



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 two 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. Between November 2025 and March 2026, we reached a collective social media audience of 89,425 across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and BlueSky, up 8,608 (or 32%) on the same period last year. This has been primarily focused on Instagram, but we have gained 1,960 new Facebook followers in this period, a channel that continues to reach a high proportion of residents.
2. Unfortunately, with staff capacity significantly impacted by staff sickness and the induction of a new staff member, we were unable to post as frequently across all channels. This resulted in impressions falling by 19% to 3,601,436 and engagements by 5% to 190,377. Link clicks rose 45% to 19,974 and the overall engagement rate rose 17% to 5.3%.
3. It is encouraging is that, despite lower reach and impressions as a result of less frequent posts, our engagement rate remained high and indeed increased over the

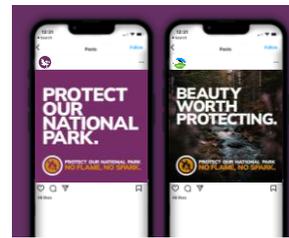


period. In part this is a result of some selective and strategic posting, ie less content, but more meaningful interactions.

4. Video views over the period fell by 18% to 836,808, again the result of reduced capacity, but this will be a key a focus for the team over the months ahead. In particular, we are exploring cost-effective ways of developing our YouTube channel, with the platform being one of the few social media sites to genuinely engage a multi-generational audience.
5. 35,000 users visited the new National Park website during the period (no figures available for last year), with key developments rolled out including a new 'map builder' function to allow us to create our own maps (see our new [health walks page](#)), a bulk document function to streamline and standardise board / planning paper uploads, and an upcoming meetings and events section. We also rolled out dedicated [funding opportunities](#) and [tender opportunities](#) pages, giving communities and businesses all the information they need in one place.
6. Content highlights from the period include: a '[View fae the ploo](#)' interview with local snow plough operators; a Cairngorms Voices piece about a member of the [Braemar Mountain Rescue team](#); a [photo story about Jean](#), who lives with dementia; a new format experiment on Instagram to celebrate [Gaelic place names](#); and a campaign to encourage EOIs for the [C2030 Communities Fund](#).

Press and media

7. We have been working with creative agency Bright Signals to develop a coordinated communications campaign for fire byelaws, under the umbrella title of '**Protect our National Park. No flame. No spark**'. The campaign is underpinned by behavioural science research including the [EAST Behaviour Change Model](#), which Bright Signals used in their recent [award-winning 'Leave Space for a Life' campaign](#) on cycle safety.
8. Our campaign will feature residents / workers from across the National Park, calling on visitors and residents alike to join them in helping reduce the threat of wildfires, utilising the principle of 'social norming'.



Fire byelaw



Byelaw begins



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"We know that it only takes one rogue spark to start a wildfire and when there's so much to lose, we just can't take the risk." In one sentence Lucy Ford, Ranger Service Manager at the Park Authority, sums up why the new fire byelaw is such an important step towards protecting communities and nature across the National Park.

The byelaw comes into force for the first time this spring – a major milestone, months in the making. So, what does it mean? In short: no fires or barbecues between 1 April and 30 September. "Our rangers are at the heart of this. Their role is still first and foremost

to engage with people out enjoying the National Park," says Lucy. "But we now have a clear message, backed up by legislation, which will empower them if they come across anyone with a fire or barbecue.

"We saw first-hand last summer how damaging wildfires can be. This is about putting a set of practical measures in place to reduce the risks and encouraging everyone to do the right thing and protect this beautiful National Park."

From recruiting a record number of rangers on the ground to training everybody on the practicalities of enforcement (working closely with Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue and the Procurator Fiscal), a lot has been going on behind the scenes.

Lucy adds: "We really hope the byelaw will be more of a deterrent, with enforcement (a fine of £500) a last resort. We're grateful for the support of our family of partner rangers, who we'll continue to work closely with over the months ahead."

