

# North York Moors National Park Authority

Monday 25 June 2018

## Volunteer Strategy

### 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update on progress during the last year.
- 1.2 To propose a new system for counting volunteering time for approval.

### 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Volunteering is central to how this Authority works. Hundreds of people give their time, energy and expertise freely to help the Authority achieve its aims. Thousands of days' work are contributed by volunteers each year and the contribution that this makes to our delivery is enormous. It also makes us better engaged within communities and enables many people to enjoy and better understand the National Park while contributing to its long term care.
- 2.2 In March 2015 a new Volunteer Strategy was approved and adopted by the Authority focusing on a 'one team approach' with volunteers trained and resourced to lead teams of other volunteers and every member of staff given the confidence and training to work with volunteers. Its successful implementation requires continued real change in the way we work both amongst staff and those who come to volunteer.
- 2.3 This report sets out further progress in delivering the Strategy over the last year and proposes a new method of counting volunteer contribution using our My Volunteering software, and the setting of a new baseline using this counting technique. The Head of Volunteering will make a presentation about the new counting methodology and will be available to respond to questions and suggestions by members.

### 3. Delivering the Strategy

- 3.1 Progress in delivering the strategy was initially delayed due to staffing issues and long term sickness. The team currently delivering the Strategy is almost entirely different to that which was in place at the outset.
- 3.2 The strategy sets out seven key ways in which we will develop our work with volunteers, these are:
  - More in-house volunteer groups.
  - A new approach to delivering field services.
  - Expanding 'associate volunteering'.
  - Developing opportunities for corporate volunteering.
  - Creating opportunities for 'virtual' or 'remote' volunteering.
  - Supporting all staff to work with volunteers.
  - Supporting staff to be volunteers.

Sections 4 - 10 below summarise progress in each of these areas.

#### **4. More In- House Volunteering**

- 4.1 It was recognised that the main barrier to growth of in-house volunteering was a lack of capacity amongst staff to provide supervision for tasks, and it was proposed that this be addressed by providing training for existing volunteers to enable them to lead tasks and training for staff so that all can identify suitable work and manage volunteers. A training programme has now been developed and we now have six Volunteer Task Day Leaders (TDLs) who lead work parties of other volunteers, and more in the pipeline. The TDL training is now partly run by a volunteer, and we have rolled out this training to staff and apprentices. This greatly increases the amount of work that can be undertaken.
- 4.2 Promotion of volunteering in the National Park has been greatly improved with a revamp of the Volunteering Opportunities section of the website, production of a *Come Volunteer With Us* leaflet and posters which are being widely distributed, production of banners for groups undertaking tasks to take out with them, and the use of a number of additional advertising methodologies.
- 4.3 We have identified a Volunteering Journey using best practice (which we are now sharing with other National Parks and organisations) which improves the support that a volunteer receives through their time with us. It includes registration, selection, induction, role profile, review and development and has an underlying health and safety aspect. All volunteers now receive a Welcome Pack which contains overarching and local information to help them on their journey. Additionally, all volunteers outline any skills they have that they would like to offer, so that staff looking for a particular skill can search My Volunteering and make a direct approach to a volunteer.
- 4.4 As well as the traditional task groups, we have opened up another category of 'Tasks available to all volunteers' on My Volunteering. This gives volunteers a variety of additional tasks that they can undertake, makes the best use of their skills and prevents volunteer groups becoming too isolated.

#### **5. A New Approach to Delivering Field Services**

- 5.1 The new ways of working in the Ranger Service, with Maintenance Rangers having a team of dedicated volunteers has now been running for several years and is now embedded enabling a great deal of work to be achieved. It is proving more difficult to recruit volunteers in some areas than in others and this is being addressed by the Ranger Teams working with the Volunteer Team.

#### **6. Expanding Associate Volunteering**

- 6.1 We have already greatly developed our Associate Volunteering and work with a wide range of other organisations. The paperwork has been completely updated to ensure all health and safety and insurance elements are covered. In doing this, we are greatly expanding our work with special needs groups. We would like to develop this further and are hoping to take on an Apprentice from September to give us the capacity to do this justice.

#### **7. Developing Opportunities for Corporate Volunteering**

- 7.1 Capacity prevents us from being proactive with Corporate Volunteering, but we have expanded the number and range of what we do. Again, the paperwork has all been rewritten to ensure health and safety is a priority and the audit trail is in place.

