# **Description: MarrAreaLogo**

***Building strong, resilient, and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others****.*

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**Annual Report 2024-25**

**Our Vision:**

MAP exists to support the needs of Marr’s communities and third sector organisations through the delivery of high quality, entrepreneurial and inclusive support. It is a financially and environmentally sustainable organisation adding clear identifiable value to projects and service provision across the area through the actions of its dedicated staff and board. It is widely recognised and respected for what it provides to communities and partners.

MAP’s mission is to support Marr communities to improve their quality of life through third sector action.

MAP’s values revolve around informing, guiding, and supporting third sector endeavours to improve the quality of life of Marr residents though an inclusive approach that pays particular attention to the needs of the least advantaged people and communities.

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**Introduction**

This report covers the period from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025. The report aims to reflect the range of activities undertaken by Marr Area Partnership (MAP) staff and volunteers. Marr Area Partnership work to realise the Scottish Government, Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan and Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership priorities in relation to “supporting communities”, particularly the Local Outcome of creating;

***“Successful, achieving, inclusive communities with the confidence, capability and capacity to tackle the things that matter to them”***

**Chair’s Report**

It has been another successful year for the Marr Area Partnership and with three dedicated development officers working part time, it has been very gratifying to see the variety of work being undertaken on behalf of our local communities. We issue regular bulletins, assist with Community Action Plans, Paths Forum, Village Halls network, Home Workers Hub, Climate Action Hubs, log bank to name a few. We also work closely with among others Braemar Community Hydro, Cairngorms Trust, Seedbox, Tarland Development Group, Citizens Advice Bureau. We also continue to offer grants to local groups under our Initiative Grant Scheme. We launched a new project this year, Marr Community Food Plan Project and welcomed Lyza Ridell as the dedicated project officer. Plus, the regular administration, wages, social media, website etc. There is a lot going on! I would particularly like to thank our Development Officers Lindsay, Kate and Cat for their professional and dedicated support. Grateful thanks must go to the volunteer board members who contribute so much. We could not do this without the support of our funders Cairngorms National Park, Aberdeenshire Council and Cairngorms Trust. In these days of drastic budget cuts, we were delighted and relieved to be awarded ongoing grant aid for next year. I would like to end this report by thanking Janelle Clark the Marr Area Manager who sadly has announced her retirement. Janelle, you have been a great friend to the Marr Area Partnership, and we will miss your unwavering support. Enjoy your retirement, Janelle! We look forward to working with Tim Stephen who is standing in for the moment as Area Manager.

**Treasurers Report**

During the 2024-25 financial year MAP received a total income of £51,579 and incurred expenditure of £41,337, leading to a surplus of £10.442, This compares to a deficit of £5,413 in the previous year.

Grants of £7940 were made to various community organisations via the Initiative Grant Scheme.

MAP continues to be grateful to Aberdeenshire Council and the Cairngorms National Park Authority for their support during a time of difficult financial constraints but recognises the necessity of finding additional income whilst maintaining its standard of support to its existing commitments.

**Finances**

Marr Area Partnership receives funding from Aberdeenshire Council Marr Community Planning Group and also from the Cairngorms National Park Authority to support the delivery of actions highlighted through the Community Action Planning process and also helping to facilitate project development. Other projects are principally funded by Scottish Government, Cairngorms Trust, MacRobert Trust and Braemar Hydro. MAP’s Treasurer is Nigel Healey and Lindsay Gallagher provides essential support as part of her Development Officer duties. MAP is registered with Companies House and as a registered charity MAP is also accountable to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and submits an annual return and annual accounts.

**Our Team**

**Lindsay Gallagher, Development Officer/Administrator**

Working 25 hours a week, Lindsay’s main role is admin and book-keeping for Marr Area Partnership. She is also your go-to for the Initiative Grant Scheme and is Secretary for the Braemar Hydro Fund. She is the project co-ordinator for the Marr Log Bank project. This year, she joined Cairngorms Trust as a Trustee. Working with CNPA and VABS recently, Linday is helped the Strathdon community update their Community Action Plan, which will be available shortly.