As in previous years, joint patrols will be carried out across the National Park, with a Police Scotland presence in key areas including Glenmore and parts of Deeside. A new thermal drone will also be used to locate fires more quickly and target patrols on the ground.

Raising awareness about the byelaw will start long before people head out for a visit thanks to a high-profile campaign covering everything from roadside signage to social media and press.



As Grant Mair, Chief Executive of the Park Authority, explains: "The first step is making sure that people know what the rules are. The message is simple: **Protect our National Park. No flame, no spark.** We need the help of residents and local businesses to ensure this reaches as wide an audience as possible and has maximum impact. "We're investing heavily in a targeted communications campaign, ensuring that visitors from all over the country know what to expect before making the journey. This will be backed up

by on-site signage, ranger patrols, local business engagement and much more. Ultimately, we're asking everyone to play their part in looking after the people, wildlife and habitats of the Cairngorms."

Deputy Assistant Chief Officer Kenny Barbour is Head of Prevention at the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and the new Chair of the Scottish Wildlife Forum. He knows well the damage wildfires can do.

"Our teams responded to more than 200 wildfires across the country last year, including the major incident at Davo / Cambridge, with each case posing a real risk to people, properties and nature. These callouts also have a significant impact on our resources and are often in remote locations, which take time to reach.

"Extreme weather events are becoming more common across Scotland and we know that communities in the Cairngorms have felt this acutely in recent years, with floods, drought and wildfires. This byelaw is an important new tool to tackle wildfire risk and safeguard the National Park."

"This is about encouraging everyone to do the right thing and protect this beautiful National Park."

Lucy Ford, Ranger Service Manager

Five ways to help

Please spread the word to ensure everyone who visits, lives in and loves the National Park is aware of the new byelaw.

Remember the rhyme: Protect our National Park. No flame, no spark!

Do not light fires and barbecues outside your own garden (and take extreme care with the latter)

If you see a fire, call 999. If you see or suspect anyone acting suspiciously, call Police Scotland on 101 or Scotland CrimeStoppers on 0800 553 111

Always follow advice from rangers, site staff and local signs

If you run a business or community space, contact us to order a window sticker at haveyoursay@cairngorms.co.uk



Find out more by scanning the QR code or going to cairngorms.co.uk/fires

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- The campaign will start rolling out week commencing 16 March, featuring everything from physical road signage to social media videos and adverts, ranger conversations, partner signage, beer mats, window stickers and leaflets. Video and radio adverts will also be shot in locations across the National Park week commencing 16 March, featuring five local residents and frequent visitors.
- We are exploring ranger partnerships with key social media influencers (eg [Adventures with Rebecca](#)), with a specific focus on teenagers / men in their early twenties and 'van life' adventurers to ensure we get the message across to key high risk audiences. Our paid online / social media activity will help us reach far beyond our



own channels, targeting those planning a trip to the Cairngorms (eg via specific keywords), as well as key demographics and geographies. Advertising spend will automatically increase based on factors including the number of dry days in the forecast, and the proximity of key school holiday periods.