## 8. **Creating Opportunities for Remote/Virtual Volunteering**

- 8.1 We are developing an increasing number of 'indoor' volunteering opportunities. Many of these roles can be delivered from home just as easily as in an office situation. The Volunteering Team has a disabled admin volunteer who regularly works from home, and indeed from hospital, when he is undertaking dialysis. As our admin roles increase, we are hoping that remote volunteering will also increase.

## 9. **Supporting all Staff to Work with Volunteers**

- 9.1 Rather than a limited number of Volunteering Team staff leading work parties, all staff are now encouraged to line manage volunteers, allowing for a much greater capacity for volunteering. This is a cultural shift, but is becoming increasingly successfully embedded and will continue to be developed, for example in the Land of Iron and River Esk projects, within the Education Team and in the Ranger Service.
- 9.2 All staff teams have now been trained in 'Working with Volunteers' and an accompanying document of the same name has been produced and distributed. We help all staff work with their volunteers through all aspects of the Volunteering Journey including My Volunteering software, role profiles, health and safety, lone working training, working with volunteers with mental health issues, and resolving problems. We are liaising with Corporate Services to ensure that time with the Volunteering Team becomes an integral part of all staff's induction programme. We are now seeing a cultural shift within the National Park with a volunteering ethic spreading across all teams, enabling them to meet their volunteering targets in the Business Plan.

## 10. **Supporting Staff to be Volunteers**

- 10.1 Discussions are ongoing relating to staff having days to volunteer for the National Park. This will be advantageous by embedding a volunteer culture in staff teams, reducing staff workload and stress, and through better staff-volunteer contact and communication.

## 11. **Counting the Contribution made by Volunteers**

- 11.1 We have completed the transition from a paper-based recording system to the software package My Volunteering, which has significant advantages including in terms of Health and Safety. Volunteer working hours are now inputted by the volunteers themselves, giving a simple, low input system for staff. The new system records volunteer working hours very accurately – by the minute if we so wish, **but it is of course reliant on the volunteers entering the information.** There are significant differences in what is recorded as a volunteer's contribution between this and the old methodology. We have now had this system in place for a year, and are able to consider these differences, and how we might set a new baseline and develop a recording methodology that properly records and values the contribution that volunteers make to delivering National Park Purposes.
- 11.2 The change from the old recording method to the new has altered the baseline of volunteer hours. What has changed?

- Firstly, some hours were previously recorded that we no longer think of as being volunteer hours. An example of this is the hours spent by community groups visiting the National Park via our Community Champions. It is our view that the hours spent by our Community Champions in facilitating and promoting these visits should certainly be recorded but the visit itself should not. These hours were previously recorded as volunteer time as the way of working was becoming established and we were particularly encouraging the visits. As it has become established practice we feel it is now appropriate to only record the Champions time as set out above.
- Secondly, it is no longer possible to account for the different requirements of different types of volunteering. For example, previously, we allocated time allowances for certain volunteers with special needs to reflect the fact that in some cases it might take all day to prepare for and deliver a few hours work on site. The new system treats all volunteers the same and records only the hours on site and travelling to and from site and all volunteers are considered to have volunteered for a day if they contribute 7.5 hours in this way.
- Thirdly, certain types of volunteering are no longer recorded as the person volunteering is justifiably not signed on to the My Volunteer system. These volunteers include people acting in a valuable advisory role such as members of the Disability Advisory Group,, co-ordinator of the North York Moors Tourism Network and members of advisory groups associated with particular projects such as Land of Iron. This is shown in the table below as 'Other volunteering not recorded on My Volunteering'. This only covers volunteering effort for groups sponsored and supported by the NPA rather than any other organisation.
- A further (in this case historic) issue is the huge decrease in engagement with special needs volunteers which resulted from a national change in funding for activities around five years ago. We know that this reduced our recorded volunteers days by around 2000 per year. Efforts are being made to re-engage with this audience.
- By entering the same set of figures using both old and new methodologies we can see that the new methodology arrives at a figure of around 20% less than would previously have been the case, which implies, in addition to the factors above, under-recording by volunteers, for whom this is an extra administrative task, since all other information points to an increase in volunteering.

