consultant procurement and farmer recruitment processes for two Support Packages (scenario modelling and regenerative transition) which will be advertised in Q1 2026.
- c) Work with the pilot farms continues with Atholl putting in water infrastructure to allow regenerative grazing across a large swathe of land to lower inputs, improve field ecology and soil quality.
- d) Tullochgorum is also in the process of improving water infrastructure for a similar aim and hosted a very well attended and successful knowledge exchange event in November.
- e) Rhindu has done further work on herd health this quarter with an aim to improve calving efficacy to reduce carbon emissions and is looking into virtual fencing collars to improve grazing.
- f) Planning with Clury for year three is ongoing, with virtual fencing collars under consideration for improving the condition of a raised bog by sensitive grazing.
- g) Progress this quarter has set the project up well for the start of 2026 with further progress expected on the existing pilot farms and the Support Packages announced and open to application from farmers across the National Park.

12. Climate resilient catchments:

- a) Key activities and milestones have been achieved across all three sub-projects this quarter.
- b) The Upper Dee groundworks contract was advertised under open competition with bids received and evaluated by a team of project staff and experienced partners. Formal award expected February 2026.



- c) The detailed design is nearly complete for the Slugain Burn project, with most technical design drawings and related documents (eg flood risk assessments and planning drawings) received, with the final few due early January for review and sign off by the project team. The project officer has also liaised in detail with Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) about the project this quarter to minimise any issues granting consents. The build costs will be reviewed once all design documents are received to determine whether it is still in budget.
- d) The Ballater flood resilience project has been formalised with a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and a grant has been awarded to support the high-level modelling of flood resilience options around Ballater. Additionally, the project lead and community partners worked with the communications team to develop a short film around the project.

13. Community benefits from nature investment:

- a) This has been a positive developing story; Annabel Davidson-Knight, Community Benefits from Nature Adviser, has engaged well with all three communities and is now developing events to discuss the core issues around benefits with them and the estates.
- b) So far, the project has shown that this facilitation role is time consuming though very productive, with all three cases showing progress. The adaptation in approach being tested for additional estates is significant as it should show how to undertake this role with more limited time and people resource.
- c) Feedback from Dalnacardoch Estate highlights how much this project is valued by them and how much it is supporting their direct engagement with their communities. They said that they would not be anywhere near as advanced in their plans without it.

14. Landscape and communities:

- a) The Landscape and communities project progressed well in Q4, particularly in collaborative planning of community engagement methods and activities, and with the launch of the C2030 landscape survey in November 2025. This survey will continue to be rolled out gradually during 2026 (to reduce consultation fatigue and enable tailoring to engage with underrepresented communities) and has been developed to be used in



different ways to suit different people, for example online or in-person, and using text, map marking and / or uploading of images.

- b) Community engagement for the landscape and communities project occurred at several events, taking opportunities to combine with others, such as at a roadshow in Aviemore, winter festival in Ballater and a health walk in Tomintoul.
- c) Collaboration has taken place with several other C2030 projects during the quarter, for example exploring how to Input the nature prescriptions welcome pack with the Green Health team and holding a discussion with practitioners on the Cairngorms Creative Directory with the Arts and Culture team and procurement staff.
- d) Cross team collaboration has also included working with the volunteering and ranger teams to strengthen existing links with communities and share 'on the ground' experience.

Empowerment

15. All projects at RAG status green.

16. Wellbeing economy:

- a) Activities related to wellbeing economy indicators were delivered by project and partner staff across the programme.
- b) Systems for capturing this activity and translating it into C2030's contributions to a wellbeing economy have developed and are summarised to date in the C2030 Wellbeing economy review for 2025.

17. Effective community engagement:

- a) The Ballater Winter Festival has become a winter staple and once again our presence was appreciated by the local community.
- b) The Aviemore roadshow combined the learnings and tested approaches of the previous two years and came together into a great event, with a range of information styles, creative activity, options for children, demographic data gathering and of course key consultations for the public to connect with.
- c) We also had our final project wrap up meeting with Agnessa Spanellis, of the University of Edinburgh, regarding the gamification work which is now complete.



- d) The team have been researching other ideas for innovative engagement methods that would be valuable to test through C2030 over the last quarter and presented these ideas at the end of the year. Next quarter, we plan to interrogate these options and establish the next method for testing.
- e) The team have also been developing and improving monitoring systems to avoid over-consulting communities and to streamline communications across the organisation.
- f) We have been mapping engagement plans for 2026 across the organisation and planning next year's engagement needs to complement these.

