

North York Moors National Park Authority

28 September 2026

Item 12, Chief Executive's report

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the CEO's activities since the last NPA and to identify key and emerging issues for Members to be aware of.

2. National issues and developments

- 2.1 With prolonged drought over the summer affecting much of England and Wales, the risks posed by wildfire have become prominent in public and political discourse. As previously reported, the NPA responded to an earlier call for evidence by the Commons EFRA committee on the subject and officers and I have been involved in providing briefing to central government in recent weeks via NPE. Government did act on one of our recommendations in temporarily banning the sale of disposable barbecues in August. Whilst the North York Moors has been spared the largest wildfires this summer (unlike the Cairngorms, Peak District and Suffolk coast), some landowners have experienced difficulties with numerous call outs to the Fire Brigade. The North York Moors has stepped up by leading the joint Don't Spark Disaster campaign and laying on additional patrols by our Assistant and Volunteer Rangers across c.30 hotspot locations across the National Park.

The circumstances have also cast some helpful light on our role in terms of wildfire mitigation, including statutory responsibilities under the CROW Act and the role of targeted restrictions on fire such as byelaw. Given the impact of climate change, the conditions experienced this summer would appear to be part of a new normal and it feels appropriate that we also explore whether additional measures may be needed beyond the status quo. Officers are holding an internal brainstorming session to explore various aspects of our role in October.

- 2.2 National Parks England has published new vision for English National Parks as nature rich landscapes that improve the nation for everyone, where communities thrive, businesses flourish and people always belong. The document makes the case for National Parks being part of our critical national infrastructure and sets out the collective ambitions of the ten English National Park Authorities as well as framing a series of asks of government to enable these ambitions to be met.

<https://nationalparksengland.org.uk/future-vision>

- 2.3 Defra published the Farming Roadmap earlier in the summer which sets the medium to long-term direction of farming policy beyond 2030. Although there is some speculation about whether a change of Prime Minister might affect the content, generally speaking the direction reflects that of successive governments: that food production is a function of the market and that the purpose of government funding is to reward the delivery of public goods. Although National Parks and FiPL receive no special mention, the Roadmap makes clear that the direction of travel in terms of

support will be towards more spatial targeting. Through National Parks England we are seeking to update our collective policy on farming and land management to reflect the importance of farming in shaping our landscapes, the need to harness farmers as partners to enhance delivery of environmental outcomes and the strength of place-based delivery demonstrated through FiPL. One specific area of interest is the enhanced role that National Park Authorities could play in the delivery of Countryside Stewardship, the second tier of ELM, which is disproportionately important as a funding stream for environmental delivery in our landscapes. In early August we met Natural England along with the three other protected landscapes in the region to consider how we might work more closely together in this area.

- 2.4 Defra has also published the 30 by 30 on land delivery plan, which sets out the steps that government will take to achieve the global target of conserving 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030. The document follows on the publication of 30x30 criteria in 2024 and explains the pathways to increase the area of England that falls under these criteria from the current 7%. Areas of land that already qualify (so-called Gold category) include SSSIs and other protected sites that are in either favourable or recovering condition. Land that may have the capability of qualifying may fall under silver or bronze categories that form pathways to 30x30. Importantly, National Parks and National Landscapes are seen as key areas where the opportunity to bring more land into qualification is highest. Additional funding has been made available to protected landscapes through FiPL to create more wildlife-rich habitat (in our case an additional £300,000 capital this financial year).
- 2.5 Government has published a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which sets the framework for plan making and new national decision-making policies for local planning authorities. A full briefing has been provided to Members on the key changes to the NPPF. Whilst some areas give some potential cause for concern, important protections for National Parks in relation to major development have been retained thanks to input from NPE and National Park planning officers as part of the consultation process.
- 2.6 In an announcement on 10 September, Government confirmed that Mayors will be given powers to introduce an overnight visitor levy. Whilst full details following the consultation earlier this had not been published at the time of writing, the announcement confirms that any levy would be based on a percentage rate with Mayors and other local leaders having discretion to exempt certain categories of business from the levy. The announcement followed the publication of a policy report by York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority that assesses the opportunity for a levy to be introduced in the region (see <https://yorknorthyorks-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/VLR.pdf>).
- 2.7 The UK National Park chairs and CEOs met in the South Downs in late June/ early July for an annual gathering at which the main subjects of discussion were the opportunities to strengthen fundraising through the UK National Parks Foundation, the development of green finance expertise in National Parks Partnerships and UK communications & branding. A relaunch of the UK National Parks brand is scheduled for later this autumn based on the proposition that National Parks are places where nature inspires action. Field trips in the South Downs National Parks revealed the

innovative extent to which the NPA is exploiting its role as a convenor in supporting landowners to build habitat banks and providing services such as registration of conservation covenants. Our formal application to join the UK National Parks Foundation has been received.

