

North York Moors National Park Authority

28 September 2026

Item 9, Future Generations Engagement Pilot and Farm Conservation – Budget recommendation

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To set out proposals and seek approval from Members to allocate additional resources from Defra RDEL allocation to support delivery work in respect of future generations engagement and farm conservation

2. Background and introduction

- 2.1 Officers tabled an updated Budget report at the June National Park Authority seeking approval to allocate an additional one-off £1.72m of RDEL funding that had been allocated by Defra for the 2026/27 financial year. Members resolved to fully allocate this funding within the current financial year, freeing up earned income that could either be allocated to additional delivery activities or reserves.
- 2.2 Members approved recommendations at that meeting to allocate just over £400k of funding to specific activities and/or additional resources. This included additional support for external funding, asset management, apprenticeships, leadership development and some short-term project delivery. Just over £1.3 million of funding was allocated to general reserves for future allocation to initiatives by Members. Officers noted in paragraph 4.4 of the June report that a number of other opportunities had been identified to optimise use of the additional one-off funding, which would be brought to Members for discussion.
- 2.3 Officers have now developed further proposals in two specific areas that seek to accelerate delivery of Management Plan objectives and the achievement of the 30 by 30 goal for nature conservation. Directors are therefore bringing these proposals forward for discussion and approval at this meeting.

3. Future Generations Engagement Pilot

- 3.1 In Spring 2026 the Recreation and Wellbeing Forum undertook scrutiny of the delivery and impact of our work in engaging future generations around the value and importance of the North York Moors National Park. The review was framed around the following five questions:
 - How can we make the greatest difference to future generations?
 - What is it most valuable for the Authority to focus on?
 - Are we focussing our energies in the right way/direction given our limited resources?
 - What other opportunities are there for creating active citizens for the future?
 - Are there any other stakeholders we should be engaging with in this space?

- 3.2 A detailed summary of the scrutiny findings was reported to NPA in June. Members noted that engaging children in meaningful visits and activity within the National Park can lead to improved health outcomes, better understanding of our special qualities, the impact of climate change, the importance of supporting and restoring nature. The main recommendations from members of the Recreation and Wellbeing Forum were to:
- Focus the Authority's future generation engagement on primary aged children (Key Stage 1 and 2) as the critical age of influence for nature connection is prior to age 12
 - Link to school curricula to ensure buy-in from schools.
 - Scale up and expand the supply of what the Authority can offer by utilising 'out of season' months for appropriate forms of engagement activity.
 - Develop further partnerships and utilise external providers to expand the reach of any engagement offer.
- 3.3 The Forum also recommended that the Authority consider allocating additional resources from reserves for a period of time in order to pilot and develop ways in which those recommendations can be taken forward. At the Authority meeting in June it was agreed that officers would bring forward detailed proposals for Members' consideration.
- 3.4 Three themed proposals are being put forward, one of which is comprised of 3 distinct programmes within that theme. These proposals will develop partnerships that are already aligned with the Authority. These are:
- Proposal 1:** Fund an additional cohort of the Stepping Stones to Nature project delivered by North York Moors Trust which focuses on schools in areas of high levels of deprivation with no access to meaningful outdoor education opportunities.
- Proposal 2:** Year-round schools' engagement based on three programmes comprising winter themed visits to Danby Lodge for KS1 children, evenings under the stars for KS2 children and space days for KS2 children who cannot attend evening sessions
- Proposal 3:** Recruit Explorer families from the Stepping Stones to Nature schools and from Green Social Prescribing contacts made through the children's nature prescription element of the Natural Health Service project to test if this produces a higher level of engagement and awareness.
- The full details of each programme and the expected scale of impact is contained within appendix 1, based on submissions considered by the Recreation and Wellbeing Forum.
- 3.5 The total cost of the three proposals: is £53,856 over a period of 18 months to 31 March '28. There is some scope to generate a small amount of income to offset some of these costs but at this stage given the pilot nature of these proposals it is recommended to proceed with the full amount.

