

North York Moors National Park Authority**15 December 2014****Implementation of Further Reductions in Spending and Increased Income****1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To inform Members of the detail of implementation plans for the reductions in spending agreed at the September Authority meeting where these had not been established at that stage and to provide an opportunity for Members to comment on these.
- 1.2 To seek approval for the proposed procedure for updating the Business Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 Members have had a series of seminars, discussions and reports which led to the adoption on 28 July 2014 of proposals for reductions in staffing and other budgets as well as proposals for increased income.
- 2.2 A summary of the agreed approach to a period of continuing financial austerity agreed was that the Authority would:
- Continue to champion the value of core National Park grant.
 - Raise other income from a wide variety of sources.
 - Maintain the high levels of efficiency in its operations.
 - Find further ways to cost effectively share/provide services.
 - Work closely with communities and businesses finding novel ways to deliver services.
 - Further mobilise the volunteer resource in delivering Park purposes.
 - Reach a decision swiftly on whether the establishment of a trust would be of benefit to the North York Moors.
- 2.3 A process of Staff Consultation was undertaken between the end of July and the meeting on the 22 September which approved the final proposals following consideration of a formal response prepared by Unison.
- 2.4 The report to Members for the 22 September meeting identified areas where Directors needed to undertake further work on the implementation of the proposals. It was also agreed at the meeting that further information would be given to Members about the intended means of implementing the changes to the Ranger and Field Services. This report updates Members on progress to date.
- 3. Forward Planning**
- 3.1 The main impacts in Forward Planning will be in the team's ability to deliver proactive community planning and it is unlikely that there will be capacity to produce village design statements, parish plans or planning advice notes to explain the Authority's approach to various policies. There is a statutory role for local planning authorities in terms of assisting communities who wish to produce Neighbourhood Development Plans and external funding from central government is available to assist in any NDPs that may be proposed within the National Park in the future. The comprehensive Local

Development Scheme which set out the timetable for development plan preparation is now well advanced and the team's focus is on completing the two outstanding plans (Minerals and Waste and the Helmsley Plan).

3.2 There will be a reduction in the ability to play a proactive role in affordable housing delivery and some of the work that has been undertaken in relation to section 106 agreements and housing needs surveys will need to be taken on by development management staff. Other areas of work which the team will not be able to cover are in relation to transport planning, highway design liaison and specific coastal planning initiatives. Areas that will need to continue to be covered include Management Plan review/monitoring and the emerging joint planning initiative which is being progressed at a County level under the Duty to Cooperate which involves the LEP in a key spatial planning role.

4. **Coastal Work**

4.1 In previous reports there was uncertainty regarding the future of the Coastal Forum and a need to go back to partners to discuss the options for this. At the time of writing this report there are still questions to be answered about whether there is a feasible future for the Coastal Forum in some form. Officers will be able to provide a verbal update at the committee meeting about where these discussions have reached as we are still awaiting responses from some partners. In the previous report officers outlined a range of positive actions that the Authority is progressing along the coast to ensure that our profile and activity in relation to this crucial resource continues to be significant.

4.2 Other changes resulting from the cuts that have not been specified and which Members should be aware of are:

- Cessation of any proactive work on agricultural best practice and only progressing this through an opportunistic approach linked to the new LEADER Programme (to be confirmed) and engagement with the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise partnership (LEP).
- Stopping any proactive work on the development of ways to promote local culture and traditions but picking up as funding opportunities allow.
- Review of our approach to regulatory functions and consultations to ensure we are using specialist officer time to best effect (eg ecological advice, protected tree work and hedgerows regulations) and use external expert support where appropriate.

5. **Ranger and Field Services and Rights of Way**

5.1 Details as to how these reductions will be delivered are set out in the **Appendix**. This will deliver the bulk of the required reduction in staff time and cash across the department but will have a big impact on the capacity of the team to deliver a range of work and particularly upon the quality of the most important asset for enabling enjoyment of the area – public rights of way. As is set out in the appendix, every effort will be made to ensure that the impact on public enjoyment is minimised.

5.2 It must be remembered that maintaining public rights of way is the statutory responsibility of the Highways Authorities who provide no support to the National Park Authority in carrying out this work. Pressure must continue to be put upon them to invest in this most precious resource.

