

## North York Moors National Park Authority

27 June 2016

### Government's 8-Point Plan for England's National Parks

#### 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider the Government's 8 Point Plan for England's National Parks and in particular the contribution this Authority may make to it via its forthcoming Business Plan.

#### 2. Introduction

- 2.1 As previously described to Members, the Government launched its plan for England's National Parks in March this year. This has been previously circulated. It is available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/509916/national-parks-8-point-plan-for-england-2016-to-2020.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509916/national-parks-8-point-plan-for-england-2016-to-2020.pdf).
- 2.2. Members have noted that this Authority is already making a substantial contribution to many of the ambitions in the Plan. A full note of the contribution that the NYMNP Authority intends to make needs to be lodged centrally by 1 September. While much will be achieved by our normal core and project based delivery, this paper highlights some areas where Members may wish to invest further through the allocation of extra resources in the new Business Plan.

#### 3. The 8 Points Analysed

##### 3.1 Inspiring Natural Environments

###### 1. Connect young people with nature

- Double the number of young people to experience a National Park as part of National Citizen Service by 2020.
- A new package of teaching materials for schools based on National Parks.
- National Park Authorities to engage directly with over 60,000 young people per year through schools visits by 2017/18.

###### Commentary

This Authority engages directly with up to 16,000 young people each year through visits to schools, schools coming into the National Park and via the events programme. It also involves young people in its governance by asking them to speak directly to Members at periodic Authority meetings. The volunteer service has engaged with young people through a variety of routes such as the Explorer Club, project specific activity (e.g. Salmon in the Classroom and Young Angling Initiative) work with Scouts, Guides and schools and the John Muir Awards. Having 15% of its workforce as apprentices means that there is a very healthy level of young persons' input as staff members and we regularly take student interns and research project students to work with staff.

It is noticeable that although the title of the section is "Connect young people with nature" the text makes it clear that the intention is to improve young peoples' connections with landscape heritage, food and farming, not just wildlife.

The Authority has not so far been a proactive participant in the National Citizen Service which is a voluntary personal and social development programme for 16 and 17 year-olds. In the Queen's speech 2016, it was confirmed that the NCS would be strengthened by further Government investment and being given statutory status. Officers are keen to investigate further opportunities to work with this initiative alongside delivering the Volunteer Strategy. This would likely require additional staff resources and at this point officers are not clear that this would be more productive than, for example, expanding the existing education or volunteer services.

Members have so far indicated a tentative wish to have a third strategic priority for the forthcoming Business Plan centred around; engagement with young people in the achievement of Park purposes. The Authority's involvement with the National Citizen Service could certainly complement work that we are already doing via the Education team and engage positively with a slightly older (but still young!) age group. Officers will gather more information on this over the next month.

## **2. Create thriving natural environments**

- National Park Authorities, with the Environment Agency and Natural England, to champion integrated management of the natural environment, showcasing the benefits that designated landscapes can bring.

### **Commentary**

This subsection of the Plan is not as detailed as the previous one. The NYMNPA has a strong track record in this area, for instance through its pioneering farm grant scheme and continued direct assistance to the farming community for environmental action. It is notable that NPAs are asked to provide leadership in this area and expected to be at the vanguard. Our pioneering delivery work creating wildlife superhighways should surely be part of this: the scheme at Kettlewell recently approved by Members shows how this work can bring landscape and heritage benefits alongside ones for wildlife. In terms of threats, while the Park has a considerable peatland resource, it is not as great as in other upland Parks, nor are there largescale problems of peat erosion. Instead, the biggest threat which has been identified is the continuing loss of ancient woodland sites particularly through their replanting with further rotations of alien conifers.

Members may wish to consider how further impetus could be added to the programmes to restore ancient woodland and to provide strong habitat corridors. A "wildcard" would be work on the National Park's marine environment.

## **3.2 Drivers of the Rural Economy**

### **3. National Parks driving growth in international tourism**

- Promote National Parks as world-class destinations to visitors from overseas and the UK.
- Increase annual visitors from 90m to 100m, generating an estimated £440m for local businesses.

### **Commentary**

The Authority's work to increase the profile of the National Park in the last four years has been very successful in terms of national and local media coverage, social media contacts and in terms of an increase in visitor numbers. The 2012 Management Plan considered that an additional 1.6m visitor days to the National Park could be accommodated without harming the Park's special qualities. An extra 0.95m of these have already been achieved. Members may wish to consider what further increases could be delivered without harming the special nature of the National Park.

Our work to increase the profile of the North York Moors has been done in the context of the Authority's existing Communication Strategy and the Promoting the Park Plan. Both of these, particularly the Communication Strategy, were done some time ago. Members may wish to consider the need to re-visit one or both of these documents and crystallise our thinking about our prime audiences.

One of the few items that Members agreed to drop from the previous Business Plan was the attempt to gain Geo-diversity Park status. The 8 Point Plan includes the example from Northumberland using International Dark Sky Status as a boost to tourism. A possible issue for this Authority to consider is the strategic themes that are best adopted to promote the North York Moors.