4. Farm Conservation

- 4.1 With around 66% of the land area of the North York Moors managed by farmers, how we work with and harness them is indispensable to the National Park Authority's ability to achieve our statutory purposes, deliver Management Plan objectives and maximise the landscape's contribution to Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and national targets such as 30 by 30.
- 4.2 Although the Authority has built strong and trusted relationships with farming businesses across the North York Moors over many years, our direct engagement with them over recent years has focussed very heavily on the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme. This has brought many benefits and strengthened relationships. Nonetheless, FiPL is best described as a special projects scheme that offers one-off grants to farmers and land managers rather than ongoing revenue incentives for nature-friendly land management. In order to truly harness the potential of farmers to deliver more in terms of environmental and habitat enhancement, we need to help farmers make best use of the wider suite of revenue payment incentives provided by Defra schemes such as Countryside Stewardship.
- 4.3 Through National Parks England, the North York Moors has championed the enhanced role that National Park Authorities could play in delivering Countryside Stewardship, which is seen as disproportionately important as a key mechanism for rewarding the delivery by farmers and land managers of environmental public goods. With a large number of farmers in the North York Moors likely to need to move from older 'legacy' stewardship schemes over the next couple of years, the NPA has started discussion with Natural England about how we can support an effective transition that enables farmers to make the most of new schemes and helps secure effective management of habitats. The NPA is also involved in discussions with the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority and other protected landscapes in the region on proposals to create a regional farm advice network centred on protected landscapes.
- 4.4 The Authority has very limited capacity (equivalent to 0.4 FTE) within our current farming and land management team beyond the staff resources devoted to FiPL. This means that our ability to provide detailed input to the discussions above, let alone play a more significant role in relation to wider farm advice and guidance, support for farm clusters etc has been very stretched. The NPA historically had a much larger farm conservation team prior to restructuring several years ago.
- 4.5 Officers are therefore recommending that the Authority invests some of the additional funding released by the one-off RDEL injection to bolster our resources in farm conservation. Specifically, our recommendation is to recruit a new Farm Conservation Officer, to work alongside our Head of Farming and Land Management (Rebecca Thompson) and FiPL team. Specific responsibilities of the role will include:
- Providing practical, integrated farm business and environmental advice that supports the delivery of positive outcomes for nature, water, climate, people and place.
 - Supporting farmers in accessing and applying for Defra schemes and ensuring that the outcomes delivered are aligned with Management Plan priorities.

- Working closely with the local Natural England team to support the development of an appropriate CSHT pipeline of agreements and to support them in the transition of extant HLS agreement into ELMs schemes.
- Promoting farming practices that contribute to the Authority's Climate Action Plan targets, including soil health improvements, reduced emissions, agroforestry, peatland restoration and optimised nutrient use.

4.6 The role would be a fixed-term contract of three years at an approximate cost of £35-£40k per annum, i.e up to £120k over three years. The ability to sustain resource beyond that will be entirely contingent on unlocking additional resources as a consequence of discussions around our role in farm policy beyond FiPL.

5. Assessing proposals against SLT criteria

5.1 The updated budget report in June drew attention to set of relevant criteria against which the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) felt any proposals for use of additional funding should be considered. These took account of the rationale that was explicitly laid out by Defra in awarding the additional RDEL funding and included:

- Whether opportunities contributed to our long-term financial resilience.
- Whether opportunities strengthened organisational resilience.
- Deliverability over the next three years and avoidance of future liabilities on our core revenue funding (i.e must be time-limited).
- Their contribution to delivering nature recovery and 30x30, which were specifically mentioned by Defra as national priorities for funding.

5.2 Officers have assessed the two proposals against these criteria. Whilst neither proposal is expected to immediately generate additional revenue, both proposals have the capability of demonstrating proof of concept that might lead to funding being leveraged in the form of grant funding (future generations) or additional government investment (farm conservation). The farm conservation proposal also makes a contribution to organisation resilience by ensuring dedicated expertise and resource to support discussions with NE, other protected landscape, the Combined Authority and others which relieves some pressure on other members of staff (including the CEO).

5.3 Both sets of proposals are time limited, thus meeting the test of deliverability and avoidance of liabilities. The Farm Conservation post is viewed by Officers as making a critical contribution to national priorities, particularly the achievement of 30 by 30 by working even more closely with farmers on optimise use of national schemes to increase wildlife-rich habitat. Whilst the impact of the future generations proposals on nature and the environment is inherently longer-term, the proposals make a significant contribution to Management Plan objective 14 (see below).

6. Financial and staffing implications

- 6.1 The total cost of these proposals amounts to c.£174k over three years. This is broken down in appendix 2 and will be incorporated into the revised budget at Q2 reforecast.
- 6.2 The costs cover salary for existing part time Outdoor Learning Leader to expand her seasonal contract (currently March to October) and some additional administration costs. One new full time, fixed-term post in the Farming and Land Management team is also created.

7. Contribution to National Park Management Plan

- 7.1 The future generations engagement proposals will directly contribute to Objective 14 of the Management Plan: “to inspire the next generation to enjoy, learn about and care for the National Park, and support young people’s direct involvement in decision-making about its future”. The planned activity with future generations has relevance to other objectives within the Management Plan, particularly Objective 13 “increase awareness of and access to the National Park among underserved communities, particularly those in the surrounding area”.
- 7.2 The Farm Conservation proposal directly contributes to Objective 4 (protect, restore and improve soils), Objective 6 (create bigger, better and more joined up habitats with nature-rich wildlife corridors) and Objective 19 (maintain a strong and viable farming and land management community). There are indirect contributions to several other objectives.