**Kate Redpath, Development Officer**

Working 7 hours a week, Kate is responsible for the MAP weekly community bulletin, available via email subscription and on the MAP website. The bulletin shares updates from Aberdeenshire Council, Marr Community Planning Partners, Scottish Government, the Cairngorms National Park, and many third sector groups. Opportunities for funding, volunteering, employment, and to have your say via community engagement initiatives are some of the key items included each week. Kate supports Lyza with delivery of priorities 1 and 5 of the Marr Community Food Plan.

**Cat Houston, Development Officer**

Cat works 10 hours a week, however over the winter just past and next (Nov-Mar) she has had another 10 hours funded by the AVA's Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund (through MAP) to run Ballater’s weekly warm space, Toasty!

Cat also has a particular focus on Village Halls and continues to work using the established email database and Facebook group to help connect and support individuals and groups involved in running community spaces.

She is a key member of the team fulfilling MAP's agreement with the Park, particularly with regard to promoting the CNPA’s activities to the Eastern side, and business development generally.

**Lyza Riddell, Development Officer**

Lyza joined MAP in January 2025 as a Development Officer for Marr Community Food, a project designed to deliver goals from the Marr Community Food Plan produced by Aberdeenshire Council’s Marr Community Planning Partnership. Her focus is on supporting communities to increase local food access opportunities and reduce food waste. Lyza has a background in community development work, as well as having run the Alford Community Food Store during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lyza is also admin for the Marr Food WhatsApp group.

**The MAP Board**

Simon Blackett, Chair

Nigel Healey, Treasurer

Bill Slee, Gillian Needham, George Wordie, Patricia Fraser, Jim Bruce, Margaret McNaught, Janice Smith, Sally Scott

**Service Level Agreements (SLAs)**

Marr Area Partnership operates under an SLA with Marr Community Planning Group, and an agreement with the Cairngorms National Park Authority. MAP meets regularly with the Communities and Rural Development Manager and Rural Development Officer from CNPA and the Marr Area Manager and Community Planning Officer from The Marr Community Planning Partnership.

The SLA process provides a good basis for planning, performance management, accountability, and resource allocation.

Elements of the SLA, as described in the “Definition of Service” section are as follows;

1. **Providing a local advice service to groups to help realise opportunities in their communities**
2. **Providing business and administrative advice to social/community enterprises seeking to develop economic opportunities**
3. **Supporting community planning within communities**
4. **Facilitating a two-way flow of information between communities and agencies**
5. **Supporting Community Ward Forums**
6. **Working to identify outcomes that fit with the Single Outcome Agreement**
7. **Working with CNPA to bring benefit to Aberdeenshire communities**

**Our Work**

MAP worked with many community groups across the Marr Area in 2024-2025. The section below highlights elements of MAP’s work and demonstrates the scope and scale of local initiatives supported by MAP officers.

Marr is the largest area in Aberdeenshire with the smallest population and so our work supporting communities is made more challenging given this spatial dispersion.

It is worth noting that for all the projects and initiatives mentioned below MAP continually work with communities to set appropriate expectations and build the foundations for each committed group that is involved. This is a crucial aspect of our work and often fundamental to success.

MAP also maintains capacity building support for the delivery of community priorities in Eastern Cairngorms. This may be as varied as working to improve the sustainability and resilience of community groups, support for Social Enterprises, to responding to emerging economic opportunities.

**Website, Bulletins and Social Media**

The MAP bulletins are distributed weekly, sometimes more often if there is urgent information to share, to over 550 subscribers. The bulletins continue to provide a vital, accessible resource to groups and individuals across Marr. Bulletins are added to the MAP website and shared on social media. The Marr Area Partnership website is undergoing a revamp, and the Facebook and Instagram pages are growing with a wide reaching following of community groups and individuals.