11.3 Additionally, there is a desire to measure the full value of time donated by volunteers to the Authority and a wish therefore to capture the additional 'hidden' hours that volunteers give over and above their recorded volunteering but without which the recorded volunteering would not be possible. This might include time spent researching routes or techniques, logging in to My Volunteer to sign up for a task, washing muddy boots and coordinating travel, etc. In order to get a better idea of this hidden activity, we selected 20 volunteers from across the full range of different roles, and with a full range of volunteering hours, and asked them to estimate the percentage of extra time they donated. The project was managed by our Volunteering Team admin volunteer Paul. We had 11 responses which varied from an extra 9% to 168% (there being no correlation with the amount of volunteering they did), with an average of 60% additional time given compared to the actual time volunteered on site. This surprisingly high figure must reflect the relatively high levels of complexity of task that we encourage volunteers to undertake. However, we concluded that, with the huge variation in response, that it is impossible without further surveying, to make an entirely valid and robust estimated average across all volunteers, but we do know is that it is a significant if very variable figure. We still wish to capture these hours and reflect the value of time volunteered and we propose that 20% would be a conservative and fully justifiable uplift which would tend to under record volunteer effort rather than over-record it

- 11.4 Our proposal is to strongly encourage all volunteers to record ALL their hours accurately on My Volunteering, whether it is travel time, preparation, research, washing muddy boots etc. Work to encourage this has begun with an article to this effect for the latest *Involved* newsletter. This is change that will take some time to be effected as volunteers get used to the new recording system. In the meantime there will inevitably be some under recording. We can either accept that in the meantime we will not have a proper figure representing the full contribution of volunteers and work hard to encourage proper recording, or we can add a modest uplift to reflect the time lag in getting all volunteers using the new system and recording all their time. It is suggested that this correction factor should be reviewed each year in line with our success in getting all time recorded to achieve as much consistency as possible over the years.
- 11.5 A key element of the Volunteer Strategy and our current approach is to treat volunteers as full members of the team and to properly appreciate their contribution. It is therefore recommended that we include all of the above considerations in our calculation of volunteering time given. Our proposal is to record volunteer hours using the following table:
- 11.6 Days volunteered to date for 2017/18 (hours are still being submitted on My Volunteering so the total will increase).

	<b>NYMNPA My Volunteering figures</b>	<b>Associate groups</b>	<b>Corporate Groups</b>	<b>Other not recorded on My Volunteering</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Days volunteered</b>	7,010+	1,935	121	Awaiting data	
	Uplift by 20% = 8412+	Anticipating 3935		anticipating 50+	12 - 13,000

- 11.7 Members' are recommended to agree this system as giving the most accurate picture of the full contribution that volunteering makes to delivery of National Park purposes and the Management Plan in a numeric sense, which can be obtained at reasonable cost.

## 12. Health and Safety

- 12.1 Health and safety and the health and safety audit trail has been developed and improved. All recommendations by auditors have been implemented and further training has been put in place for staff and volunteers This includes Health and Safety for volunteers training to be Task Day Leaders, Lone Working training for staff who manage volunteers who lone work, skills training for volunteers eg Lantra brushcutting and Lantra pesticide/herbicide training for volunteers, a water safety course for one of our Task Day Leaders, and first aid training. Dom Passman has attended our Task Day Leader course and suggestions implemented.
- 12.2 My Volunteering has been set up so that all health and safety documents including Policy, Lone Working and Risk Assessments are filed, and volunteers are asked to sign to say that they have read and understood these documents, where appropriate. The system is also used for them to records any health issues that task leaders may need to be aware of when they are volunteering.

12.3 All volunteers were invited to take part in a health and safety questionnaire, similar (but slimmed down) to that undertaken by staff. An action plan was devised and implemented following the results of this survey. Additionally, the Head of the Volunteering Team is a member of the National Park Health and Safety group.

### 13. **Financial and Staffing Implications**

13.1 All contained within the current budget and Business Plan.

### 14. **Contribution to National Park Management Plan**

14.1 Assists staff in meeting their Management Plan targets.

As volunteers become more engaged in an ever wider variety of work, implementation of the Volunteer Strategy contributes delivery of many National Park Management Plan Policies. These include:

- C2 Opportunities for volunteering will be created
- E1 The landscape character of the National Park will be maintained and enhanced
- E9 The traditional skills base will be developed and promoted
- E16 Awareness, knowledge and enthusiasm will be raised amongst communities, land managers and visitors about measures necessary to protect habitats and wildlife
- U7 The public will be able to improve their health and wellbeing through reconnecting with nature
- U13 Children living within and outside the National Park will be engaged with the National Park during their school career.
- Outreach work amongst under-represented groups will be continued

### 15. **Legal Implications**

15.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report

### 16. **Recommendation**

16.1 That:

Members approve the proposed methodology for counting volunteering contribution as set out in 11.1 – 11.7 of this report.

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### **Background papers to this Report**

### **File ref**

1. Volunteer Strategy 2015