

North York Moors National Park Authority

27 June 2016

Volunteer Strategy Update

<p>1. Purpose of the Report</p>
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<p>1.1 To update members on progress in implementing the Volunteer Strategy.</p>
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2. Background

2.1 This Authority has an excellent volunteer service, the largest of any National Park Authority, it currently delivers around 13,000 days' work each year and enables us to engage directly with a large number of people and to achieve much more across a wide range of work areas.

2.2 In March 2015 the Authority enthusiastically approved a new Volunteer Strategy. It set out plans for changes to the way in which the Authority engages with volunteers, developing a "one team" approach and an aspiration to double the number of volunteer days worked to 25,000 per year by 2020.

2.3 The key areas of change were:

- Establishing new ways of working in Field Services.
- Developing a framework of policy, training and administration to facilitate the change.
- Establishing a "one team" approach where volunteers are able to contribute to all areas of our work and every member of staff has the knowledge, confidence and tools to engage volunteers in their work.
- Reviewing staff and volunteer roles to enable more volunteering in all areas of the Authority's work.
- Encouraging associate volunteering.
- Developing corporate volunteering.
- Developing a monitoring and performance framework for inclusion in the new Business Plan.

2.4 This report outlines progress in implementing the key elements of the strategy in its first year.

3. Establishing New Ways of Working in Field Services

3.1 Following the restructuring and reduction of the ranger and field services in 2015, a new way of working was established which included Maintenance Rangers working regularly with volunteers, especially in maintaining priority rights of way. The four Maintenance Rangers with the support of the Senior Rangers have now put this in place and weekly volunteer assistance is an established part of the area based teams approach. In 2016/17 it is anticipated that over 1000 volunteer days will be worked with Maintenance Rangers

4. Developing a Framework of Policy, Training and Administration

- 4.1 Perhaps the most significant administrative development which will be central to future delivery and expansion of the Volunteer Service is the purchase and installation of the new software package, "Better Impact". This allows every volunteer to have an online personal record of the skills they offer and their availability. It enables them to sign up to tasks. It also provides every member of staff a means of advertising and recruiting for tasks. It will also enable volunteers to put together staff free teams to perform specific tasks. The system has been rolled out to Maintenance Rangers, the Voluntary Ranger Service and Forest Volunteers to good effect and has met with an overwhelmingly positive response from volunteers. The next task is to provide staff with a better understanding of the system and its capabilities.
- 4.2 A policy framework has been put in place including an ethical policy, health and safety policy and volunteers code of conduct all of which are available to volunteers on "Better Impact".
- 4.3 A package of training for staff and for volunteers has been agreed and roll out continues. Volunteers have been trained in use of "Better Impact" and are to be trained in key aspects of leading volunteer work tasks. This training will be delivered, commencing in August, in partnership with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and North Yorkshire County Council Health and Safety team. The Volunteers Team have met with each department to introduce the strategy and new systems, further training in use of "Better Impact", identification of tasks and working with volunteers is being delivered in the coming months

5. Establishing a One Team Approach

- 5.1 This cultural change will develop over a number of years as volunteers work across a wider range of areas and as staff feel empowered to work more often with volunteers. The recent establishment of volunteers in more areas, including visitor centres, has contributed to this, along with early delivery of some training to staff.
- 5.2 Volunteers bring a huge range of skills, some of which have been previously unavailable within the Authority's team. Through Better Impact, we will get a better understanding of what skills are on offer amongst volunteers and a better understanding of the opportunities/needs across all areas of the Authority's work and will be better able to take these opportunities, extending the range of ways that volunteers are involved. Volunteers do require management and support and their role in some areas, such as development control may always be limited
- 5.3 Volunteers are more often joining staff in corporate activities such as training days and full staff meetings and are actively engaged in consultations. They are becoming more broadly engaged in the functioning of the Authority and better able to be influential in how the Authority works. They will play be invited to play an enhanced role in the development of the new Business Plan.

6. Reviewing Staff and Volunteer Roles

- 6.1 The review is complete. Job descriptions and working practices for the whole Volunteer Team have been reviewed and new working practices are largely established. As set out above, training for volunteers in the safe and effective management/delivery of tasks is currently being rolled out.

