

North York Moors National Park Authority

24 September 2012

Interpretation Action Plan Review

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform Members of recommendations of the Working Group carrying out a review of the 'Interpretation Plan for Engaging with Casual Visitors to the North York Moors National Park'.
- 1.2 To seek Members approval for the proposed actions listed in section 13.

2. Background

- 2.1 In April 2009 Members approved the *Interpretation Plan for Engaging with Casual Visitors to the North York Moors National Park*. Since the Plan was approved the Authority has experienced a decline in budgets and staff resource with the number of specialist staff responsible for delivering 'information projects', declining by 0.5 fte as a result of part time working. In addition there has been a reduction in management capacity within the department and the full time delivery post has reduced to a casual role of 2.5dpw April-October 2012 when it is set to cease. As there is a substantial stock of publications left to sell the latter impacts directly on the work of the team and other staff.
- 2.2 In addition to the above, large projects such as planning and implementing a new website and the Lime and Ice exhibition at Sutton Bank as well as smaller tasks such as vacating the storage premises at Sawmill Lane have all increased workload significantly delaying all but the most urgent tasks. It should be noted that a considerable amount of staff time is spent on corporate work and projects such as Moorsbus, Lime & Ice, visitor centres, website, events and communications (e.g. Members/Staff bulletins) to name but a few.
- 2.3 The experience of external projects such as Lime and Ice and the Sustainable Tourism Project before it show that whilst these deliver important core work, the timescales involved mean they can have a major impact on the ability to achieve regular maintenance and other work. Good advance planning is important if these projects are to deliver high quality information and messages to the public in the right way. The prospect of major external funding bids raises the need to ensure the required capacity is achieved to deal with this.
- 2.4 Over the last few years there have been shifts in the way information is relayed to people in particular, an increasing use of websites, mobile phone 'apps', blogs and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and foursquare. This is likely to enable new users to access information about the National Park and though still robust, demand for traditional printed material may decline in the future.
- 2.5 The combination of the above factors have triggered a need to review the balance of elements within the Interpretation Plan and how that plan can be delivered with less resources in the future.

3. **The Review**

3.1 The Review has been carried out by several staff and Members Mr S Scoffin and Mrs J Mitchell over the period from May to August 2012.

3.2 The Review has considered the delivery of National Park messages to a variety of audiences under three headings; *people who don't know about the National Park*, *people who know about the Park* and *people out and about in the Park*. Also considered are the variety of media for getting messages to potential audiences (including promoting the National Park brand) many of which overlap and interlink. In 'headline' terms these include;

Publications, panels, promotional material for Authority services (e.g. Moorsbus, 'Inspired by' gallery), website, 'e' books and leaflets, social networking, in print articles, advertorials and adverts, adverts on transport and at transport locations, radio/TV, National Park Centres and their exhibitions and interpretive content, partnership working (e.g Welcome to Yorkshire, Whitby TIC), local and specialist shows, entry point and other road, village, car park and major recreation route signs, Village Information Points in honeypot locations, use of the mobile display unit, face to face contact, events and exhibitions, information in accommodation, shops, walks and talks, the Out and About Guide, Moors Messenger, Cleveland Way and other routes, geocaching, the Authority photographic library

3.3 The outcome of the review is contained in the following points 4 – 12 with proposed actions summarised at pt. 13.

4. **Publications and Delivery**

4.1 In 2010 the Department held in stock 82 titles on a variety of subjects including walking and cycle routes, general guides and specialist books which were distributed primarily to information centres, village information points and shops around the National Park. The list of titles is kept under review and has been progressively reduced so that currently there are 40 titles in stock of which up to 20 have been identified as good selling publications to be retained with the remaining 20 titles to be discontinued when the current stock runs out. Commercial distribution by a book company is being investigated, especially for several of the better selling titles that have the potential to maintain a wide circulation.

