



For discussion

Title: Communications and Engagement update
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Purpose

This paper presents an update of current communications and engagement activity, plus outlines a number of key priorities for the next quarter. It also includes a strategic risk register and accompanying mitigation measures.

Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to:

- a) Review activity across a range of communications and engagement channels in the past three months and discuss the identified priorities for quarter three of 2026.
- b) Review the accompanying risk register to ensure key risks are captured and that mitigation measures are appropriate.

Key communication and engagement deliverable / achievements

Website and social media

1. Unsurprisingly, the period was dominated by the fire byelaws communications campaign; however, despite this we have shared a breadth of content to support projects ranging from the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Communities Fund to cultural heritage and river restoration (see links below).
2. The total digital reach of the fire byelaws campaign now stands at just shy of 1.5 million unique individuals, or 4.3 million impressions. Our video adverts have been viewed 352,086 times and there have been 4,649 link clicks. Our digital agency Bright Signals have highlighted that they usually see click-through rates of around 0.1% for campaigns of this type, so our click-through rate of 0.35% is particularly noteworthy. Increasing the relevancy of messaging and targeting users based on their proximity to the National Park is proving effective.
3. Whilst it has only been running for a few weeks, 24,632 people have already heard our radio advert, and it has been shared on 462 different podcasts. We are able to



select specific themes for these podcasts to ensure we reach a less 'bought-in' audience, ensuring our spend goes further. Meanwhile, our organic fire byelaws content with our own ranger and partner ranger teams helped get the message out to visitors and residents alike.

4. We have narrowed down a shortlist of social media influencers to help spread the word about fire byelaws ahead of the busy summer season. The shortlist includes a mix of bushcraft, outdoors or 'van life' content creators, with the majority reaching a much younger audience than our own channels. Invitations went out to potential partners a few weeks ago, with content due to be delivered in the run up to and during the summer holidays.
5. Social media impressions have been particularly high over the past few months, rising 365% to 7,408,458. However, engagements have only risen 24% (to 94,815), suggesting that the paid-for fire byelaw advertising campaign may be having an impact on our organic figures. We are investigating this with our digital agency Bright Signals to establish how the campaign is likely to be affecting our day-to-day activity.
6. Our total audience across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Bluesky rose by 3,406 (or 3.8%) to 93,032. Video views were up 113% to 524,742, likely driven by a redoubled focus on short, shareable content such as the fire byelaw, Communities Fund and Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) short interviews to camera.
7. On our website we had 28,804 active users (no comparable figures for 2024). Large-scale developments included the creation of a specific Gaelic site in line with our Gaelic Language Plan commitments. The copy for this has been translated and the build is in progress, likely to be completed by the end of summer. We are also making improvements to the news and views section of the site, aimed at encouraging more repeat visits.
8. Content highlights over the period include a photo story from two young people in who helped release beavers into the wild; a longer video piece about river restoration featuring the Ballater Flood Issues Group; a post celebrating Highland games within the region; and visitor posts focused on ground-nesting birds.
9. A successful citizen science callout – asking for aspen sightings to be inputted on our new interactive map – had a direct impact on the work of the Nature team, enabling them to track down flowering aspen to collect genetically robust seeds. This suggests our audience is much more actively engaged than they were in the past, something we hope to build on with future campaigns.