18. Climate learning and education:

- a) Newtonmore Primary School: Delivered two Ranger-led sessions on National Park special qualities and River Spey habitats, which marked the first direct engagement with the school in several years. Activity partly inspired by two pupils who successfully campaigned for “Duck Crossing” signs on the high street.
- b) Speyside High School: Project lead presented a whole-school update to encourage broader staff involvement and integration of C2030 activities across more departments.
- c) Kingussie High School: School initiated an 18-month project to build a traditional Canadian kit canoe to explore the River Spey's cultural and historical significance. The project involves technical staff, local craftspeople, historians, and community groups. Launch planned for spring 2027, with consideration of how the project will be documented.
- d) Aboyne and Alford Schools: Ongoing meetings this quarter to finalise and formalise their C2030 activity plans for spring 2026, the key delivery phase.

19. Climate conscious communities:

- a) Event delivery so far is steady, and future work scoping additional delivery alongside the more localised climate action groups in collaboration with the regional climate hubs.

20. Community arts and culture:

- a) Volunteer interim board established:



- i. Four volunteers appointed as interim board members.
 - ii. Held first meeting and allocated tasks focused on researching governance models, required policy documents, insurance, and banking arrangements.
 - iii. Work supported by Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS).
- b) Pledge, Process, Planet touring exhibition delivered:
 - i. Hosted at Iona Gallery (Kingussie) and St Margaret's (Braemar) with two workshops at each venue.
 - ii. Activity enabled through £5,000 grant funding from the Cairngorms Trust.
 - iii. 223 visitors attended across both venues; 29 participants took part in workshops led by National Park based creatives paid at Scottish Artist Union (SAU) rates.
- c) Creative workshops delivered:
 - i. Topics included unmapped place names, art and Dùthchas, and natural-ink tree-based workshops.
 - ii. Strong positive written feedback recorded at both venues.
 - iii. An e-zine catalogue has been produced as a legacy resource.
- d) Procurement Workshop with Landscape Values project:
 - i. Nine creatives attended a session exploring how to encourage wider participation in creative tendering.
 - ii. Discussion covered procurement processes, alternative models, communications, and language.
 - iii. Insights will inform future Park Authority tender documents and commissioning approaches.
- e) The establishment of the volunteer interim board is a major step forward in the overall process, exemplifying the shift in power from being Park Authority led to being much more community led. This project is an excellent example of a project moving across the co-design spectrum.

21. Community managed climate grants:

- a) A busy quarter developing communications materials and planning partner engagement funding codesign panel.
- b) Recruitment for the fund's co-design panel was launched on 07 January and over 150 applications have been received to date. Target is 250-300.



- c) Next quarter will include recruitment and selection of the codesign panel, with the panel formed by end of March / early April 2026 and beginning their training and delivery of their workplan on codesign of the fund between April and June 2026.

Transport

22. Active communities:

- a) Project remains at RAG amber status
- b) Progressing developed design and community engagement for Aviemore and Boat of Garten.
- c) Aviemore scope change agreed by steering group: removal of segregated cycle path on Grampian Road. Topographical survey highlighted there was insufficient road space and community council feedback was not supportive. Focus will now be on active travel improvements for walking and improved public realm designs.
- d) Work to shape scope of work for Nethy Bridge and Newtonmore continues.
- e) Preparations for making funding requests for detailed design deliverables in 2026.

23. Changing travel behaviours:

- a) Agreement to continue bike buses to primary schools, family rides and cycle confidence-building rides in Badenoch and Strathspey is a significant achievement for the programme, reflecting strong community and media support.
- b) Finalising the contract extension with The Strathspey Pedal Initiative (SPIN) Project provides a positive and secure start to delivery into 2026.
- c) The programme's legacy is already taking shape through the training of an additional eight bike bus volunteers as Cycle Ride Leaders. This ongoing capacity-building of community-led ride leaders is essential to sustaining long-term success.
- d) The 2026 Workplace Cycling Project shows strong potential and is expected to deliver positive outcomes for everyday journeys to work.
- e) Effective partnerships with organisations including Cairngorms Connect, The SPIN Project and The Highland Council remain a key strength.
- f) Communications have been particularly successful, with the launch of a film showcasing The SPIN Project's work with C2030 and HITRANS, alongside



positive local media coverage highlighting the success of the Badenoch and Strathspey bike bus.