4.2 Some publications may be distributed by other media such as the 'easy going' access routes (which have already been put on the Authority website), and it is likely that further walks will be made to download on the website free of charge as the printed copies run out. Making some of the better selling publications into 'ebooks' will be investigated.

4.3 In order to sell, publications need to be distributed and experience has shown that outlets are a lot less likely to order replacements without proactive contact. The full time post of 'delivery driver' ceased in 2011 and for 2012 a temporary post of 2.5dpw from March to October is operating with the potential to utilise volunteers for additional help as necessary.

4.4 The stock of publications held at the beginning of September represents over £30,000 of gross profit (sale price less printing costs) which needs to be realised. Whilst a commercial way of distributing publications is being explored, in order to reduce the current number of titles by selling existing stock it is recommended that a similar casual post be offered in 2013 only.

The delivery van is being replaced in 2012 and will be used to distribute these publications and other National Park materials. Direct sales to the public via the National Park website will continue.

Recommendation; That, in 2013, a casual post of upto 3dpw (average) be employed to sell and deliver publications and other material between Easter and the end of October and thereafter cease as deliveries are focussed on honeypot sites (see Pt 4.4). This would result in increased staff cost of approximately £6,900 for one year only which would be found within existing budgets.

4.5 Publications have been sold at multiple outlets in approximately 50 locations in and around the National Park. In order to maintain effective distribution it is recommended that from 2014, as the number of titles reduces sales of publications are targeted toward businesses in key villages and Tourist Information Centres.

4.6 It has been identified that the National Park lacks a general guide to history and archaeology and it is proposed to investigate the feasibility of producing one in partnership with an author in a similar way to the popular 'Discover the North York Moors' guide with the aim of being distributed commercially.

5. Village 'Honeypot' Locations

5.1 The Review has highlighted the need to reach the largest number of visitors in the most cost effective way. It is therefore proposed to concentrate visitor engagement in key honeypot locations, through the use of Visitor Information Points (VIPs), panels, walks and other publications and introduce QR (quick response) codes to allow access to further information.

5.2 Currently the Authority supports 6 VIPs in honeypot locations of Hutton le Hole, Goathland, Grosmont, Osmotherly, Rosedale Abbey, Thornton le Dale. The review has confirmed that these relationships function well and that VIPs provide a low cost means of distributing information at key visitor locations. It is proposed however that the locations are reviewed and the addition of a coastal location(s) be considered within existing resources. These will provide a focus of information provision with the aim of getting to as many people as possible in those key locations with the resources available.

6. Panels and other Features

6.1 There are approximately 110 panels maintained by the Authority in the National Park in locations including villages (17), Authority owned and other sites (32), field centres and Youth Hostels (11) and open access panels (50). In addition there are 88 other features relating to Village Information Points, the Mobile Display Unit, sculptures and boundary signs. These will be maintained but reviewed as they are due for replacement. A way will be found such as village caretakers (where appropriate) or local volunteers to maintain the panels in a presentable condition.

6.2 Successful requests for new panels that receive public funding should have the content approved by the Authority. In future, externally funded projects such as Leader that have given grant aid for a number of panels should have guidelines and templates agreed with the Authority to offer applicants. The aim would be to allow very local input and flavour while maintaining a minimum level of National Park awareness and wider brand promotion for the common good. The Parish Forums could be consulted on these.

6.3 The use of QR Codes will be trialled and if successful incorporated where possible to provide access to additional information via smartphones and tablets in remote sites.

7. **Website**

7.1 Planning and implementing the new website (going live in September) has taken over 18 months and had an adverse impact on other core work. In order to ensure efficient management of the website content in future years it is recommended that;

- A small group of Officers meet monthly to discuss major changes and improvements to the site.
- Individual named staff be responsible for the content of relevant areas of the site
- The Web and Information Support Officer plays a key and more independent role in monitoring changes to the site.