11. The press team is working on a range of proactive media opportunities, with filming already planned with Channel 4 News, STV News and BBC Reporting Scotland. Specialist publications are also being targeted to maximise coverage and awareness of the byelaw as we approach launch date.
12. The success of the campaign will be tracked via a specific pre-and-post-campaign survey with a random sample of 100 residents and 400 visitors, as well as through the next tranche of our visitor and resident surveys. We will also keep track of (and report on) overall campaign performance over the coming months, and compare this to results on the ground from our ranger team in terms of eg active fire sites, conversations had with target demographics etc. Qualitative feedback will be sought through our family of ranger services, utilising the regular Managing for Visitors meetings.
13. Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) projects have also been a key focus over the past few months, with a range of coverage secured on [C2030 Communities Fund recruitment](#) and the [C2030 creative residency](#). We also marked the launch of a [new fund for farmers and crofters](#) in the National Park, alongside a [new cycle hub fund](#) to help local communities and partners take forward active travel projects. German TV company ZDF filmed with Glenkilrie Larder and Grantown Grammar for a piece on the deer larder project (yet to air).
14. Nature stories included a feature on freshwater pearl mussels by [BBC Out of Doors](#), the launch of this year's [Climate Adaptation Fund](#) and the results of the first [survey on peregrine falcon](#) numbers for 20 years.
15. Staff have contributed newspaper columns for the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald and Deeside Piper on a range of topics including woodlands, ranger work and youth projects. We've secured a [new column with the Press and Journal](#) and the Courier for Malcolm Smith, our Agricultural Advisor, which has been well received so far.
16. The pre-election period comes into force on 26 March, which will restrict the volume of outgoing PR and media activity the team can deliver. We plan to use this time to plan ahead for the summer season, with a particular focus on fire byelaws, the launch of the C2030 Communities Fund and a variety of upcoming nature news items. We also plan to continue meeting key contacts across local and national



media outlets, exploring how we can best work together and what types of stories they are most keen on.

Public and stakeholder engagement

17. Recruitment for the [C2030 Communities Fund panel](#) opened on 07 January for six weeks. The paid opportunity was promoted extensively (including via local and national press, a door-drop to 30,000 households, social media videos, partner communications and posters in communities across the National Park) and we were delighted that over 250 people expressed an interest in being involved.
18. We received applications from every major town and village in the National Park and from every age group, with applicants ranging from 16 to 85 years old. All seven of our C2030 target audiences were well represented and we had strong engagement from a range of under-represented groups, including ethnic minorities and disabled people. Another positive sign was that just under half of applicants reported having 'minimal' or 'no previous contact' with the Park Authority. A final shortlist of 18 people is currently being pulled together, ahead of their first session on 25 March (led by our partners Involve UK).
19. An Aviemore roadshow event took place on 11 December. Aligned to the next stage of consultation around C2030 active travel proposals, the event included information about local health walks, transport and landscape projects, and craft activities such as Lego building and screen printing. Despite its proximity to Christmas, 49 people joined the team over the course of the day, and this has been further supplemented by a business drop-in session and a nighttime safety audit with members of the local access panel.
20. A Boat of Garten roadshow event took place on 15 January, linked to the active community's consultation and designs for improving crossing points / walking routes within the village. The C2030 Communities Fund was also promoted, and the beaver team came along with video camera footage of recent activity in the local area. The Engagement team are currently finalising plans for spring and summer, with roadshow events planned in the Angus Glens, Blair Atholl, and Laggan / Dalwhinnie, together with Highland games in Strathdon and Tomintoul (via the ranger team).
21. Building on the success of the cultural heritage networking event in Boat of Garten last year, a follow up meeting has been arranged in early March, with the agenda shaped by the practitioners themselves. Key topics include developing a connected archive for the National Park and agreeing the scope and key priorities for a new Cultural Heritage Network.



22. We have been working with the Cairngorms Trust over the past few months on a dedicated [Communities and Cultural Heritage Fund](#), with a total of £65,000 awarded to 11 projects celebrating local heritage, crafts, art and music. Among those granted funding were the Braemar Local History Group for digitising their archive material, a Kingussie High School project to design, build and launch traditional boats (including a canoe, kayak and Spey coracle), and the creation of a heritage hub in Strathdon, providing a workspace and archive storage. We hope to repeat the fund next year.
23. Our C2030 Engagement team have been researching and identifying methods of reaching out to under-represented groups within the National Park, in particular those on low incomes and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. The team discussed potential approaches with our Equalities Advisory Panel Meeting last month, receiving positive and constructive feedback on potential engagement methods. These will be rolled out over the next few months.

