

North York Moors National Park Authority

16 December 2019

Members Involvement in Projects and Programmes

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To propose a suite of mechanisms to enable members to be kept fully informed and engaged in the direction, oversight and monitoring of the increasing number of projects and programmes delivered by the North York Moors National Park Authority.

2. Background

- 2.1 Over recent years, the proportion of operational activity funded by the core budget of the Authority in pursuit of its purposes has decreased.
- 2.2 External funding has expanded the range of activity that the Authority is involved in and the scope and scale of work has increased to such an extent that it is more difficult for Members to keep track of the wide range of activity undertaken by the Authority.
- 2.3 Funding for projects has been received from a wide range of sources including National Lottery, European funds, S106 and grants from trusts and foundations. The high level of volunteering has taken the Authority into new areas of activity. The monitoring requirements for all of these funders and projects vary and this has led to inconsistency in awareness of and in the way members engage with, the delivery of the projects. Moreover the level of detail that Members see when approving the project can be limited simply because of the number and range of projects and the degree of delegation within the staff structure.
- 2.4 Examples of these projects / programmes of work across the Authority include Turtle Doves, Ryevitalise, Land of Iron, the s106 Compensation & Mitigation action plan delivery, Young Rangers, Sutton Bank Development, Thornton le Dale hub, the River Esk projects and Monuments for the Future.
- 2.5 A successful Members evening seminar in August demonstrated the value of reporting the scope of Authority activities to members in order to raise awareness of the range of activities that the Authority delivers. This was followed in October by a further Members evening seminar to consider how members could and should engage with projects and programmes of work to ensure that they are adequately informed about progress and can have an oversight and monitoring role in the delivery of projects. At this meeting, a range of opportunities to share information, understand risk and to monitor and scrutinise progress were explored and these are presented in the following section.

3. Activity Proposals

3.1 Regular reporting to FRASC

Regular quarterly financial updates to FRASC have recently been strengthened to include more detail related to the achievement of milestones and financial profiling associated with the delivery of non core funded projects and programmes of work.

It is proposed that this continues, as achievement of milestones is a strong indicator of work plans being on track and any deviation from the proposed work plans which could impact on match funding required from core budgets can be identified and addressed in a timely manner. More detailed financial information on major projects will also continue to be presented. (Members will however be aware that the Woodsmith S106 programme and spending already has a separate approval and monitoring process via reports direct to the full Authority in addition to FRASC's financial scrutiny).

3.2 Updates at NPA Meetings and Scrutiny

Officers already update Members about project progress regularly at quarterly NPA meetings but these agendas are often heavy with numerous items to consider and so there is not a lot of opportunity to understand more about the projects in detail. Updates at NPA meetings should remain on the agenda but supplemented with additional opportunities to monitor the project in more depth using the mechanisms noted at 3.3 to 3.6. The annual Scrutiny meeting should also be used to scrutinise projects in turn, especially those that involve a high level of financial risk to the Authority.

3.3 Members Bulletins

Better use should be made of Members Bulletins with a regular 'project' slot giving an update on a selected project. This could provide a regular focus on individual programmes of work each month on a rolling basis – so if there are 6 current projects, members would receive a bulletin update twice a year for each project.

3.4 Members Evening Seminars

As the August seminar showed, evening seminars are an ideal opportunity for informal discussions between members and officers about work areas that Members might otherwise learn little about. These can focus on one project in detail or cover several projects in one session. They provide an opportunity to informally but effectively scrutinise progress, effectiveness and different approaches.

3.5 Members Training Days

This activity enables members to see how the project is being delivered on the ground through site visits where they can hear from partners and people benefitting from the project and see the practical impacts of project delivery on the ground. It is an ideal opportunity to see how the project is delivering outcomes against outputs and management plan objectives.

3.6 Forums

The Authority holds a number of forums where topics can be discussed with Authority Members, officers and external interested parties. These platforms could be more flexible to include all Members and provide an additional opportunity for members to review project delivery in more depth, including where appropriate, involvement from external interests to enhance scrutiny (Forums are not however decision making occasions – they replaced the previous formal committee structures which had delegated powers but in practice rarely took formal decisions).

3.7 **The Business Plan**

The primary way in which Members direct the activities of the NPA with respect to programmes of work is by agreeing an overall work programme and MTFs to support this. The previous Business Plan included a list of topics which were Members priorities for external fund raising – most of these have now been translated into active projects including large and complicated ones such as Ryevitalise. We need to be sure that enough time is devoted to the next Business Plan to allow Members to be clear about their priorities and the scope of externally funded projects they wish to see happen.

3.8 **Way Forward**

It is recommended that Members approve the following list of actions to allow them to engage collectively and more systematically in the direction monitoring and oversight of the Authority's project work. These proposals are largely drawn from the discussion at the October Evening Seminar.

- Increased scrutiny of financial and risk elements of projects by FRASC as in para 3.1.
- One or two additional Evening Seminars a year to focus exclusively on less visible areas of work/projects.
- Regular slot in Members' Bulletin covering progress on major Project developments.
- Increased time and emphasis given in the Business Plan preparation to the scope and content of externally funded projects Members wish to see happen.
- Scheduled training day programme to include examination of project delivery on the ground.
- Use of Forums to scrutinise project progress and delivery.

The normal cycle of reporting and scrutiny would of course continue in addition to this.

Progress reports will be presented as Officer presentations and summaries of the funding bodies reporting requirements to ensure that additional work is not created in presenting project reports in multiple formats.

4. **Financial and Staffing Implications**

- 4.1 There are no expected finance or staffing implications as a result of the contents of this report.

5. **Contribution to National Park Management Plan**

- 5.1 The nature of the activity reported in this paper does not have a direct contribution to delivering the specific National Park Management Plan Objectives.

6. **Legal Implications**

There are no expected legal implications as a result of the contents of this report.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 That Members approve the suite of mechanisms proposed in this paper to enhance their awareness and understanding of the range of projects and programmes undertaken by the Authority and their direction, monitoring and oversight of the works.

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Background papers to this Report

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