8. Legal and sustainability implications

- 8.1 None

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 That Members approve the allocation of £174k from general reserves to fund the proposals outlined in sections 3 and 4 of this report.

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Appendix 1 - Future Generations Engagement Proposals

Proposal 1: Stepping Stones to Nature Partnership with the North York Moors Trust

Stepping Stones to Nature is the North York Moors Trust's nature-based schools programme, designed to help children grow up well through connection with nature and their local National Park.

The programme takes a regular, sustained and meaningful approach rather than relying on occasional outdoor visits. Children build familiarity, confidence, knowledge and practical skills over time before progressing to experiences in the North York Moors National Park which complement and add depth to this learning and development whilst creating a sense of belonging to the National Park.

The programme is now in its third year. Previously funded by the Trust and some funding from NFU Mutual, ICL Boulby, Rounton Coffee. The Trust is underwriting another year, and they are now looking to develop the next phase of the programme through further corporate and strategic partnerships.

One opportunity would be for the North York Moors National Park Authority to sponsor a school for a full academic year, supporting an entire Year 3 cohort of approximately of between 40–60 children and 4 staff members.

For approximately **£10,000-£12,000** the project will deliver:

- 37 nature-based sessions across the school year, delivered during term time.
- Regular, sustained engagement with one Year 3 cohort of approximately 40–60 children aged 7–8.
- Two visits into the North York Moors National Park one in autumn/winter and one in spring/summer — allowing children to apply their learning and develop a deeper relationship with the National Park.
- Opportunities for National Park rangers/staff to engage with the children, either through school visits or as part of the National Park experiences.
- Resources and materials for the programme.
- Liaison with school leadership and teaching staff.
- Commissioning an existing patronship to develop further in this space and create capacity.
- NPA branding of the project.

Proposal 2: Year-round schools' engagement

This proposal will make use of the opportunities for engagement and learning which are created through the opening of the Danby Dark Skies Station as a learning space. It will create an understanding and appreciation that the countryside is a place where learning and visits can take place outdoors at any time of year.

The aim is to build on our previously funded work on dark skies education through furthering knowledge and understanding of our International Dark Skies designation (supporting use of the Danby Dark Skies Station at times of the year when traditionally

schools would not visit a location like a National Park. The plan is to embed pupils' learning and understanding about living things in their environment and how to care for the countryside. It supports outdoor learning for early years in a marketplace where outdoor visits for this age group are limited. Whilst education visits can be one off experiences research around the value of such experiences have been shown to:

- Improve confidence – pushes children out of their comfort zones, building confidence and self esteem
- Promote Independence – especially for younger children who develop skills around self sufficiency
- Provide new experiences – offer the chance to experience things they may not have the opportunity to do otherwise. Experiencing new and exciting aspects of the world is a great way to grow as an individual.
- Enhance learning - a change of setting can encourage pupils to become more involved in the subject matter and offer additional context to their learning. Children develop their knowledge – as do teachers!
- Enhance practical knowledge - children learn practically rather than confined to four walls and screen time.
- Improve team working - children are challenged to complete tasks as a team. Spending time together in an unknown environment helps to build trust with each other.
- Improve social skills - helping pupils to learn how to interact with each other in a kind and respectful way. This can be especially valuable for children who struggle with social skills or who aren't given opportunities to interact with others outside of the classroom.
- Increase physical activity – they provide pupils with an opportunity to take part in physical exercise which they are more likely to do with their peers, outside of school, and in a fun environment.
- Reduce stress - visits help with stress reduction. They enable children an escape from their daily routines and engage in fun activities with their friend creating lasting memories.

The audience for these opportunities are in the KS1 and 2 cohorts (ages 4 – 11) which was a focal area requested by Members in their discussion. These proposals will be delivered through a mix of in-house capacity and partnership working with a specialist provider of dark skies education.

Programme 1 - KS1 outdoor learning during Winter

Provision of One Snowy Night day visits supporting the KS1 curriculum. Proven and highly valued programme of engagement supporting and enhancing learning through:

- Science: Living things and their habitats.
- PSHE: Caring for local environments and helping others. The benefits to health and wellbeing through learning outside the classroom in an outdoors setting.
- PE: Co-operative games and physical activity.

16 x 1 day visits for KS1 children to Danby Lodge. **75%** of these from areas of multiple deprivation. Nov/Dec 2026 and Nov/Dec 2027 – 8 visits per year. Reaching 400 children and 48 teachers.