Press and media

10. Over 250 separate pieces of media coverage were published / aired in the week leading up to the launch of a new recreational fire byelaw, with a combined audience estimated at 800 million (albeit all media monitoring figures should be taken with a pinch of salt!). This included special reports on Channel 4, Channel 5, STV News and BBC Reporting Scotland, as well as Grant Moir being interviewed on BBC Breakfast News about our plans. The story appeared in print / online with Sky News, the Press and Journal, Herald, Scotsman, Sun, Daily Mail and the BBC, as well as in specialist publications such as The Scottish Farmer, Forestry Journal, Land Business and Scottish Mountaineer.
11. The byelaw was the focus for a special episode of Landward in May, with Dougie Vipond visiting the National Park to speak to land managers affected by last year's wildfires, as well as the Park Authority's Agricultural Adviser, Malcolm Smith. Further press and media activity is planned around the byelaw, including our use of thermal drones to detect fires on the ground, plus a Press and Journal feature including interviews with Mike Dearman from the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust and Ranger, Polly Freeman.
12. The team were on hand to capture the first meeting of the new C2030 Communities Panel, and have subsequently interviewed a number of the panel members to hear more about their experiences so far (see also a short video [here](#)). There was some pushback from local media about our decision to only reveal first names of project participants whilst the process was ongoing. We worked with our partners at Involve to explain clearly the reasons for this and the fact that it was standard practice for processes of this kind.
13. Other activity within the period includes:
 - a) Promotion of the latest community roadshow event in Laggan / Dalwhinnie.
 - b) An update on recent planning decisions, including a hydro-electric scheme at Spittal of Glenshee.
 - c) A piece about Sandy Bremner's re-election as Convener of the board.
 - d) An update on the golden eagle tagging project.
 - e) Encouraging news from the latest [capercaillie lek counts](#).

Public and stakeholder engagement

14. Over 100 businesses and community groups have got involved in the fire byelaw campaign so far, taking advantage of a suite of online and physical resources, from window stickers to pin badges and bespoke signage. This includes the team at Cairngorm Brewery, who have kindly agreed to distribute our 'no flame, no spark' beer mats to bars and pubs across the region. We have organised a series of online



business drop-in events with the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) to promote the byelaw, explain how businesses can get involved and answer any questions. We are also working with Scottish Land and Estates (SLE) to get the message out to partner estates, and our offer of bespoke signage has been picked up by Aviemore and Glenmore Trust (AGCT) at Glenmore Visitor Centre, amongst others.

15. The period from March to June held a lot of activity for the C2030 Communities Fund panel, with the first seven sessions (a mix of online and face-to-face) taking place. So far, the group have discussed everything from the number and size of pots available to eligibility criteria, equalities, diversity and inclusion considerations and how the application process should function. Working closely with participation charity Involve, the panel will look to finalise the fund design over the coming weeks, ahead of a launch date later this summer.
16. The C2030 Engagement team have been finalising details of this year's roadshow and community events. Community drop-ins are planned for Dalwhinnie / Laggan on Thursday 04 June, Blair Atholl on Saturday 20 June and Angus Glens in October, with the Park Authority having a presence at events including the Lonach Gathering, Highland Pride, Grantown Show, Tomintoul Highland Games and Ballater Winter Festival. This latest set of events will mean that the team has visited every major settlement in the National Park within the last two years.
17. A core part of the C2030 engagement approach is to trial new and innovative methods. In addition to exploring the possibility and value of virtual reality experiences, the team are also looking to build on last year's successful trial of 'gamification' (ie breaking down complex topics through the medium of a board game), creating a format that will work for more drop-in style events.
18. The team are also seeking out more opportunities to 'meet people where they are', attending pre-existing community group sessions and offering engagement in a setting attendees are more comfortable with. The first sessions have been very positive. One attendee at a recent Aviemore event said: "I just wanted to let you know that the ladies at Coffee and Chat appreciated you coming to talk to them and to listen to what they had to say. They are not easily impressed and would be happy to help you in the future."
19. Besides event delivery and support, the team have achieved a huge milestone in rolling out a new Community Contacts List and Engagement List for the organisation. The culmination of nearly two years' work, these systems ensure all engagement activity delivered by the Park Authority is recorded and tracked in the same way, capturing learnings and feedback as we go. Training has taken place



with all staff, and we intend to review the process after six months to ensure it is working as anticipated.

20. The next Cultural Heritage Network event has been organised for Tuesday 13 October at Boat Hall. This session will build on a previous gathering of over 20 cultural heritage practitioners back in March, agreeing and taking forward key priorities for the network, including a connected archiving project.