- 5.3 Other work, currently carried out by the Rangers and Field Services Team which will be reduced are:
- “Capital works” – the scope for implementing major improvements to access routes will be much reduced and more dependent upon external funding being secured. It will however continue to be a priority to maintain high standards at our car parks, toilets and other owned visitor facilities
 - Attendance at agricultural and community shows. A smaller scale, more easily constructed and staffed structure will reduce the staffing requirements for shows and there will be some reduction in the number of shows attended. Greater use of mobile display units, including by volunteers will off-set reductions in public presence.
 - It will be necessary to be more selective as to which meetings to attend and when to give talks and presentations to external groups

6. **Other Park Services**

- 6.1 Reduced capacity in the Communications Team will mean that we must concentrate our efforts on those media which are most effective at communicating our message and raising our profile, such as website, social media and a few key publications. We will be able to do less on production of panels, leaflets and other publications, although some content that would previously have been available via these media is being made available on the website.
- 6.2 Reductions in the staffing and cash budgets relating to the targeted transport initiative mean that we will concentrate our resources on those elements of the scheme which are proving most effective and which have been largely “embedded” with little need for dedicated staffing. These elements will be delivered by the Education Service and the Volunteer Service via the Community Champions network. It is hoped that we might build upon the latter service in partnership with Public Health Teams in neighbouring urban authorities.

7. **Corporate Services**

- 7.1 At the meeting on 22 September there was discussion around the proposal to change the office opening hours to 9am to 5pm from Monday to Friday. Officers have considered alternative opening times but cannot see an alternative that would yield the savings and produce less inconvenience to internal and external customers. The Assistant Director of Corporate Services has discussed the changes with the Customer Services Team as to how best this will work, what activities will not be performed, what will change and how best to ensure that office cover is consistent. The impact of the new hours will be kept under review. UNISON has also balloted union members and has notified the Authority that the vote (on opening hours and flexi-time alterations) was in favour of the proposed changes.

8. **Progress and Impact on Business Plan**

- 8.1 Progress on the Business Plan 2012-15 has been considered by the Authority at the Scrutiny meetings on 16 December 2013 and 14 July 2014. These reports were based on a detailed analysis as to whether actions in the Business Plan had a Red, Amber or Green status, with green being on target.

8.2 Directors have discussed the process for updating the Business Plan which is due to be completed in the next financial year and consider that given the uncertainty of the funding position a one-year roll forward of the current Business Plan is the only viable way forward. This will update the financial tables and action plan on the basis of the work which has taken place this financial year with a medium term plan produced only when there is a clearer picture of the funding settlement for the following years. The substantive work to achieve this one year roll forward has largely been undertaken in planning the changes recently approved. Therefore, it is proposed that a draft of the tables are prepared for Finance, Risk, Audit and Standards Committee and are then circulated to all Members for comments prior to a version for approval being submitted to Authority in March 2015.

9. **Financial and Staffing Implications**

9.1 The Financial and Staffing Implications have been dealt with in the earlier reports listed as Background Documents below.

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

10.1 The result of implementing the recommendations will be to minimise the reduction in the Authority's contribution to the delivery of the National Park Management Plan.

11. **Legal Implications**

11.1 There are no legal implications resulting from this report.

12. **Recommendation**

12.1 That Members note the contents of the report and approve the process for approving the Business Plan.

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Background documents to this report

File Ref.

Committee Reports:

1. Financial Plan and Strategic Direction - 26 September 2011
2. Approval of budget for next financial year – 24 March 2014
3. Outline proposal - financial situation – 23 June 2014
4. Implementation of Changes to Staffing Levels – 28 July 2014
5. Public Consultation Survey – (reported to PM&M 23 May 2011)
6. Final Proposal on the Reductions in Spending and Increased Income – 22 September 2014

Future Management of Public Rights of Way and Unsurfaced, Unclassified Roads

1. Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 22 September 2014, the National Park Authority resolved to make a reduction of £290,000 from its annual budget for access, recreation and rights of way, including staff cost savings of £149,000.
- 1.2 It was reluctantly accepted that a reduction in manpower of this scale would have an impact on delivery and performance but was unavoidable. The key area of work affected will be management of public rights of way which makes up the bulk of these two teams work. It will no longer be possible to maintain 100% of the network of rights of way to the same high standard and it is clear that the condition of the network will decline.
- 1.3 It should be remembered that the statutory duty for management of public rights of way rests with the Highways Authorities: North Yorkshire County Council and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council. The Authority currently manages the network on their behalf under the terms of delegation agreements. However, no resources are given to the National Park Authority in respect of these works carried out on the Highways Authorities' behalf. This is clearly unsatisfactory and pressure should continue to be placed upon the Highways Authorities to make some investment in this important resource to reflect their statutory duties and in light of the networks importance to local communities, to the public in general, to the economy and to public health.
- 1.4 It has been agreed that, in order to deliver the greatest public benefit in terms of the Authority's purpose to promote public enjoyment, work should focus on those rights of way most used

