

North York Moors National Park Authority

23 March 2015

Volunteer Strategy

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for a new Volunteers Strategy.

2. Background

- 2.1 Volunteering is central to how this Authority works. Hundreds of people give their time, energy and expertise freely to help the Authority achieve its aims. Last year over 12,000 days were worked by volunteers, the equivalent of approximately 45 full time staff. The contribution that this makes to our delivery is enormous. It also makes us better engaged and better informed and enables many people to enjoy and understand the National Park whilst contributing to its long term care.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 15 December the Authority approved a framework and timetable for the development of a new Volunteering Strategy. This report outlines the process by which the strategy was developed and presents the new strategy for approval.
- 2.3 The strategy proposes a way forward building on the existing, much valued and highly effective volunteer service and setting a high level direction for the coming years. Its successful delivery will require real change in the way we work both amongst staff and those who come to volunteer. It is succinct and deliberately avoids the detail. The action plan attached at **Appendix 2** sets out in a little more detail, the key actions that will be necessary to create the framework for delivery in year one.

3. Preparation of the Strategy

- 3.1 Preparation of the strategy commenced with gaining a broad understanding of best practice in volunteering in this country and further afield. For example, in the Cotswolds AONB we learnt about volunteers planning and leading tasks, from the National Trust we learnt about staff training and support, in Finland we learnt from a National Park who has formal contracts with businesses and voluntary organisations to carry out work of shared interest, from the Ramblers Association we found an organisation with policies in place to make it easier for them to work alongside authorities such as ours.
- 3.2 We also carried out an analysis of the restrictions preventing growth of the current operation. These are:
- Limited staff capacity and confidence to identify tasks.
 - Limited experience amongst many staff as to how to engage with volunteers.
 - Limited staff capacity to supervise volunteer work.
 - Lack of a framework to allow unsupervised volunteering to take place safely.
 - A culture which does not encourage all staff to be actively involved with volunteering.
 - Limited cash resources, including for managing, training and supporting staff

These limitations are recognised and tackled by the strategy and associated action plan.

3.3 A wide consultation has taken place in the following ways.

- Every member of staff and every volunteer has had the opportunity to comment.
- Focus groups of both volunteers and staff were held.
- Department meetings discussed the draft.
- Parish Forums were invited to comment.
- It was discussed at the Voluntary Rangers Annual Meeting.
- Management Team saw both the draft and the responses to the consultation.

3.4 The response to the strategy by both staff and volunteers has been overwhelmingly positive and there is a real appetite to see it delivered. Some issues were raised and many have been taken into account in amendments to the first draft.

3.5 Discussions have taken place with the Authority's insurers and are planned with our specialist Health and Safety advisers to ensure that the right steps are taken to ensure safe delivery.

3.6 The strategy is attached at **Appendix 1** and is now recommended for approval.

4. **The Action Plan and Implementation**

4.1 Attached at **Appendix 2** is an action plan setting out the key steps in the first year delivery of the strategy. It sets out two clear phases, work in April to August will largely focus on getting the framework of contracts, codes of practice, training and support, etc in place. From August work will turn to delivery of the new ways of volunteering.

4.2 An exception to this is the establishment of new ways of working in Ranger and Field Services which has been prior approved and is well underway.

5. **Priorities and Targets**

5.1 It is intended that the strategy will lead to a growth in volunteering across the Authority's functions and that an early task is for each department to identify key areas for development. This said, early target areas will be the further growth of the now successfully established volunteering programme at Visitor Centres, some input to core administration/management functions and growth in volunteer involvement in the Authority's drive on restoring Planted Ancient Woodland Sites and planting native woodland.

5.2 It is anticipated that the 2015/6 will largely be a year of consolidation and preparation and the target for volunteer days is therefore set at 12,500, a slight growth in anticipated outturn for 2014/5. Growth targets for future years will be set on an annual basis but it is proposed that the long term aspiration is to increase volunteer days to 25,000 by 2025.

6. **Financial and Staffing Implications**

6.1 All cash requirements set out in the action plan are covered by existing budgets for 2015/16.

6.2 A full review of existing volunteer team roles and of what support is required to ensure successful delivery is included as one of the first steps in the action plan. No reduction in staff numbers is planned for the volunteers team but roles and ways of working may change to reflect the needs of the strategy. Additional funding to cover an anticipated slight increase in costs has already been agreed and is allocated in the 2015/16 budgets.

6.3 It is expected that delivery of the strategy will enable a wider group of staff to recruit and work with volunteers in their own work areas and through this boost capacity to deliver against priorities.

7. Contribution to National Park Management Plan

7.1 Successful implementation of the strategy will greatly enhance the Authority's ability and capacity to deliver across all fronts.

7.2 Delivery of the strategy will contribute directly to policies relating to outreach and engagement (U16), public health (U7) and community (C2).

8. Legal Implications

8.1 The new way of working set out in the strategy has implications for public liability insurance and health and safety. Specialist advice is being sought regarding these matters and creation of a clear framework is step one of the action plan.

9. Recommendation

9.1 That the Volunteer Strategy and Action Plan 2015 be approved.

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Background papers to this Report

File ref

1. Report to National Park Authority 15 December 2014