#### **4. Deliver new apprenticeships in National Parks**

- Develop three new apprenticeship standards led by National Park Authorities.
- Double the number of apprenticeships in National Park Authorities by 2020.

#### **Commentary**

The new standards referred to relate to countryside working, rural tourism and built heritage conservation. The Authority has already volunteered to lead on the two of these and work is underway on the countryside apprenticeship in conjunction with other employers. Staff resource will need to be found to scope and then take forward the other two Trailblazers.

Given the large number of existing apprenticeships that the Authority already has (currently 16 out of a full time equivalent workforce of 108) it is difficult to envisage a large expansion in their number here. Having said that, the Authority is actively considering how apprentices could form part of the staffing requirements for future funding bids.

The work that the Authority is doing in leading on the Countryside apprentice trailblazer will assist other NPAs to develop their own apprentice programme, and it is perhaps by sharing knowledge and experience proactively with other NPAs that this Authority can make its most significant contribution to the overall doubling of apprentice numbers. Officers are also working with the York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnership (YNYER LEP), with which we have developed a really positive relationship, on their Apprentice Strategy Group which will result in increased numbers of apprentices in the area.

In terms of funding, while the Authority will not pay the Apprentice Levy itself, the levy may provide an opportunity to develop a new funding scheme for apprenticeships. It is expected that many organisations will not be able to spend their apprentice levy 'pot' as there are tight deadlines on spending and restrictions on what the levy money can be spent on. A mechanism is being developed to enable those organisations to transfer levy cash to another employer to spend it on their behalf. Officers believe that the Authority could potentially be an attractive partner for other organisations - this would effectively be a form of corporate sponsorship, but would require staff time to develop.

#### **5. Promote the best of British food from National Parks**

- National Parks will be known for, and visited as, great food destinations.
- Work with National Park Authorities and the Great British Food Unit to deliver more Protected Food Names for National Park products and increase exports.
- The Government will celebrate National Park produce.

### **Commentary**

It is more than ten years since the Authority produced a printed local produce guide. This is now online at <http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/visiting/made-in/food-and-drink> and <http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/visiting/made-in/artisans>. We are currently updating the artisan one (adding a further 80) and should look to do the same for the food one (we may also move all the Capital of Cake places here).

One area where this Authority may be able to develop this work in a new direction is by concentrating on cooked and processed food, for instance, by concentrating on the area's reputation as the Capital of Cake.

It was also suggested that more could be made of the area's fishing heritage and its marine foodstuffs. The upcoming Fish. Fillet. Feast! event (18 June) funded through CCF is celebrating our fishing heritage and could be the start of this.

## **3.3 National Treasures**

### **6. Everyone's National Parks**

- Complete the designation to extend the boundaries of the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.
- Encourage more diverse visitors to National Parks.
- *As well as attracting more overseas visitors, we want to ensure that everyone here in the UK can benefit from visiting National Parks. As nationally significant and free-sites for heritage and spaces for wellbeing. National Parks should be enjoyed by all. National Park Authorities will work to build on existing successful programmes, including those that encourage and support under-represented groups. We will support the National Park Authorities to forge partnerships in order to meet their aspiration of removing barriers that can inhibit those without access to transport from visiting National Parks.*
- Promote volunteering in National Parks.
- Celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of National Parks' creation.

### **Commentary**

It is hard not to read the full text of the second bullet above, and the accompanying case study (which deals with public transport in the South Downs National Park) without casting a wistful eye back at Moorsbus. This was by far and away the largest and most well used of the all the National Parks' public transport systems and had a European-wide reputation as such. The Authority was forced to close this network because of funding reductions and there is no suggestion that this could be reversed given the state of the Authority's current financing. We have, however, been successful in a focussed way in achieving much more cost effective transport to the National Park for those without a car by close working with selected groups and communities around the Park via our Community Champions. It would be relatively easy to expand this provision, possibly in tandem with the increasing emphasis which may be given to engagement with young people.

In terms of volunteering, Members have of course agreed the Volunteer Strategy in March 2015. This Authority already has significantly more volunteer days than other National Park Authorities and there is the commitment in the Volunteer Strategy to expand these numbers further (see separate item on this agenda).

In terms of the celebration of the National Parks' creation, one approach to this could be an emphasis on the rich cultural heritage of National Parks in the UK (see next sub-heading). The UK's Parks are sometimes seen as fifth division due to their status as "Category V" in the International Union for the Conservation of Classification System

for Protected Areas. This System starts from the mistaken assumption that National Parks in some parts of the world are genuine wildernesses when in fact they have (barring a few tiny islands and Antarctica) all had active human populations for thousands of years. The 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UK's National Parks could celebrate their rich cultural heritage associated with past and current human populations and how this interacts and is integrated with National Park wildlife and tranquillity values. This is the context in which the Authority's decision to give planning permission for the new building at Stanbrook Abbey, Wass is placed –which has recently won the Royal Institute of British Architects' prestigious best new building in Yorkshire Award.