7. Encouraging Corporate Volunteering

- 7.1 Due to constraints on the time available to work on this area, officers have agreed to postpone development of Corporate Volunteering until 2017; this aspect of the Volunteer Strategy will be addressed in the new Business Plan.

8. Developing Associate Volunteering

- 8.1 A form of 'contract', setting out the responsibilities and liabilities of each party (National Park Authority and Associate Volunteer Group) has been developed and agreed with our insurers. While there is no intention for this to be a legally binding contract, Officers believe that agreeing responsibilities at the outset is an important part of Associate volunteering work.

- 8.2 Associate Volunteer Groups (including Ramblers Association and Single Track) are now a regular and increasingly common feature of practical work being carried out in the National Park – with Ramblers Association carrying out practical work and survey work on the rights of way network and Single Track assisting with the maintenance of cycle tracks around Sutton Bank. In each case the levels of responsibility for the parties will vary and tailor made agreements setting out responsibilities including for health and safety and insurers are agreed.

9. Developing a Monitoring and Performance Framework

- 9.1 It was agreed that a monitoring and performance framework would be developed alongside the new business plan, this will include targets for each department which will in turn be broken down into individual performance targets and amalgamated to develop a single overarching target for volunteer day . Agreement of individual targets for volunteer activity in each area of work has yet to take place. As staff briefings and training are delivered and the scope of Better Impact is understood it will be possible to develop these as the basis for performance plans and the new Business Plan Targets

- 9.2 It is proposed that the original aspiration of doubling volunteer days to 25,000 by 2020 be retained. A more informed, proofed and profiled target will be developed for each year of the Business Plan.

10. Overview

- 10.1 Much progress has been made, especially in developing job roles, administration and training to facilitate the long term changes required for successful implementation of the strategy within a framework that ensures that these changes do not compromise health and safety and that they deliver effectively against National Park Authority priorities.

- 10.2 There has been good growth in volunteering in certain areas, especially with Maintenance Rangers and in the visitor centres. However, more general engagement with "Better Impact" across the Departments has taken longer than originally anticipated as the need for gradual roll out and testing of the system became apparent.

- 10.3 Development and roll out of training for volunteers to enable volunteer led tasks to take place has also taken longer than anticipated as it required significant changes to the roles of staff within the volunteers team. This is now in place and training will be delivered in the coming months, enabling the safe and effective growth of volunteer led work.

10.4 With administration and training schemes now in place it is intended that 2016/17 will see a more rapid change and growth in volunteer involvement.

11. Next steps

11.1 In order to carry forward these changes and realise the benefits of better working with volunteers, some resources will be required, primarily existing staff time, increases in volunteer travel costs, equipment, training and some additional staff resource. This was discussed at the recent Director away days and it was agreed that a best estimate of the resource required at present was £50,000 per year. This assumes that in some areas an initial injection of staff time will lead to the release of greater quantities of time after set up is complete – resulting in more output for the same cost, while in others there will be greater output, often in new areas of work, but with some permanent increase in staff costs for management/support of volunteers.

11.2 In terms of value for money, if we assume that an additional 10,000 volunteer days are generated and that of these 25% are “skilled”, 50% unskilled and 25% are primarily of value for engagement rather than work done, an approximate value of this additional work, using HLF guide figures, would be in excess of £625,000 per year in addition to other benefits relating to engagement and health and wellbeing, etc.

12. Financial and Staffing Implications

12.1 As set out above it is proposed that officers provisionally allocate £50,000 of resources across the Authority in the developing Business Plan to meet growing demands for staff time, transport, equipment and support staff. The figures in the preceding paragraph easily justify this.

13. Contribution to National Park Management Plan

13.1 Successful implementation of the strategy will greatly enhance the Authority’s ability and capacity to deliver across all fronts. 13.2 Delivery of the strategy will contribute directly to policies relating to outreach and engagement (U16), public health (U7) and community (C2).

13.2 It also contributes to this National Parks delivery of DEFRA’s 8 point plan for National Parks

14. Legal Implications

14.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

15. Recommendation

15.1 That the report be noted

15.2 Members comments on delivery of the Volunteer Strategy are invited

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Background papers to this Report

File ref

1. Volunteer Strategy 2015