2. Proposed Future Management of Public Rights of Way

- 2.1 At the meeting on 22 September it was resolved that in order to minimise the impact of the agreed cuts in staffing and funding upon public enjoyment the following principles should be applied:
 - The key “driver” for the Authority's work on rights of way will be user satisfaction rather than the condition of the entire network. Huge improvements have been made to the whole network over the past 13 years and now our work must increasingly focus upon those routes which are most important to visitors and to local communities.
 - The new staffing structure will require new ways of working including delegation of workload management to the Maintenance Rangers working more independently with a team of volunteers (has proved to be successful in managing the Cleveland Way and in the Community Access Project).
 - We will encourage greater involvement by local communities in the management of key local routes.
 - We will work with landowners and land managers to encourage a greater input into the management of rights of way across their land, in line with their statutory duties.
 - In 2015/16 we will carry out the user satisfaction survey and then repeat this every other year so as to monitor the impact of these changes.

- 2.3 It is recommended that in light of the above, the Authority's resolve to place a continued high priority on rights of way and the need for clarity for the public and for the managers, the Authority should at least for now retain delegated responsibility for the whole network and prioritise work as set out below.
- 2.4 **Priority routes** (15% of the network). These are routes promoted by the Authority, routes identified as most important by local communities and the other routes which do not fall into these categories, but which are identified by Rangers as busiest. These will be maintained to the same high standard as currently.
- 2.5 **Non priority routes** (the remaining 85%). We will **aim** to maintain non-priority routes to an optimum basic standard set out at the end of this report. Within this 85% of the network there will continue to be some prioritisation with staff responding most quickly to those reported problems which are a safety concern or which affect more popular (but not priority) routes.
- 2.6 The optimum basic standard means that the National Park Authority will no longer do the following:
- install finger posts where the path leaves the road (a waymark disc will be used)
 - install gates and stiles (or convert stiles to gates) The Authority will offer the choice of a kit for landowner/occupier to install or 25% of the reasonable cost of installation (our statutory obligation under the delegation agreement).
 - Clear fallen trees or encroaching/overhanging vegetation
 - mow as much up-growth
- 2.7 On the non-priority routes landowners/occupiers would in future be expected to fulfil their statutory responsibility by doing the following:
- Install gates and stiles – with a contribution from the Authority as set out above.
 - Clear fallen trees
 - Clear encroaching/overhanging vegetation
 - Resolve reported problems within reasonable timescales
- (Note: we installed 45 stiles and 79 gates on behalf of landowners last year on “non-priority routes”).
- 2.8 We will continue to inspect the entire network, including non-promoted routes, on a five year rolling programme (carried out by volunteers) to prioritise works. Issues which have public safety implications will be prioritised wherever they are on the network (ie on priority or non-priority routes) and we will ensure that we satisfy all requirements relating to health and safety and public liability.
- 2.9 Whilst these proposals will amount to a significant reduction in the resources allocated to fulfilling the Highways Authorities' statutory duties, there will also be a big reduction in the resources dedicated by the National Park Authority to carrying out work which is the responsibility of landowners and occupiers, especially the replacement of gates and stiles. The impact of this will have to be closely monitored and it is anticipated that in the beginning, it will be necessary to spend more time communicating with landowners and occupiers to remind them of their responsibilities, to clarify the new working practices and to manage expectations.
3. **Other Changes to Current Management of Public Rights of Way**
- 3.1 Following previous reductions in resources and to adapt to the current reductions, other changes to the Authority's work on rights of way and access have been implemented as follows:

- We no longer have responsibility for the definitive map
- We no longer have responsibility for inspection and maintenance of around 80 bridges – responsibility for large structures has been handed back to NYCC
- We will not be posting site notices relating to changes to the legal record, except in exceptional circumstances
- Large scale improvements and upgrades will only be carried out when external funding is secured and staff resources allow
- BVPI ease of use survey will be carried out every other year (rather than every year) and will be carried out by trained volunteers
- Increased involvement of volunteers and communities
- No direct involvement in management of unsurfaced, unclassified roads (see section 8 below)

4. Impact on the Condition of the Public Rights of Way Network

- 4.1 It would be naïve to suggest that this level of reduction in investment will not have an impact on the quality of the network of public rights of way. It will be important to monitor the impact of this on public enjoyment as set out at 7 below.

5. Management Beyond 2015/16

- 5.1 The above proposals will be trialled for the financial year 2015/16 only. Delegation agreements with Highways Authority's will be terminated in March 2016 and in December 2015 a review of the new way of working and the level of future resources that the Authority will be able to invest in this area of work will be carried out to inform any future agreement.
- 5.2 In the meantime, pressure will continue to be placed on the Highways Authorities to make some investment in the network of public rights of way in the National Park to reflect statutory duties and in light of the networks importance to local communities, to the public in general, to the economy and to public health.