## **7. Landscape and heritage in National Parks**

- Work with the Heritage Lottery Fund to achieve their objective of encouraging more fundable projects in the Natural Heritage sector.
- Enhance people's involvement in the interpretation of the historic environment and natural beauty in National Parks.
- Support the Lake District's bid for UNESCO World Heritage Status.
- Tell the story of cultural landscapes in England's National Parks.

### **Commentary**

This Authority has had a long succession of HLF funded projects covering bio-diversity amongst other features. The current Ryevitalise Landscape Partnership Scheme bid is awaiting its stage 1 approval having recently been submitted and the TEL is proceeding with a substantial natural heritage element. We are also working with the HLF regional office and other partners through a Natural Heritage Forum to consider future project ideas, the coordination of these and also how we can encourage others to develop successful natural heritage projects. The Authority's External Funding strategy and developing project pipeline will feed into discussions with the HLF.

Regarding the second bullet point the Authority and continues to deliver projects to remove built heritage and archaeological sites from the Buildings and Monuments "At Risk" registers. These projects, co-funded by Historic England, have involved significant volunteer survey and practical action, involving innovative (mobile working using a bespoke mobile phone app) and award winning elements whilst working closely and positively with the owners of these sites. Both TEL and Ryevitalise include innovative ways to engage a range of audiences in the heritage they are focussing on which would be nationally important examples of best practice.

The last of the bullets relates in particular to the previous section. It would be good to have some international initiative to spread the word about the value of celebrating the cultural element of our wild areas as well as the natural one, an initiative which would also feed in to the work on international tourism. Skype, Facetime and other forms of electronic communication offer new ways to work with overseas partners without costly travel.

## **8. Health and wellbeing in National Parks**

- Promote innovative schemes for National Parks to serve national health.
- Realise the immense potential for outdoor recreation in National Parks.

### **Commentary**

Given the importance of landscape, nature and physical activity to an individual's mental and physical health and wellbeing, much of the work of any National Park Authority will have a beneficial outcome in this respect. More specifically, this Authority has run a programme of health walks each year for over 8 years and has been involved with other initiatives on physical and mental health including health volunteering and the Explorer Club. The way in which health walks are delivered by the

Authority is highly cost effective but this and other initiatives remain on a small scale compared with the size of the problem. It is arguable that the two real issues around the work of National Park Authorities on health are first:

- Targeting those who need assistance the most. There is an inevitable tendency for those already healthy to become more healthy/physically active rather than those who are extremely inactive to take their first steps towards a more active lifestyle.
- The second big issue is scale. To make a meaningful impact, the work of the NPAs needs to be fully integrated with the NHS and to involve other major partners.

It was in part to tackle this issue that this Authority has pushed at a national level for a joint National Parks' bid to the Big Lottery Fund for funding for the development of a large scale programme of work on this issue. For various reasons the progress on that national bid has been slow and this has delayed progress on health at a local/regional level.

Decisions on the National Parks England Business Plan which are due imminently should resolve whether sufficient impetus and resources are going to be given to the national angle and this will allow Members in the North York Moors to decide on the approach they want to take locally.

The immense potential for outdoor recreation in National Parks is well known. The two Yorkshire Parks have (for 10 years, pre-dating the Tour de Yorkshire) viewed the two Parks as particularly suited to an expansion of cycling. This has not diminished the commitment to maintaining a public rights of way network which is fit for all users – though cash funding has been withdrawn from the latter as a result of the reductions in core grants, while the two National Park Authorities continue to fulfil the Highways Authorities' statutory responsibilities here while receiving no cash support to do so.

The issue for the Business Plan may however be whether a core funded new initiative is desired with regard to recreation – or whether this is an area where significant initiatives will rely on external funding. Given that some external grant opportunities can have very short lead times, the prior preparation of “shovel ready” projects may be desirable.

At present, the only large-scale recreational projects which officers are aware of in relation to the National Park relate to the Cindertrack and the potential expansion northwards (the latter was discussed at a recent meeting of the North York Moors National Park Trust).

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 The 8 Point Plan is a thoroughly positive and very welcome document, which encourages the English National Parks to strengthen their traditional roles and experiment with new ones in the fulfilment of National Park Purposes. A huge volume of work is being inspired by and carried out by the National Park Authority already. This paper has examined just a few of the areas where Members may want to develop new areas of work as part of the emerging Business Plan. The fact that the Plan is relatively light on initiatives relating to the First Purpose suggests that more thought will need to be put in to this area domestically than would otherwise be the case. The one real disappointment with the Plan is that it is silent about the positive difference that the Authorities' planning role makes and how it could be developed further.

By preventing the wrong developments and encouraging the right ones, almost all the other activities in the Plan are strengthened or enabled.

**5. Financial and Staffing Implications**

5.1 These will be dealt with thoroughly in the Business Plan process.

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

6.1 As above.

**7. Legal Implications**

7.1 None

**8. Recommendation**

8.1 Members are recommended to discuss the subjects raised in this paper, comment on the 8 Point Plan, raise other issues in relation to it they see as important and give officers a steer as to which subjects, if any, they wish officers to develop further as part of the Business Plan process.

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**Background papers to this Report**

**File ref**

1. Government's 8-Point Plan for England's National Parks – March 2016