3. Authority updates

- 3.1 Officers, led by Tom Stephenson, our head of climate change, have moved swiftly to contract works for the initial restoration phase of Fylingdales Moor following the award by Natural England of additional funding to the NPA (£3.5 million) for peat restoration and adjacent works on firebreaks. Given the timescales (completion/spend by 31 March 2027), this is a significant undertaking for us and our contractors, RSK, who have been contracted to undertake the works.
- 3.2 A number of Members were able to attend the site visit on 28 August to see the new HQ development at Riccal drive. The progress that has been made with construction since the start of June when ground was broken has been extremely rapid with steels, roof and stairwells all installed and the building taking shape. The Officer project group is currently meeting weekly in light of the ongoing nature of engagement with contractors on detailed elements of construction. A further staff workshop on how the Authority makes best use of the space in the building is planned for 23 September to which Members will be invited. The move from Sawmill Lane to Riccal driver depot is substantively complete and we hope to proceed with sale of the old premises soon.
- 3.3 Over 20 of our senior leaders and manager have been supported on their leadership development over the last year. Working with leadership specialists, Pro Development, the year-long course has combined group sessions and action learning discussions to develop and hone leadership skills such as active listening, coaching and team development. The feedback from staff involved in the first two cohorts has been excellent with a third cohort of managers expecting to start their journey later this autumn.
- 3.4 As reported recently to FRASC, a number of teams and individuals across the organisation have experienced significant workload pressures, compounded by a higher than usual level of sickness absence. Directors and I have put a significant amount of time into understanding the root causes, supporting individuals and teams where necessary. Although there appears to be no consistent pattern and circumstances are often highly individual a common theme has emerged of the challenge that colleagues face in prioritising work and saying no. We've encouraged colleagues to be proactive with line managers and for line managers to ensure they make space for supportive conversations, leaning on Directors where there are difficult calls to determine priorities.
- 3.5 Our current Authority strategy and business plan is reaching the end of the original five-year period. Directors met in August to reflect on our strategic direction and priorities for the next five years and beyond. A key theme is the need for consolidation by focussing on doing fewer, significant and impactful things well. We also discussed how the format of our business (or corporate) plan could evolve to

make the document more logical, simpler and accessible to staff and Members. With a review of the National Park management plan about to get underway and may of our delivery objectives relating to it, any refresh of our internal corporate plan has to be able to survive contact with changes to the Management Plan. Nonetheless, we have some thoughts, both on our strategic direction and authority business plan which we aim to discuss with Members at the workshop on 14 October.

- 3.6 Members will be aware that the Authority is dealing with several major developments currently, including substantial changes to the construction timescale and methodology at Woodsmith Mine which is likely to have ongoing long-term impacts on the National Park's Special Qualities. Officers are currently working with the company to improve the quality of the proposals and further information and clarification is required regarding a number of planning impacts. Members will be updated in more detail on this as negotiations progress. An application by NatPower UK for a large-scale Battery Energy Storage System near South Kilvington is also being scrutinised by officers for potential impacts on the setting of the National Park. A report will be prepared for Members to consider whether the impact on views from Sutton Bank ("England's finest view") and any adverse impact in tourism are significantly harmful to justify an objection to the scheme.

4. Stakeholder engagement

- 4.1 Along with other National Park CEOs, chairs and stakeholders, I attended an event in the Peak District National Park to mark the 75th anniversary of the first National Parks. Planning for the celebration of our own 75th birthday in 2027 is now underway and we aim to share plans with Members before the end of the year.
- 4.2 Together with Officers and colleagues from North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue, Forestry England and the Local Resilience Forum, I hosted a visit by now former Environment Minister, Mary Creagh MP to Fylingdales Moor to learn more about last year's wildfire, the challenges faced by the region in relation to wildfire risk and our restoration plans on the Moor. Mary Creagh has stepped down from government with Jenny Riddell-Carpenter, MP for Suffolk Coastal, taking over as nature Minister and portfolio holder for protected landscapes. Peak District NPA hosted the new Minister for a site visit in August.
- 4.3 The UK National Parks Conference biennial conference was held this year in the Cairngorms National Park in September.

5. Financial and staffing implications

- 5.1 None.

6. Contribution to National Park Management Plan

- 6.1 N/A

7. Legal and sustainability implications

- 7.1 N/A

8. Recommendation

8.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

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