**Community Ward Forums**

The Community Ward Forums are undergoing a reorganisation. This year, MAP have worked alongside the Marr Community Planning Group (MCPG) and shared their questionnaire that went to all community councils asking for their views of the way forward for the Forums. We also met with the MCPG Planning officer to suggest topics and dates for the next Forums.

**Marr Village Halls Network**

Following our work with the Village Halls Manual, MAP has created a database of around 40 email contacts, as well as a Facebook group "Marr Halls Network" to help connect and support individuals and community groups involved in the running of their village hall.

**Cairngorm National Park Authority**

MAP continues to support delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan 2022-27. Our work this year has included:-

* Community Action Plan for Strathdon. We had a successful “Big Conversation” on 9th November, the draft plan is with the Strathdon Community Development Trust for their final comments and will be available shortly.
* Braemar Community have been actively pursuing their Community Action Plan with support from MAP Chair. It is expected that their final plan will be ready in the next few months.
* MAP offers general capacity building support for the delivery of agreed community priorities in Eastern Cairngorms. This is as varied as working to improve the sustainability and resilience of community groups and support for Social Enterprises to responding to emerging economic challenges and opportunities. A snapshot of what we have achieved follows:
* Marr Log Bank project has a hub in Braemar and is helping support families in fuel poverty
* New log bank hub set up in Ballater
* Village Halls – Ballater, Aboyne, Braemar (Castleton) and Lumphanan in particular, also more widely through MAP Village Halls Network’s Facebook and email contacts
* Wee Ducklings Upper Deeside Community Playgroup – assisted funding process to employ facilitator from Aug-Mar 25 (CLV).
* Ballater Playpark Improvements Group (PIG) Assisted with re-connection with council landscaping officers with the result of uncovering £75,000 in funding allocation for the Monaltrie Park site for 2025-26. Five companies expected to present plans by February 2025 for group/public consideration. Physical preparations have also been carried out on site by AbCo.
* Ballater Evergreen Club: Attended meetings, assisted with admin, posters, publicity. Still lots to do in terms of developing the group, utilising available finances to better effect and raising the profile of benefits/activities open to those aged 50+ in the village.
* Ballater Pantry: Attended meetings, assisted with admin, posters, publicity. Located previous funds with view to transfer to present group member/s. Supported negotiations to install outdoor shed for surplus food to increase access and also a part separation from the Ballater Hardship Fund as combining the two was creating mixed messages for the public and confusion for volunteers.
* Ballater Business Association/VisitBallater/VisitCairngorms – support offered towards transition process, channel open for further support/development
* Enterprising Aberdeenshire – attended networking event 7.11.24
* Scottish Rural and Island Transport Committee – Online Café & Chats regularly attended. Info shared to Ballater’s interested transport parties
* Food Van project applications
* Advice and information given someone wanting to start allotments in Ballater
* Glenmore visitor centre takeover details to Richard Frimston, Ballater
* Funding ideas to various groups and individuals including, Braemar Primary School, SCDT, BCL, Tok Pod at Aboyne Academy, Strathdon Paths Group,
* Toasty! Warm Space Ballater – supported funding application from AVA’s CMHWBA Fund to employ facilitator Jan-Mar 25 and Nov-Mar 26. Enabled increased engagement with community through leaflet design and drop, working with Ballater Pantry and further engagements with support services including technology support, SWACAB and visits from MSP and MP planned for Feb. Transport issues identified for development.
* Established a homeworkers hub in Ballater. Funded by CLV. Three events to date, in September (Ballater); November (Dinnet) and January (Strathdon). Attendees varied from 2-12 but each session valuable in terms of networking, connecting people and sharing info regarding Cairngorms 2030. Final event planned Braemar Spring 2025, hopefully with CNPA (2030) presence/input.
* Contact made with B&C Community Council Secretary and other interested individuals/groups to indicate potential and MAP’s availability to assist
* Joined Visit Ballater as a member
* Establishing a Build Your Business Trail in Ballater. The Summer Trail was a great success with 22 participants/models, 7 of those displayed in the CNPA public area of the Albert Hall, rest across village shopping area; 60 paper trail lists uplifted from CNPA area. A Festive Lego event culminated in an exhibition in CNPA public area on Nov 30 (Ballater Winter Festival), space shared with CNPA engagement staff. Est 350 visitors and great contacts/working relationships established.
* Shared relevant information to communities via the MAP weekly bulletin sent to 550 individuals/groups with Cairngorm area related items included.
* MAP supported various Park Authority led initiatives through membership of associated working groups:
  + Representative from MAP Board on the Cairngorm Future Land Use Project
  + Representative from MAP Board on the Cairngorms Nature Reps group.
  + Representative from MAP Board is a member of Cairngorms Business Partnership and attend their meetings.
  + Representative from MAP Board sat on Cairngorm Communities Group which is temporarily suspended.
  + MAP attended AoCC EGM as a board member. AoCC has now ceased, and money held has been distributed to MAP and VABS to be ring-fenced for the purpose of supporting the 21 community councils across the Park in future to re-engage in a cross-Park network of community representation.
* We made contact with Glenshee Ski Centre and Mount Blair CDT and Stratharle Tourist Association communities to better understand emerging issues within the Glenshee area.