6. Monitoring Impact of Management Changes on Public Enjoyment

- 6.1 It is impractical to accurately measure the percentage of users on each of the variety of routes unless significant cash and staff resources are made available for installation of people counters and gathering of data on a selection of both types of route across the national park and over a reasonable length of time. It is proposed therefore that the detailed and considerable knowledge of levels of use which the Rangers and Field Staff have should inform our initial decisions as to which routes are managed at which level.
- 6.2 To measure the impact of these changes on the public's enjoyment of the National Park and to inform future management, it is proposed that a user survey be carried out every two years. Over time this could also assist in building a picture of where visitors go and relative levels of use across different routes.
- 6.3 More immediate visitor feedback will be encouraged by clearly notifying the public of opportunities to comment (on rights of way, at visitor centres and Mobile Display Units) and monitoring levels of problem reports for individual routes. As well as highlighting problem areas it will provide a guide to levels of use.

7. Unsurfaced, Unclassified Roads

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Authority withdraw completely from any direct involvement in work to manage unsurfaced, unclassified roads (often referred to as "green lanes").

- 7.2 As part of the highways network, UURs are the statutory responsibility of the Highways Authority. They have never been included within a delegation agreement.
- 7.3 The Authority does have the power to make Traffic Regulation Orders to restrict vehicular use of these routes in extreme circumstances and (as set out in the current business plan) has recently been engaged in assessing the sensitivity of the routes and developing proposals for their management where the National Parks special qualities are being most compromised by vehicular use. The bulk of the work associated with this has been carried out by the Access Officer, a post which is being made redundant, we therefore no longer have capacity to continue this work.
- 7.4 Bearing in mind the Authority's continued investment of much of its access resources in the Highways Authorities' public rights of way networks, it is expected that the Highways Authorities will undertake to carry out all activity related to UURs including within the National Park and to give priority to works where conservation and public enjoyment of the National Park is being most compromised. A clear, written undertaking from the Councils, to this effect is being sought.
- 7.5 The results of the Authority's work to date on UURs will be passed to the Highways Authorities and our future involvement will be restricted to highlighting issues to the Highway Authorities and requesting action where necessary due to use of the route having a negative impact on the special qualities of the national park and their enjoyment by the public

8. **Recommended Action**

- 8.1 It is therefore recommended as follows:
- The Authority agree delegation agreements that have the effect of extending the current terms and conditions for a further year only.
 - That notice is served to terminate these agreements with effect from 1 April 2016.
 - That work be carried out as set out in this report.
 - That the effectiveness of the above way of working and the resources available to continue is reviewed and reported to members in December 2015
 - That pressure continues to be put upon the Highways Authorities to make some investment in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities for the public rights of way network in the National Park
 - That the Authority withdraw from any work relating to the management of unclassified, unsurfaced roads and that confirmation be obtained from the Highways Authorities that this network is their responsibility and that they will prioritise works necessary to prevent negative impact on the special qualities of the National Park and public enjoyment.

Proposed Optimum Basic Standards for Non–Priority Public Rights of Way

Set out below are the responsibilities for managing public rights of way which have not been identified as “priority routes” by the National Park Authority.

Responsibility of the Highway Authority (and its agents)

Public rights of way will be:

- **Signed** where they leave the road – correctly coloured waymark disc carrying path status in words is acceptable
- Provided with an **adequate surface** suitable for the “ordinary traffic of the neighbourhood”
- **Obstruction free**
- **Clear of up-growth** such as thistles, nettles, brambles and bracken which would **block** the right of way to appropriately dressed users (expect legs to be covered). Long grass is not an obstruction – merely an inconvenience when wet, so other than field-edge paths will not be cut
- **Provided with crossings of water courses** whenever deemed by the HA to be required and able to be provided within available budget
- **Waymarked** or otherwise defined on the ground where the course of the path is unclear after reference to the latest edition of the OS Explorer map
- **Recorded** on the definitive map, with an up-to date working copy available on the Council’s website

Responsibility of the Landowner/Occupier

Public rights of way will be:

- **Provided with gates and stiles** which are reasonably convenient for the public to use as outlined in guidance to be issued by the HA. HA to contribute minimum 25% cost of maintenance by paying an agreed percentage of reasonable invoiced costs for works completed to an acceptable standard, or by providing standard materials in lieu of a fixed percentage contribution.
- **Clear of fallen trees** and encroaching or overhanging branches / scrub / vegetation
- **Free from issues arising through ploughing and cropping**
- **Obstruction free:** No padlocked gates, rubbish, barbed wire, slurry/manure; electric fences; misleading signs; intimidating dogs or aggressive livestock
- **Provided with warning notices** where necessary such as beside electric fences and slurry lagoons
- **Repaired** where damaged through private vehicular use