Publications and branding

21. The summer edition of *Cairn* magazine is currently in production and is due to hit doorsteps towards the end of July. In addition to the usual mix of nature and community stories, this issue will feature an update on the fire byelaw, an in-depth guide to our peatland restoration work, an interview with Angus Glens Ranger, George Patterson, and the latest from our future farming project.
22. Our two pocket-sized leaflets on fires and barbecues and 'tread lightly' in the National Park have proved hugely popular during the fire byelaw rollout, to the extent that we are doing a reprint of 10,000 copies each. The tread lightly version is also being translated into 10 languages following a request from Police Scotland. Work is also ongoing to replace the old camping and campervans leaflet, previously produced by CBP. We aim to have this in place ahead of the summer season.
23. A new Tomintoul paths leaflet has been developed, in collaboration with the local community and Crown Estate Scotland. The leaflet features a new map and updated information. Next in line are Nethy Bridge and Boat of Garten.

Communications and engagement activity over the next three months

24. A range of communications and engagement activities are planned over the next three months; these are summarised below. These projects will take place alongside a regular programme of activity, coordinated through our centralised Content Working Group, Engagement cross-cutting board and C2030 Engagement strand:
 - a) Work with the C2030 Communities Fund panel to finalise the shape / function of the £1 million fund, ready for launch in summer 2026. Ensure as wide a range of potential applicants are engaged in the process as possible.
 - b) Develop a suite of materials – including website resources, programme, videography tender and on-site signage – to support the delivery of the UK National Parks Conference in Aviemore this September.
 - c) Continue to deliver the fire byelaw communications and engagement campaign, including finalising roadside signage with Transport Scotland,



- developing partnerships with key social media influencers, and supporting partners (from local businesses to estates and community groups) to share the message through targeted comms materials.
- d) Finalise and deliver comms materials / community engagement activity to support the informal and formal National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) consultations. This will in turn inform our approach to the Local Development Plan (LDP) consultation next year.
 - e) Deliver a follow-up cultural heritage event on 13 October, taking forward recommendations from previous gatherings and supporting practitioners across the National Park to establish a Cultural Heritage Network. This includes work on a collective archiving project.
 - f) Progress the second phase of Your Future Here activity, encouraging young people to explore careers in the National Park. Building on the learnings from our inaugural event in September 2024, we will explore events in the east and west of the National Park, tying in with careers fairs held at schools including Alford, Aboyne, Kingussie and Grantown.
 - g) Continue developments with the new National Park website, including the creation of microsites for the Cairngorms Nature Index (CNI), a C2030 data portal and the revival of the Cairngorms Photo Posts project.
 - h) Continue delivery of a programme of proactive communications around farming and land management in the Cairngorms National Park, highlighting ongoing support offered to the sector and encouraging two-way dialogue. This includes the P&J / Courier column with Agricultural Adviser, Malcolm Smith.
 - i) Explore the development of an Aviemore / Glenmore pilot visitor app with Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust, paving the way for a future National Park-wide app (to be developed with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority) in the near future.



Risk register for communications and engagement

25. Following on from discussions at a Governance Committee meeting in 2024, we have developed a specific risk register to capture the main risks facing the Park Authority from a reputation standpoint, plus relevant mitigation measures. This will be updated on a quarterly basis, with additions highlighted in blue. Unless otherwise stated, the risk owner is the Head of Communications and Engagement. Assessment of likelihood and impact from last quarter's report are shown in brackets.

#	Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
1.	Coordinated disinformation campaign on social media / in local press seeks to undermine residents' confidence in the Park Authority, particularly in the aftermath of the Scottish elections.	Medium (high)	Medium (medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key facts document created and shared with MSPs following Scottish elections.• Robust community management processes on social media, providing rapid response to all factually incorrect posts and attempting to create a 'safer' online environment where partners / supporters feel comfortable challenging misinformation.• Continue to liaise closely with key reporters in target local and national titles via the Media Communications Manager and her team, exploring positive news stories and to make the case for more balanced coverage (albeit more limited during pre-election period).



				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinated campaign of positive social media and public relations (PR) activity, telling the story of our work eg with land managers / farmers plus funding for community priorities.• Continue to update key facts document to ensure rapid response to any disinformation that does appear, plus willingness to resort to Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) complaints where all other options are exhausted.
2.	Beaver movements and / or death of animals leads to questions about our approach to reintroducing the species, plus potential further objections from land managers.	Medium (medium)	Medium (medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing monitoring from the Beaver Project Manager and Park Authority ranger team with direct line to Head of Communications.• Reactive lines and frequently asked questions (FAQs) prepared for various eventualities, including links to management and mitigation strategy.• Case studies available from other reintroductions, eg Scottish Beaver Trial, Loch Lomond release etc.