**Braemar Hydro Community Fund**

MAP administer the Braemar Hydro Community Fund, liaising with the chair, panel, and applicants.

**Homeworkers Hubs**

Our first event held at Ballater’s Rothesay Rooms on Wednesday 4th September attracted two attendees plus one entrepreneurial home-schooler. One person emailed asking to be kept informed of future events, and a few people also indicated a similar interest on Facebook posts/ads. One also made the suggestion that the timing of 10-12 was perhaps not convenient for those homeworkers who were tied to certain hours, and that a lunchtime slot may be better.

A second Hub took place on November 6th in Dinnet (Loch Kinord Hotel), this time from 12-2pm and the attendance of 10 individuals (plus a baby!) perhaps proved that lunchtimes are better in terms of people’s ability to attend.

One participant from Logie Coldstone also mentioned that moves were afoot their to create a co-working space in the village hall there. Support and advice were offered, but it seems the notion of coworking/connecting homeworkers is certainly gathering pace in the Eastern Cairngorms area

**Marr Food Project – supported by Board member, Janice Smith**

Last years future plans of employing a Food Project Co-Ordinator have been realised and a Development Officer began this work in January through funding received from Marr Poverty Alleviation Fund.

To date, the Marr Community Food project has expanded on the existing Marr Food Group aims of connecting and coordinating with local community food initiatives (CFIs) as well as creating new food access opportunities in three communities through a pilot placement of new Marr Community Food Outdoor Pantries. With thanks to funding from the **Scottish Government’s Rural Community Led Local Development Fund 2024/25** we have also supported a number of community led food initiatives including a kitchen garden expansion at Lumsden Primary to allow pupils to add home grown produce to their community café, a new food pantry pop-up service at Rannes Hall in Kennethmont, the creation of a cookery programme at Alford Primary School through the purchase of a portable cooker and trolley, and the development of a larder within Banchory Academy which can be discreetly accessed by pupils and families. One of our early priority areas has been to build links with Marr area schools, as CFIs have noted difficulty in achieving this in the past. We have had great success in the initial phase of this focus through the provision of holiday gift parcels to 429 pupils through 10 settings within Marr as well as collecting associated feedback from the participating schools on the needs of their pupils and parent forums. A presentation on the work completed during Phase 1 of the Marr Community Food project will be given at the 2025 MAP AGM.

