

North York Moors National Park Authority Scrutiny Meeting

11 July 2016

Scrutiny of Business Plans 2012-15 and 2015/16

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an analysis of the Authority's performance against the actions and targets set in the 2012 -2015 Business Plan and the 15/16 extension. This provides useful evidence in the determination of resources and priorities appropriate for the new Business Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 The origins of the 2012 – 2015 Business Plan, and its context, have been described to Members in detail in previous papers and discussed at the evening seminars. An analysis of the performance against the financial principles has also previously been presented to Members. Regular reports on the Authority's Performance Indicators are made as part of routine business. This report therefore looks at broader progress in key areas of activity, the achievement of individual actions and performance against particular long term performance measures which are not dealt with annually. These are all derived from the National Park Management Plan.
- 2.2 The format of this report follows that of the 2012/15 Business Plan.
- 2.3 Overall, the Business Plan was ambitious and the Authority has achieved a high proportion of its targets. This is despite reduced resources and some unavoidable diversions such as the potash development.
- 2.4 This report is part of the body of evidence, which will inform the development of the new Business Plan. Other evidence includes:
- The outcome of discussions at the members seminar on 26 April when members considered the big issues likely to have an impact on the development of the new plan.
 - A progress report on State of the Park indicators in the National Park Management Plan.
 - Members SWOT analysis.
 - Outcomes from Staff consultation events, which have fed into the SWOT analysis and highlighted potential areas of work for development.
 - Residents and visitor surveys.

At the members seminar planned for 24 August all of this evidence will be made available (in a digestible format!) for Members to consider in their discussions on the priorities and key activities for the new Business Plan

A reminder of key dates and the timetable:

11 July - Scrutiny Committee	Progress review of business plan and presentation of draft SWOT
24 August - Members' seminar	Discuss broad framework for strategic priorities, Conservation work and key activities
5 September - FRASC	Discussion on resourcing the plan
3 October - Authority	1 st draft plan presented
19 December - Authority	Final plan signed off

3. Financial Information

3.1 The old Business Plan set five targets for unit cost of delivery of certain services. The baseline target and performance are outlined in the table below:

Unit Cost	April 2011 Baseline	2014/15 Target	2014/15 Actual
Cost per User of Education Service	£10	£7	£7
Cost per Km of Rights of Way	£249	£240	£218
Cost per Volunteer Day	£17	£17	£17
Cost per Chargeable Car Park Space	£110	£110	£83
Income per Chargeable Car Park Space	£252	£258	£252

(Car Park Income per space was £289 in 2015/16)

3.2 These figures suggest that the drive to improve effectiveness in terms of cost and income has been successful. Bench mark figures and targets were not in fact set for the Conservation Department or our grant provision.

4. Income Generation

4.1 This has been discussed at length by Members who have expressed their satisfaction with progress so far, which exceeded Business Plan targets; Members have indicated their desire to set further and higher Business Plan targets for income generation over the next Business Plan period.

5. External Funding

5.1 Apart from the financial principle targets which were met, the Business Plan set the following areas of specific targets for external funding in light of the threats and opportunities identified in the Management Plan. The following table lists these targets and show our achievement against them. A 'tick' indicates that a significant level of external funding was secured, whether or not it has yet been received.

Targets	Achievement
Improving habitats on the Connections Map or addressing an imminent threat or priority opportunity	✓
Planted ancient woodland sites	✓
Alcathoe's Bat	Bid submitted
Esk Pearl Mussel	✓
Daffodils	✓

This Exploited Land	✓
Tourism	✓
Skills	✓
Temples in Duncombe Park	✓
Undergrounding	✓
Geodiversity projects	Deprioritised
Local sustainable transport fund	✓

6. Environmental Performance

- 6.1 It will be fair to say that the Authority's internal environmental performance has not been a priority over the last four years given the huge strides that were made in this area over the preceding two Business Plan periods.
- 6.2 Members may wish to consider whether renewed vigour should be applied to this area and whether any specific targets are appropriate.

