



For information

Title: Cairngorms 2030 restoring and enhancing landscape's theme update February 2026

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Purpose

This paper describes recent activity and progress on the seven projects within the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Restoring and Enhancing Landscapes theme.

Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the paper.

Overall Progress

1. As we start the third year of the delivery phase, all seven projects are progressing in line with their project schedules.
2. The last six months have seen the scope of the projects finalised, Woodland Expansion and Nature Recovery projects now have fully defined project outputs, though some are awaiting approval from National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).
3. For details on each project see Annex 1.

Upcoming decisions

4. There are several key decisions to be made in the next quarter:
 - a) NLHF approval for the new Nature Recovery projects.
 - b) **Nature Recovery:** The feasibility study for new woodland in Glen Tilt will highlight whether we support this and / or similar planting at Dalnacardoch and Glen Shee.
 - c) **Nature Recovery:** Future Skills project will be scoped with estates in the West Grampian Deer Management Group (DMG) before a training provider is procured.



- d) **Climate Resilient Catchments:** Slugain burn - we shall soon have a detailed cost estimate for the construction of the bridge, and it is possible that it will be significantly above early estimates. We shall make a cost benefit assessment on how or whether to proceed with the project based upon this.

Common themes across projects

5. There have been several common themes arising from the suite of projects in the last 12 months. These reflect the diverse nature of the projects within the theme but also across the whole programme.
6. **The engagement 'landscape':** Engagement has become more complicated than originally anticipated with a rise in 'consultation fatigue' in communities of place and interest. The engagement team has become more skilled at designing approaches to minimise this and have worked well with the project leads. They have, in turn, become more adept at managing the process and are now engaging more with communities than originally anticipated. This is especially true in the woodland, catchment and nature recovery projects.
7. **Delays linked to external approvals:** Project delivery has been delayed in several places by the slower than anticipated approval processes, for example planning and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) consents. We have learned to adapt schedules and where possible to use the delayed start to our advantage by giving more time for tendering and preparation of site works which will allow more flexibility for contractors.
8. **Adjustments to project proposals:** All projects have had to make some changes to the application proposals, some more significant than others. The team is adapting well to this and developing new approaches as necessary. For example, the landscape and community project has remodelled its engagement approach in light of feedback on the best methods to engage different communities which has evolved in the last two years, and changes in the engagement team membership.

Change management

9. There have been quite a few new processes in areas like project management, budget control, reporting and communications. These are often trialled with the



C2030 team before being rolled out across the authority. This has required new learning and patience as staff work through them. However, they have engaged well with them, offered constructive feedback, and suggested ways to make the learning easier.

Team performance

10. The team have developed new skills and apply these to their work. There are a few small areas where individuals need to develop further but this is being managed through the programme team and theme leads. The team is growing in confidence about their roles and have increasing enthusiasm to get communities involved and deliver community benefits.
11. There are no changes in project leads for the theme but some of the peatland staff have changed in the last two years.

Budgets

12. Woodland expansion match funding:
 - a) The C2030 programme included £4 million of match funding from Scottish Forestry (SF) for two woodland creation schemes at Glen Fender and Dalnamein.
 - b) Actual delivery costs were significantly lower due to reduced fencing requirements and economies of scale.
 - c) Although the planted woodland area remains unchanged at 990 hectares (ha), the reduced grant value creates a match funding shortfall of approximately £2.3 million against the original cost plan.
 - d) To address this shortfall, the NLHF is happy for the Park Authority to propose other SF funded woodland creation schemes delivered in the National Park area during the programme timeframe. The business case for inclusion and how they deliver for C2030 outcomes will be submitted to NLHF for approval.
13. The peatland restoration project continues to secure funding from the Scottish Government (SG). This year's budget will be £3.5 million.



14. There are no other major changes to project budgets though some redistribution within projects has been required - eg catchments, farming, woodland, and nature recovery.

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24 February 2026

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