24. Cycle friendly Cairngorms:

- a) Delivery has progressed on the projects supported by the 2025 Cycling Friendly Infrastructure grant awards in Ballater and Blair Atholl. These investments form key components of the longer-term development of the Park's cycle hub network.
- b) Procurement plans to select preferred suppliers for e-bike charging and cycle parking is in progress and will be published in February 2026.

25. Sustainable transport

- a) The project's focus will primarily focus on design and construction of Ballater mobility hub and Aviemore / Glenmore sustainable transport improvements to add value to the Active Communities and Cycle Friendly Communities projects
- b) These more focussed deliverables release uncommitted funds for investment in an on-street Hitrans Hi-Bikes e-bike fleet in Aviemore as part of the Cycling Friendly Cairngorms project.

Health and Wellbeing

26. All projects at RAG status green.

27. Public health and the outdoors:

- a) A very successful and fruitful quarter to end the year on. Significant progress has been made in raising awareness of the project through communications and increased face to face contact with healthcare professionals leading to an increase in referrals.
- b) The team have also done some great work in developing new initiatives particularly the Festival for All that looked at innovative ways of helping people with mobility and access issues connect more meaningfully with nature.

28. Outdoor dementia resource centre:

- a) Continuing inspirational work from the team has continued this quarter.



- b) The move into the wider field of brain health is an exciting and innovative addition to the activity programme and an opportunity to work with a wider audience across Badenoch and Strathspey.

Stakeholder engagement

Communications

- 29. Press releases
 - a) There was one proactive press release during this period, promoting the launch of the Active communities Aviemore consultation.
 - b) Help shape safer travel around Aviemore.
 - c) There was one partner press release during this period from Bothy Project, launching the new artist residency opportunity (Community arts and culture).
 - d) Applications open for C2030 arts residency.

- 30. Cairn magazine articles (note three issues per year, distributed to over 12,000 households and all 18,000 residents in the National Park). Cairn hit doorsteps in the first week of December, featuring an update on the deer larder (Nature recovery), school murals (Climate learning and education) and the Aviemore active travel development consultation (Active communities). The magazine also featured the YMCA climate festival (Climate conscious communities) and work on the Dee River restoration (Climate resilient catchments). [You can read the latest edition here.](#)

- 31. Cairngorms Voices (online blog / photo stories)
 - a) There were four online blogs posted this quarter featuring Cairngorms 2030 projects:
 - i. [Finding 'win-win-wins' in farming](#) – a feature on the C2030 future farming project, what has been learned so far and the opportunities ahead (Cairngorms future farming).
 - ii. [The Cairngorms artistic movement inspiring change](#) – an interview with artist Clare Waddle on the power of art to inspire conversation and community action (Community arts and culture).
 - iii. [In conversation with Dr Annabel Everard](#) – an interview with Annabel Everard about her role in peatland restoration (Peatland restoration).



- iv. [The science of peatlands](#) – a blog sharing more about peatland restoration work is like on that ground (Peatland restoration).

32. Social media:

- a) Social media activity in this period continued with a total of 16 posts that kept C2030 present on our social media channels.
- b) Total engagements - that is people who have liked, shared, watched and interacted with materials - of all C2030 activity across social media: 9,991.
- c) Engagements are down 77% due to the spike last quarter from views of the Glenkilrie larder film (Nature recovery).

33. Other online / offline activity:

- a) Bothy Project residency announcement (Community arts and culture).
- b) Aviemore and Boat of Garten active travel consultations (Active communities).
- c) Farming events and workshops (Cairngorms future farming).
- d) Interviews with members of the Cairngorms creatives network (Community arts and culture).
- e) Promotion of a film covering the SPIN Projects work with local young people (Cycle friendly Cairngorms).
- f) Working with videographers Cairn Media on the production of several films following C2030 projects. Specifically coordinating the production of a storm covering river restoration and Storm Frank (Climate resilient catchments).
- g) Assisting with posters, displays and promotional materials for engagement and project promotional activity, including the Aviemore winter roadshow and Ballater winter festival (Effective community engagement).
- h) Collaborating with the Transport Team, Alan Jones Associates and Mott MacDonald on communications and engagement on the Active Aviemore project (Active Communities).
- i) Collaboration on the C2030 2025 summary leaflet – including statistics and procurement efforts.
- j) Commission of peatland photography, following the team and restoration with photographer Clare Jones.