**Marr Log Bank – supported by Board members Gillian Needham and Simon Blackett**

The 3rd season of this innovative project was possible thanks to funding support from The MacRobert Trust and Cairngorm Trust Community Led Vision fund. With thanks to a private household in the area for donating a huge amount of wood, and using a local wood processing yard to log and bag donated timber, and volunteers to distribute to individuals and hubs across Marr, we worked with schools, foodbanks, community and elected Councillors, pantries and larders, Citizens Advice Bureau and faith groups to reach those in our communities who needed our help. In this, our third season, the project has delivered almost 800 bags of seasoned firewood to hubs and homes across all corners of Marr. We now have hubs up and running in Huntly, Braemar, Tap ‘O Noth, Strathdon, Tarland and Ballater with The Strathdon Hub providing their own wood and is supported by donations of logs from Candacraig Estate and storage space for distribution by Dunecht Estates.

As always, a huge thank you must go to our volunteers who give up their time to collect timber and deliver logs, we could not do this without our volunteers

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|  | A pile of wood in a building  Description automatically generated |  |

**Signposting**

MAP is on hand to help with signposting and networking, bringing groups together and providing advice and support. This year we have helped with enquiries about community asset transfers, place planning, funding, food, and pantries. Through this work we support the priorities of the Marr Community Development Plan and the National Park Partnership Plan.

**MAP in Partnership**

MAP plays an integral role assisting in the development of partnerships formed around issues, initiatives and projects, and is also a significant stakeholder in several formal and informal partnerships at a national, regional and local level.

MAP sits on the following groups;

* **The Local Learning Partnership.** Community and Learning Development partners deliver positive outcomes for communities and learners. The groups look at learning demand and opportunities across the Shire within the communities they cover. The partnership delivers discrete initiatives meeting those objectives along with Live Life Aberdeenshire.
* **Health and Wellbeing** **Group.**is a partnership with NHS, the Marr Community Planning Team, MAP and AVA identifying work strands that support wellbeing initiatives in Marr, for example men’s mental health.
* **Marr Community Planning Group*.*** This is a representative body of stakeholders in the community planning arena including NHS Emergency services, CLD and AVA
* **Association of Cairngorm Communities**. MAP sits on this body which is a networking and information sharing group of development trusts, community associations and community councils from with the Cairngorms National Park
* **VABS (Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey)*.*** MAP is working with support from VABS, to incorporate new approaches to Community Action Planning, with the aim of developing consistent approaches to engagement within the Cairngorms National Park area. We would like to thank Karen for all her support this year.

MAP is a valued proactive participant in these groups which show the geographically diverse and range of topics engaged in. All these partnerships produce specific packages of work and complement our networking and engagement at the local level.

**MAP Initiative Grant Scheme**

MAP manages the Initiative Grant Scheme (IGS) as predominantly a seed corn fund which helps demonstrate confidence in the project to the community and other bigger funders. A panel of board members and development officers have a process for determining the grant applications and go to great lengths to ensure the application process is simple, straight forward and appropriate to local need.

In 2024-25 we have given funds to 9 groups across Marr, totalling £7940.00.

**2024-2025 Projects supported by IGS**

**Aboyne Paths & Tracks - £1000**

Aboyne Paths & Tracks group applied for funding to run an in-house training course for 6 volunteers from local paths groups and to buy another petrol strimmer and associated safety equipment to allow them to maintain their (ever expanding) path network as outlined on the APTG paths leaflet. Working alongside other Paths Groups in the Marr Paths Forum by providing training & tools for other groups helps bring communities together to work & learn from each other & create new volunteering opportunities.

**Alford Bowling Club - £1000**

Alford Bowling Club used their funds to help upgrade their clubhouse which is in need of essential repair and maintenance. This will make the clubhouse a safer, more comfortable and welcoming place.

**BCL Community Wood - £1000**

Money from the IGS helped Braemar Community Ltd (BCL) to pay lawyers fees as part of their Community Asset Transfer when buying a piece of land by the village as community wood. (Clunie Meadow) They have ideas and plans to improve and use the land for the benefit of future generations, but the first challenge is acquiring the land.

**Bellabeg Noticeboard - £750.00**

The need for a community notice board was raised in a facilitation exercise by the Strathdon Community Development Trust under ‘what the community wants' – a communication board sited centrally and easy to access was raised. With money from the IGS fund, the board will enable community members not using social media of community events.