Cost over next two winters: **£6,901**

Programme 2 – KS2 Dark Skies Evenings and Space Days

Provision of Evening Under the Stars night visits to Danby Lodge Dark Skies Station or Sutton Bank Nature Hub for Key Stage 2 pupils. Proven and highly valued programme of engagement supporting and enhancing learning through:

- Science: Earth and Space, Habitats and Environment including human impact.
- Physical Education: Team and outdoor challenges
- PSHE: The benefits to health and wellbeing through learning outside the classroom in an outdoors setting.

The evenings are made up of a carousel of activities, dividing large classes into smaller more manageable groups, essential for dark skies experiences. The activities will comprise space geocaching and understanding how GPS works, a bioluminescence walk and introduction to nocturnal wildlife/pollinators, understanding the importance of the right lighting followed by star gazing facilitated with a specialist provider.

- 16 x 1 night visits for KS2 children. **75%** from schools in areas of multiple deprivation. January and February 2027 and January and February 2028 (8 nights per year).
- Reaching 400 children and 48 teachers.
- Cost over next two winters: **£11,152.**

Programme 3 - Provision of Space day visits to Danby Lodge Dark Skies Station

Trial a new day programme with planetarium provided in partnership with specialist providers. This enables those schools unable to commit to evening sessions to have a dark skies experience.

The days will be split in two with the provider delivering an immersive experience in their planetarium followed by space geocaching and understanding how a GPS works with National Park staff.

The day visits support and enhance learning through:

- Science: Earth and Space, Habitats and Environment including human impact.
- Physical Education: Team and outdoor challenges
- PSHE: The benefits to health and wellbeing through learning outside the classroom in an outdoors setting.

16 x 1 day visits to Danby Lodge for KS2 children. 75% from schools in areas of multiple deprivation. January/February 2027 and January/February 2028 (8 days per year). Reaching 400 children and 48 teachers.

Cost over next two winters: **£14,652.**

Both of these dark skies proposals provide specialist support for an area of the curriculum in which teachers are less familiar. Our previously funded dark skies experiences during Generation Green 2 were oversubscribed and we had to turn schools away. As an International Dark Skies Reserve, we should provide equitable access to dark skies for children, particularly those in our surrounding areas of deprivation as our Dark Skies Festival events are expensive and often inaccessible for families without transport.

Proposal 3: Family Explorers

This proposal will expand our Explorer Volunteers experience to families who become connected to us via their children accessing other programmes such as Stepping Stones and the Natural Health Service. Family Explorers has been a successful programme in ensuring equitability for our family volunteering provision by targeting families in areas of deprivation who struggle to access our core offer due to transport limitations and lack of knowledge.

The Social Return on Investment evaluation from our lottery funded Explorer project, which focussed on families in Teesside, Whitby and Scarborough, showed the following:

- Families experienced and valued highly their increased environmental awareness and responsibility. This was the most important outcome by a wide margin.
- The intervention created resilient young people through improvements to mental health, confidence and independence – equipping them for an ever more high-tech society.
- The intervention made families stronger. Outcomes relating to family relationships and mental health were the most significant values after environmental awareness.
- The social value created for families from areas of deprivation was higher than families outside of those areas (who attend our core funded Explorer group).
- For every £1 of investment there was 6 times as much social value created for participants.

We propose to recruit families from the Stepping Stones project schools and Green Social Prescribing contacts made through the children's nature prescription element of the Natural Health Service project.

10 families (approx. 30 individuals) between April 2027 – March 2028

Costs cover staff costs and personal development/training due to them not being core funded and a small mileage allowance. There is a modest materials budget for resources e.g. wood for making bird/bat boxes, willow for making bird feeders. Costs also cover transport for 8 out of the 12 sessions to fully utilise sites showcasing our special qualities (volunteer work tasks are often in areas not on public transport routes), we will also utilise public transport where possible e.g. the Esk Valley Railway and Moorsbus. Cost for 2027/28 financial year **£9,150**

Total cost of all proposals: £53,856

Appendix 2 –Surplus Earned Income Proposal

Proposal	2026/27 £k	2027/28 £k	2028/29 £k	Total £k	Comment
Total Surplus Earned Income	-	-	-	1,720	Earned income released through allocation of additional one-off £1.72m Defra RDEL to activities in 26/27 financial year
Proposals previously approved at June NPA	265.5	80	62.5	408	Includes bridge funding for L2 apprentices, new funding officer, estates manager, HR consultancy, SROI research project, health & safety, further leadership development training
Unallocated surplus earned income released to general reserve	-	-	-	1,312	-
Future generations engagement pilot proposals	22.3	31.5	-	53.8	-
Farm Conservation Officer	20	40	40	120	Three-year FTC runs into 2029/30 financial year
Total				173.8	-
Remaining unallocated in general reserve	-	-	-	1,138.2	Surplus earned income retained in general reserve for future allocation/ initiatives subject to Member approval