



## For discussion

**Title:** Cairngorms Peatland ACTION Programme

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### Purpose

This paper presents an update on the delivery of the Park Authority's Peatland ACTION programme in 2025/26 and the developing programme for 2026/27.

### Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the progress against programme targets for 2025/26.
- b) Note the plans for 2026/27.

### Strategic policy consideration

1. The National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) action is to restore a minimum of 6,500 hectares (ha) of peatland by 2027, as a contribution towards the target of a minimum of 38,000ha of peatland under restoration by 2045, 80% of all drains restored by 2035, and all erosion features restored by 2050.
2. Peatland Action funding is a significant component of the match funding for the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Programme. As one of the five Peatland ACTION delivery partners, the restoration work delivered by the Park Authority plays an important part in reaching the Scottish Government's (SG) target of 250,000ha of peatland being restored by 2030.

### Performance dashboard

Performance Measure for 2025/26	Rating	Commentary
Finance: Maximise use of £3.98 million capital finance and £650,000 resource finance available in	Green	There are currently 15 projects in the programme with an estimated grant requirement of £3.37 million (estimated on 31 January 2026). £610,000 were



Performance Measure for 2025/26	Rating	Commentary
2025/26 for peatland restoration.		returned to SG in November 2025. The resource budget of £650,000 is on track to be fully spent.
Finance: Impact on the Park Authority's budget management.	Green	No wider unplanned demands currently made by programme on financial resources.
Restoration target 2025/26: 1,700ha Restoration Area	Green	1,614ha have been reported between 01 April 2025 and 31 January 2026. There is a potential total of 1,870ha in the programme, with 256ha of restoration currently delayed due to snow.
Pipeline for 2026/27	Green	The provisional programme includes 15 projects totalling 1400ha. A further five projects are on a reserve list. The Park Authority will design and deliver six projects directly, with the remainder being agent-led.
Programme risk profile	Green	At this stage in the year there are quite likely to be changes in the programme. Should projects drop out, there are sufficiently worked up projects in reserve to fill the programme.
Future funding profile	Green	The provisional SG allocation for 2026/27 is £4.205 million, comprising £3.5 million capital and £705,000 resource. £250,000 is allocated for development grants, surveys and monitoring. £3.25 million remains available for project delivery.



Performance Measure for 2025/26	Rating	Commentary
Future delivery profile	Green	Landowners remain engaged with Peatland ACTION and demand now exceeds supply in terms of budget.

### Delivery against strategic outcomes

3. The programme is on track to exceed the target of 1,700ha in 2025/26. Approximately 1,600ha have already been secured and work is continuing on three projects, subject to delays due to snow conditions. If conditions improve, a total of 1,870ha could be achieved in 2025/26. Alternatively, the work will be finished in operational year 2026/27.
4. Since 2022 approximately 6,600ha of peatland has been brought under restoration. The NPPP action to bring 6,500ha under restoration by 2027 has been achieved and we remain on track to bring a minimum of 38,000 ha of peatland under restoration management by 2045.
5. Funding for peatland restoration in 2026/27 is a reduction in capital from 2025/26 of £480,000. This reflects a reduction in the national budget as a result of there being no additional £8 million from Scot Winds. Our provisional share of the national budget is £3.5 million capital and from this we aim to fund 15 projects across the National Park and a provisional target of 1400a. This may be altered over the next few months.
6. Multi-year plans for several large estates will continue to be developed, bringing a degree of security to future pipelines and a strong business case for investment both by landowners in terms of private contributions to projects and contractors on plant, staff and training. Development grants have proved successful in developing agent led projects and we will continue to issue these grants.

### Strategic risks under management

7. **Budget capacity:** For the first time since the start of the programme, demand for projects now exceeds budget capacity. The Park Authority has prioritised projects



using a range of criteria including hectares, value for money, delivery risk and existing commitments. Projects that do not fully meet these criteria are considered as reserve for 2026/27 and / or deferred to future years.

8. **Staffing and resourcing:** One Peatland Officer left the team in the summer. Having considered how best to fill this post we have recruited a replacement which will bring the Peatland Team back to a full complement of nine staff.
9. **Contractor capacity:** Contractor capacity remains sufficient to tackle the planned programme and appears to have broadly stabilised overall. The new entrant scheme, which supports relatively small operators starting out in the discipline in applying for and delivery of low complexity projects, has resulted in one new contractor bidding for work in the National Park.
10. Agent capacity and experience have increased markedly across the Park and this is something the Park Authority has actively encouraged. Agent led projects now exceed the Park Authority's designed and led projects in the annual programme and this is likely to continue in future years.

**Colin McClean**

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