34. Communications actions in next quarter:
- a) Publication of film focusing on the Cairngorms future farming project (Cairngorms future farming).
 - b) Publication of film covering the aftermath of Storm Frank and River Dee restoration (Climate resilient catchments).
 - c) Launch of the C2030 communities fund (C2030 Communities Fund).
 - d) Continued support and promotion of community engagement events (Effective community engagement).
 - e) Social media reel following Fèis Spè and their work with Edinburgh University researchers.
 - f) Working with social media influencers to promote travel by public transport (Sustainable transport).
 - g) Publication and printing of the C2030 2025 summary leaflet.
 - h) Production of leaflets for nature prescriptions project (Public health and the outdoors).

Knowledge and Research Exchange

35. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation:
- a) Supported individual projects with resources to capture information from project participants, feedback from events and monitor activity delivered by grant recipients and delivery partners.
 - b) Supported project leads to complete end of year reports and milestone planning.
 - c) Development work with theme leads and communications colleagues for year two summary report.
36. PhD Studentship:
- a) PhD student is midway through his first phase of fieldwork, focussing on how governance practices and narratives of empowerment emerge through delivery of the programme.
 - b) Knowledge Exchange Officer continued with supervision responsibilities and attended the School of Social and Political Sciences supervisor briefing and update in December.
37. Team review day:
- a) A team review day for 2025 was planned and delivered at the end of November with input from the programme team and external evaluation



consultants Urban Foresight. Information was collected from project leads and theme leads to inform ongoing programme delivery and evaluation.

38. Conference attendance:

- a) Six staff members attended five conferences.

39. Other work areas:

- a) Responding to student / research enquiries: responded to 11 enquiries in the past quarter, 36 since May. Most of these come for UK / EU students, mostly postgraduate level researcher enquiries or postgraduate placement requests (from one – 12 months), which at this stage, we are unable to host. Knowledge Exchange Officer investigating whether there is scope to bring in doctoral researchers on three-month placements across directorates.
- b) A discussion paper featuring C2030 as a case study was published in the British Academy's Place-sensitive understandings of nature recovery publications, supporting knowledge exchange between the Cairngorms and neighbouring catchment scale work by the Findhorn Watershed Initiative.
- c) Presented summary of Britain Talks Climate and Nature report at programme delivery team meeting.
- d) Attended the Just Transition summit 2025 in Edinburgh, showcasing C2030 as one of the pioneering projects putting just transition into action.

40. Volunteer activity:

- a) 13 individual Volunteer Rangers have been directly involved in C2030 projects this quarter, contributing a total of 58 volunteer hours. All hours were delivered through sessions at the Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre. This represents a decrease of 17.5 hours compared with Q3 2025, but an increase on Q4 2023, which aligns with the expected seasonal dip associated with the Christmas period.
- b) 25 members of the public created a CERVIS volunteer account during this timeframe.
- c) No new Volunteer Rangers were recruited this quarter; however, recruitment and training are ongoing. 12 new Volunteer Rangers are expected to complete training in Q1 2026. Of the current cohort of 88 Volunteer Rangers, 52 contributed volunteer time during Q4 across the programme.



- d) Volunteer Ranger support at the Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre continues, with C2030-linked volunteering hours increasing compared to similar activity levels last winter. This improvement is likely due to a higher number of 'Dementia Friends' trained Volunteer Rangers and a broader range of volunteering opportunities offered by the Centre.
- e) No additional volunteering activity took place within the Cycle Friendly Cairngorms project this quarter due to the expiry of the SPIN contract. Activity is expected to resume in Q1 2026.

Staffing and recruitment

- 41. No staffing changes within the NLHF funded staff complement.
- 42. One Park Authority employed Peatland Officer resigned and will be replaced.
- 43. C2030 staff project review and evaluation day held on 26 November.