**Castle Street Coffee, CiC, Huntly - £1000**

Castle Street Coffee will serve as a community-driven café located in Huntly, blending high-quality coffee and delicious food with a strong social mission – supporting the mental health and wellbeing of young people. By offering early intervention support, coaching, mentoring, and work placements, they aim to build confidence, resilience, and life skills. They will also provide training and accredited qualifications to help participants gain employable skills. Their social impact model will generate a sustainable revenue stream, while reinvesting profits into mental health programmes, employability coaching, and personal development opportunities for local youth. We were pleased to be able to help with money from the IGS fund.

**Rannes Hall, ,Kennethmont - £1000**

The Rannes Hall Management Committee applied for funds to help buy and install a generator at the Hall creating an emergency community hub which the area of Kennethmont and outlying district can use in times of power outage and other emergencies. The Rannes Hall is the focal point of the village with no shops or services within the village and the community is becoming increasingly reliant on the village hall and the installation of a generator will provide warmth, food, communication and wellbeing with weather events cause problems at home.

**Strathdon Community Development Trust - £440.00**

As a hub for the Marr Log Bank Project, with logs donated by Candacraig Estate, to be able to process logs on site thereby reducing time and expense by fully processing the wood wherever it might be the IGS fund helped buy a generator. The split wood is stored in a shed donated by Dunecht Estates. The generator will have other uses during power outages in the area.

**Torphins Paths Group - £1000**

There is currently no path heading NE from the village parallel to the B993. This is a fast road, unsafe for walkers, wheelers and runners so people accessing the village from this direction – and walkers leaving the village this way - currently have to drive. Learney Estate has recently planted a new wood of broadleaf and native trees on the slope to the east of the B993 and with a track running along the bottom of the plantation, parallel to the road, The Estate are happy for the Torphins Paths Group to turn this into a track to be used by the public. Deer need to be kept out of the plantation and with money from the IGS, the Paths Group are going to install two new self-closing gates for walkers at either end of the plantation and to move 70m of stock fence back slightly so that walkers can stay away from the road.

**Towie Hall - £750.00**

With help from money from the IGS, a dishwasher and microwave were purchased, to enable community events including catering to be run more efficiently. These community events include funeral teas, Towie Primary School ‘Soup and Sweet’ events, The Silver

Circle, not to mention the annual Burns Supper, all of which can entail extensive washing up.

**Future Plans**

The following strategic objectives were agreed at board meetings facilitated by Karen Derrick of VABS to review our purposes and modus operandi and undertake preparatory work for a strategic plan:

* To provide practical and advisory services to Marr voluntary organisations and their partners
* To assess existing and emerging needs in rural communities and small towns in Marr and behave proactively to increase awareness and encourage community led responses
* To support community planning processes and engage actively with the community planning and the community led development agenda
* To assist in the formation and development of new and existing third sector organisations, including social enterprises
* To initiate encourage and promote collaboration between the voluntary sector, statutory bodies and the private sector in ways that support community development
* To assess existing and emerging community needs and develop and deliver income-generating projects which address those needs
* To grow MAP membership to engage with and respond to the diverse communities of place, interest and identity in Marr
* To encourage active citizenship through engagement with consultations, collaborative community planning and volunteering
* To invest in the MAP team (paid and unpaid) and enable their personal development in ways that enhance their and the organisation’s potential
* To ensure that MAP operates as an efficient and cost-effective TSO

**Summary**

MAP continues to adapt well to the changeable funding landscape with committed, experienced, expert, and resilient staff. The ongoing cost of living crisis and personal and community resilience is forefront in our support to communities going forward. MAP will continue to help new groups and projects build firm foundations and support established groups with on-going governance. MAP will work to ensure community sustainability, inclusivity and diversity across all its activities, in accordance with The Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council’s vision for communities.

**March 2025**

*If you require a larger print version of this document please contact:*

*lindsay@marrareapartnership.org.uk*

With thanks to our supporters:

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