Publications and branding

24. The spring edition of [Cairn magazine](#) – a fire byelaw special – will hit doorsteps across the National Park week commencing 23 March. Alongside features on the byelaw and short interviews with residents and partners backing the campaign, there are a range of other stories including funding updates, peatland archaeology training and a mental health course for the farming community. The issue also features a piece on the over £1 million of path upgrades taken forward in the National Park over the past three years.
25. Work to install new interpretation panels at the Charter Chest Path near Braemar, the Cairns Walk on Balmoral Estate, and the Sky Hide stargazing spot at Tomintoul is progressing well, with delivery expected in time for the busy summer season. Another key priority is refreshing signage at Glenmore Visitor Centre and Café, to include byelaw messaging at this strategic visitor spot.
26. The 2025 programme report for C2030, featuring a range of highlights from its second year, has been sent to print. Work is also progressing well on new community path leaflets, with Tomintoul the first to get a refreshed look.

Communications and engagement activity over the next three months

27. 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) Rollout of the fire byelaw communications and engagement campaign, including physical materials on the ground (signage, leaflets, promotional materials) and targeted online activity (influencer partnership, targeted social media advertising, Spotify and video ads etc).
- b) Work with a panel of 18 people – alongside our appointed agency Involve UK – to make key decisions on the £1 million C2030 Communities Fund. A total of eight sessions (five evening sessions online and three face-to-face sessions at weekends) will take place over the next few months, with the aim of launching the fund in summer 2026.
- c) Take forward recommendations from the cultural heritage event and support practitioners in establishing a Cultural Heritage Network for the National Park, including work on a collective archiving project.
- d) 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.
- e) 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 new P&J / Courier column with Malcolm Smith.
- f) Rollout a series of nature news announcements, including on freshwater pearl mussel, further beaver releases and the Climate Adaptation Fund.
- g) Continue developments with the new National Park website, including the potential creation of microsites for the Cairngorms Nature Index, a C2030 data portal and the revival of the Cairngorms Photo Posts project.
- h) Take forward a range of priority interpretation projects, continuing to reduce the backlog caused by last year's Scottish Government budget freeze.



Risk register for communications and engagement

28. 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. 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 run up to and immediate aftermath of the Scottish elections.	High (high)	Medium (medium)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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).• Coordinated campaign of positive social media and public relations (PR) activity,



				<p>telling the story of our work eg with land managers / farmers plus funding for community priorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.	<p>Beaver movements and / or death of animals leads to questions about our approach to reintroducing the species, plus potential further objections from land managers. Activity elsewhere in Scotland – specifically the new releases in Glen Affric – leads to greater scrutiny on future beaver releases in the Cairngorms.</p>	<p>Medium (medium)</p>	<p>Medium (medium)</p>	<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.• Regular meetings and dialogue with Farmers' Forum and other land management groups.



				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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">• 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) 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



				<p>for each of our seven target audiences and align communications to these messages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">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)	High (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.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



				<p>comments more quickly to senior staff so we can correct the record sooner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of team capacity every quarter as part of standard performance development process.
6.	<p>Backlog of interpretation / signage projects as a result of Scottish Government budget freeze causes reputational damage with key community partners looking for our support.</p>	<p>Medium (Medium)</p>	<p>Medium (Medium)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proactive series of visits by Park Authority's Communications Officer 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.	<p>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.</p>	<p>High (n/a)</p>	<p>Medium (n/a)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Additional spend (£50,000) secured to ensure we reach an audience far beyond our 'owned' channels.• Multi-channel approach to communicating the byelaw, working closely with partner



				<p>ranger services, local businesses, community groups etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single, coordinated 'No, flame, no spark' messaging across all campaign materials, based on sound 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	Medium (n/a)	High (n/a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensuring the final 18 panel members reflect the demographics of the National Park and understand the issues that matter to



	<p>the validity of the process, and / or panel members being singled out for criticism.</p>			<p>residents and those with a passion for the Cairngorms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Robust training and pastoral support provided through independent experts – Involve UK – 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 / reducing chance of misunderstandings.• 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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