Governance

- 44. A review of the C2030 Programme Board membership was undertaken in November 2025.
- 45. The purpose was to ensure the Board remains well-positioned to deliver the programme's ambitious aims and outcomes. As the programme moves to the later stages of project delivery, it is essential that the right mix of organisations and individuals are represented. We invited professionals with the capacity and expertise to drive programme delivery, identify opportunities for collaboration and ensure long-term impact across the National Park.
- 46. The following members were appointed:
 - a) Neil Macrae, Partnerships Manager, Hitrans Regional Transport Partnership
 - b) Dr Clare Devaney, Director, Glasgow School of Art, Rural Hub
 - c) Gillian Councill, Director of Brain Health, Alzheimer Scotland
 - d) Fiona Van Aardt, Head of Highland Region, Scottish Land and Estates
 - e) Keith Turner, Cairngorms Equalities Advisory Panel



47. The two-year programme delivery review (2024/25) has been launched to assess progress against the NLHF approved purposes. It will identify any slippage or changes that have occurred and set out recommendations to strengthen delivery going forward.
48. Meeting with NLHF monitoring consultant, Fiona Southern, on 24 November to discuss transforming landscape theme delivery. Project updates and a site visit to Dalnacardoch Estate helped scope Nature Recovery project proposals.

Budget and cash flow

49. No significant changes to budgets or cash flow during the quarter.
50. Transport Scotland funding applications submitted for the Active Communities projects 2026/27.
51. Scottish Government (SG) has given a provisional capital budget of £3.5 million for Peatland Restoration for 2026/27. In terms of C2030 Programme finances, the provisional capital allocation for peatland restoration more than matches the expected contribution to the programme for 2026/27.
52. The £600,000 match funding decision from the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) application remains to be confirmed. Discussions have progressed well with a new HIE Project Manager appointed to resolve the delay. Approval expected end February 2026.
53. One proposal to reallocate part budget from Sustainable Transport to Cycle Friendly project to be progressed in Q1 2025.

Legal agreements

54. Draft MoU in progress:
 - a) Community deer larders: Glen Clova Estate.
 - b) Community deer larders: Atholl Estate.
 - c) Hitrans Regional Transport Partnerships (RTP): Hi-Bikes Aviemore agreement as part of Cycle Friendly Cairngorms.



- d) Glasgow School of Art: 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.
- e) Climate Resilient Catchments: Ballater Flood Group Initiative.
- f) Woodland expansion: Montane planting with National Trust Scotland (NTS), Marr Lodge Estate.

Programme delivery actions to end March 2025.

Hitrans Hi-Bikes MoU signed	Feb 26
Community deer larders grant awards issued for Glen Clova	Feb 26
Community deer larders grant awards issued for Atholl	Feb 26
Nature Recovery project development (deer larders, woodland planting, rural skills and conservation grazing approved in principle by NLHF.	Feb 26
Publish Cycle Friendly e-bike charging and cycle parking ITT	Feb 26
Confirmation of HIE match funding award	Feb 26
C2030 Community Fund co-design panel selected	March 26
Two-year programme delivery progress review completed	March 26
Active Communities designs for Aviemore and Boat of Garten published	March 26

Significant Budget Adjustments

55. Delivery of the woodland expansion project will be completed in full, with all planned hectares successfully planted. The total cost of delivery has, however, been significantly lower than anticipated, around 50 percent below the original budget estimate.
- a) This variance reflects both efficient delivery and the fact that initial planting cost assumptions were higher than ultimately required.
 - b) While this represents good value for money, it has also resulted in an underspend that affects the wider programme's planned match funding profile.
 - c) To address this shortfall, the NLHF is happy for the Park Authority to propose other Scottish Forestry funded woodland creation schemes delivered in the National Park area during the programme timeframe. The business case



for inclusion and how they deliver C2030 outcomes will be submitted to NLHF for approval.

Conclusions: Performance Overview and Matters Meriting Strategic

Review

56. In conclusion, the following key operational programme risks under management are drawn to the Boards attention:
- a) Programme risk level has remained at green
 - b) The Active Communities project risk status has remained at amber. However, significant challenges remain in delivering the project due to the short timescales resulting from annual funding application and allocation timetables. Governance and risk management plans have been instigated.
 - c) Setting the strategic direction for the Nature Recovery project is a significant step forward. We look forward working with partners and NLHF to agree project scope and deliverables.
 - d) NLHF approval is required to extend Scottish Forestry's investment in woodland expansion within the Park boundary to address the C2030 match-funding shortfall.

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05 March 2026

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