8. **Social Media and other 'e' Tools**

8.1 The use of electronic media is increasing with 80% of households online and 50% of the population with smartphones. In order to capitalise on this trend and reach new users it is proposed that an increasing emphasis be given to the website, search engine prioritisation and ensuring relevant and accurate content on sites featuring the North York Moors National Park. Greater use should be made of blogs, social media, smartphone apps, 'e' versions of books and QR codes to provide access to information in remote locations. It is important to keep abreast of new developments and trends in this fast growing arena and to monitor the effectiveness of the channels we use.

8.2 A 'Social Media and Online Participation Guidance' has been produced by the Promotion and Tourism Officer for staff on how to participate effectively and professionally when using social media in the work situation.

9. **Externally Funded Projects**

9.1 In recent years externally funded projects have achieved a great deal for the Authority and enabled a great deal of core work to be achieved but the demanding timescales of such project add an unsustainable workload to the Information Team and delay other work significantly. Although projects usually contain an element of funding for interpretation, this rarely translates into additional people to carry out the work. Projects need to be planned so that the interpretation and information elements are as effective as possible.

9.2 In order to improve this situation it is recommended that in future;

- The Information and Interpretation Manager be fully involved in the relevant elements of planning projects at a strategic level.
- Projects apply for sufficient funding to employ staff or contractors working within approved guidelines, to carry out the relevant interpretation and information work rather than relying on the in house team.

10. **Promoting the Park in Towns**

10.1 It is proposed to reinvigorate the taking of displays and information material to public buildings such as hospitals and libraries over the winter which had ceased along with the delivery post. This will be done using a mix of Officer and volunteer time. Mobile Display Units (and simpler displays where appropriate) could be taken to town centres and other relevant locations to also promote the National Park over the winter period.

- 10.2 It is proposed that these events would be staffed largely by Voluntary Rangers. The Ranger and Field Team will continue to be required to transport larger displays but the smaller, more easily transportable display obtained recently for Robin Hoods Bay means that many events can be entirely serviced by Voluntary Rangers. In order to accommodate this it is recommended that the pool of Voluntary Rangers be increased and that training be provided to Voluntary Rangers undertaking these duties.
- 10.3 An expanded pool of Voluntary Rangers could also take on an increased face to face contact role by giving talks, with pre prepared presentations to a variety of groups.

Recommendation: To expand the pool of Voluntary Rangers by 50 from 200 to 250, broaden the duties and extend rota administration to include manning the MDU, carry out a skills survey and provide appropriate training. This is likely to be done over a three year period and incur costs of travel (costed at six duties per year), uniform and training. With 20 recruited in year one and 15 each in years two and three the costs will be approximately £5,800 in year one, £6,500 in year two and £8,000 in year three. On going travel costs will be required post year three and staff time to manage the process will also be needed.

This directly contributes to the achievement of the Business Plan priority to continue to grow the contribution of volunteers to the work of the Authority.

11. Shows

- 11.1 The Authority has attended 10 local shows per year in recent years and also specialist shows in some capacity such as the Outdoor Show in Birmingham and the York Cycle Show. The resource required to do this is considerable and as the shows vary in size so the scale of presence required should be tailored accordingly. It is proposed in future to hire a marquee and take a large pitch at only a small number of the larger shows attended mainly by visitors and at smaller shows to take a reduced pitch with a gazebo which would still provide an effective presence but would require less staff time in set up and management. The total number of shows will be reviewed regularly but the overall number attended per year will not be increased.
- 11.2 How to best promote the National Park at specialist shows such as the York Cycle Show, Dalbyology and Guisborough Forest Festival will be investigated further.

12. Events

- 12.1 Currently approximately 160 events and exhibitions are held per year ranging from large events such as the Moorland Festival and National Park Week to smaller ones such as guided walks and children's events. Having reviewed attendance and resources required to run the events it is proposed to concentrate promotional efforts on marketing a 'Summer Festival' of all events held during the school summer holiday. Joint working with partner organisations that run complementary events and walks will be continued and extended where appropriate.