				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular meetings and dialogue with Farmers' Forum and other land management groups.• Clear rationale communicated – based on published licence conditions – for all future beaver releases.
3.	Surveys showing decline in population of Cairngorms Nature priority species (eg capercaillie, raptors, freshwater pearl mussel) and / or wildlife crime incidents impact on our reputation for species conservation. Further illegal releases of wild animals (following lynx / feral pigs) add to this.	High (high)	High (high)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Updated materials and webpage resources highlighting our work to protect raptors in the National Park.• Proactive stream of nature news outlining our coordinated action plans for these species plus supporting blogs / social media activity / <i>Cairn</i> content.• Dedicated resource (Charlotte Milburn, Communications Officer, Nature and Land Management) focused on nature and land management communications.• Close collaboration with key agencies and partners, eg NatureScot, Scottish Environment LINK members, capercaillie steering group etc.



4.	Complexity of C2030 programme – and time it takes for project work to fully materialise on the ground – leads to questions about value for money / overall programme delivery.	Low (low)	Medium (medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicated Engagement team for C2030 tasked with programming a series of roadshows in communities across the National Park.• C2030 Communications Coordinator continues to utilise key messages / storylines for each of our seven target audiences and align communications to these messages.• Continued opportunity to celebrate quick wins, eg dementia centre, deer larder, green health prescriptions, peatland targets exceeded etc.
5.	Digital team's capacity to take forward proactive community management on social media is hampered eg by a material increase in negative posts, staff burnout / fatigue etc.	Medium (Medium)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impact increased due to staff shortages / illness over recent months, reducing capacity to handle these issues.• Rota implemented for staff involved to reduce exposure to most toxic content. Exploring training opportunities to assist staff dealing with this.



				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicated social media monitoring service (Sprout Social) to help track audience activity in real time.• Combining multiple social accounts into one to avoid conversations becoming too fragmented.• Identifying 'serial offenders' and keeping a closer eye on their activity – escalating comments more quickly to senior staff so we can correct the record sooner.• Review of team capacity every quarter as part of standard performance development process.
6.	Backlog of interpretation / signage projects as a result of Scottish Government budget freeze in 2024-25 causes reputational damage with key community partners looking for our support.	Medium (Medium)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proactive series of visits by staff members to meet with impacted communities.• Prioritised action plan for first six months of this financial year, deliberately targeting different areas of the National Park.• Identifying additional funds (eg The Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund (GLAIF))



				funding for Gaelic materials) to fund additional interpretation capacity.
7.	Communications and engagement activity around fire byelaws does not reach all our intended audiences, and / or does not prevent a potential wildfire incident, leading to a loss of confidence in our overall approach.	Medium (High)	Medium (Medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Additional spend (£50,000) secured to ensure we reach an audience beyond our channels.• Multi-channel approach to communicating the byelaw, working closely with partner ranger services, local businesses, community groups, social media influencers etc.• Single, coordinated 'No, flame, no spark' messaging across all campaign materials, based on behavioural science principles.• Regular reviews of campaign effectiveness, optimising our approach based on what is / is not working. Feeding this back to residents via a range of channels, including <i>Cairn</i>.• Being clear in all our communications on the topic that preventing wildfires is a shared responsibility and that the risk of fires has significantly increased as a result of climate change. Also providing clear guidance that if



				people see a fire, they should call 999 (rather than the Park Authority ranger service).
8.	Decisions made by the C2030 Communities Fund panel prove contentious with members of the local community, leading to questions around the validity of the process, and / or panel members being singled out for criticism.	Medium (Medium)	High (High)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensuring the final panel members reflect the demographics of the National Park and understand the issues that matter to residents and those with a passion for area.• Robust training and pastoral support provided through independent experts – Involve – with significant experience of running these processes in the past.• Opportunities created for the panel to hear directly from representatives from a range of different communities, breaking down potential barriers.• Clearly communicating the process the panel are going through, introducing panel members as a diverse group coming together to make difficult decisions (as opposed to singling out individuals).• Full risk register provided to the Park Authority to feed into and review.



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