13. Summary of Proposed Actions:

Publications

- The number of publications produced by the NPA will reduce from 82 to 20 or less by 2014.
- There will be greater use of downloadable resources and QR codes.
- The commercial distribution of relevant titles will be investigated.
- Investigate production (on a commercial basis) of a general guide to history and archaeology of the North York Moors.

Distribution

- Distribution of continued publications after the current stock is reduced will be only to honeypot locations, Village Information Points and TICs. Initially by a seasonal part time contract for 2013 only and subsequently by staff and volunteers.
- Distribution of 3 key book publications by a private company will be investigated.

Honeypot Locations

- These will be kept under review and locations on the coast be approached to offer an additional Village Information Point but within existing resources.

Panels

- Review panels when they are due for replacement and aim selectively to reduce the number of panels. In future panels will only be erected in key locations where other alternatives are not appropriate.
- Trial the use of QR codes on panels.
- Set up a local mechanism to maintain panels in a presentable condition without placing a demand on staff time.

Website

- Following the new website going live in September, day to day management of content will be the task of named officers for each specialist area. The Web and Information Support Officer will play a key role.
- A small specialist web development group will meet monthly (initially) to consider major changes or improvements to the website

Social Media

- Increase the emphasis on using social media and other 'e' tools with regard to the audience potential balanced with the input required and monitor the effectiveness.

External Funding and Projects:

- All future project planning must involve careful consideration of information and interpretation elements and the time required to fulfil these. In many cases this will involve ensuring additional staff support is provided.

Promoting the Park in Towns

- Expand the use of displays and information to public buildings in towns.
- Increase the use of small mobile display unit including during winter months staffed by volunteers.
- Increase the number of Voluntary Rangers by 50 to 250, broaden the job description to include attending shows or manning the MDU, carry out a skills survey and provide training.

Shows

- Ensure the scale of input and visual appearance of display at shows is appropriate with large stands to be taken at a reduced number of the larger shows.
- Review the list of shows to visit.
- Investigate the value of and demands of promotion at specialist shows.

Events

- Promotional efforts will be concentrated on a 'Summer Festival' of events.
- Investigate further joint working with partner organisations that run complementary events and walks.

Summary of Proposals in the Use of Volunteers

- Increase the number of Assistant Rangers by 50 to 250 over a three year period which will cost approximately £5800 in year one, £6500 in year two and £8000 in year three.
- Carry out a skills survey.
- Provide relevant training.
- Create further opportunities for volunteers to;
 - man the MDU(s),
 - attend shows
 - undertake deliveries
 - give talks with a pre prepared presentation on the National Park.
- Increase the role of volunteers at the National Park Centres.

14. Financial and Staffing Implications

- 14.1 The proposals contained in this paper build on decisions already taken to cease renting the storage unit at Sawmill Lane and to cease the full time delivery post both of which have created financial savings for the Authority.
- 14.2 The proposal to retain a casual delivery post 3dpw in 2013 will cost approximately £6900 plus a cost to the fleet van. The proposal to increase Voluntary Rangers would cost approximately £5800 in year one, £6500 in year two and £8000 in year three plus staff time to manage the process.
- 14.3 There will be savings in staff time and finance from maintaining and printing a reduced number of publications and though this will also result in reduced income, it will allow a refocusing of effort as outlined in this paper.

15. Sustainability Appraisal

- 15.1 In terms of the National Park Management Plan, the recommendations contained in this report will have the following significant beneficial sustainability implications;
- Increase accessibility to and the effectiveness of information and interpretation of the National Park at time of declining resources.
 - Improve promotion of the National Park brand.
 - Increase volunteering opportunities.

16. Legal Implications

- 16.1 None.

<h3>17. Recommendation</h3>

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| <p>17.1 That: Members approve the summarised proposed actions listed in section 13.</p> |
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Background papers to this Report

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