7. Environment

- 7.1 This is the part of the Business Plan which applies to the similar component of the Management Plan. It describes how the 2012/15 Business Plan 'marks a major shift in focus with the end of the Farm Scheme and the adoption of two new major priorities: work on habitat connections and increased emphasis on woodland restoration (PAWS sites)'. The key areas of activity listed in the Plan are shown in the Table below together with a commentary on progress:

Key Activity	Comment on Progress
Significant improvement to habitat connections across the National Park to strengthen biodiversity and improve ability to respond to climate change.	Some excellent individual projects but overall much less progress than hoped. See text below for discussion.
Accelerating the restoration of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).	Significant progress, target met and £300k external funding for 2016-2020 achieved.
Restoring traditional field boundaries via a new landscape grant scheme open to all land managers.	Achieved, but on a more limited scale (45 grants a year) due to reductions in funding.
Identifying ways to continue work to enhance habitat for important species such as the Fresh Water Pearl Mussel and Alcatloe's Bat.	Pearl Mussel very much achieved. Alcatloe's Bat nothing on a significant scale, possibly via Rye Project. Water vole survey and other actions.
Improving the condition of Scheduled monuments, listed buildings and other important historic features.	Highly successful: 105 monuments and 52 listed buildings rescued; leader in this field despite reduced resources.
Developing a project focussing on the industrial heritage of the National Park.	Highly successful with the TEL HLF award.
Contribute to the development of local, national and European policy such as CAP and RDPE.	Useful work done on this but unable to prevent significant negative policy shifts.
A new initiative to work with farmers to deliver both improved profitability and environmental gains.	Deprioritised with Member approval.
Protection of trees, woodlands and hedgerows through advice and regulation.	Carried forward successfully.

Improving the quality of villages – through grants, advice and regulation.	With exceptions generally very successful.
Maintaining the landscape of the National park through application of the Local Development Framework.	As successful as the general relaxation of planning controls permitted.
Increasing Volunteer involvement in Environmental work.	No significant progress but strong base retained.(Cultural Heritage volunteering has blossomed)

8. Delivery Actions and Strategic Performance Indicators

- 8.1 The Business Plan also contains specific actions and major long term targets linked to the Management Plan. The major long term targets are discussed in detail below.
- 8.2 One of the delivery actions – an initiative to work with the farming community on new technology to bring environment economic benefits was deleted following the further reductions in National Park grant. The great majority of the other actions have been completed. It is notable however that in four key areas relating to significant Management Plan ambitions progress has been mixed. These areas are the protection of ancient woodland sites, creating habitat corridors, restoring species rich grassland sites and new native woodland planting. Targets for all four were ambitious.
- 8.3 In terms of protection of ancient woodland (restoring sites that had been planted with conifers) approximately 500 hectares of work has been initiated in the National Park in the four year period. This is believed to at least maintain the impetus developed in 2010 and 2011 and exceeds the Business Plan target over the previous years. £300k of external funding has been generated to boost efforts in this area in coming years (via the TEL project and grants from the Woodland Trust) and more may follow via the Rye Project. Thus the hoped-for boost to this area of work should be continued. The Trennet Bank project is a splendid example of what the Authority can achieve and should do more of.
- 8.4 The plan to create strong corridors for wildlife across the National Park has been an innovative, challenging and ambitious one. The Business Plan identified 132 key habitat connections that needed to be made and the target has been to address 70% of these by the end of the Business Plan period.
- 8.5 In practice 9% have been successfully completed, though work has started on more than 70%. While acknowledging the challenge of establishing new methodologies, the determination to have high standards in designating sites as complete, and some diversion of resources, this is a disappointing outcome. Although momentum has now built up in this area of work it seems likely that unless this becomes a clearer priority for the department (inevitably at the expense of things) transformational progress in this area is unlikely to occur.
- 8.6 The figures for woodland planting – 161 hectares against a target of 300 - are also lower than expected. (These figures include some very sparse 'parkland' planting). This reflects policy changes which make woodland planting less attractive to landowners.
- 8.7 These changes have diminished achievement of planting at a national level by an even greater margin, thus these figures are believed to be very respectable given the resources available.

- 8.8 The outputs in terms of species rich grassland are however disappointing. The Business Plan aim has been to 'restore' or 'create' 150 hectares of this habitat by 2017. We have no evidence that any such sites were created or fully restored between 2012-present.
- 8.9 Officers believe that 'restored' should mean what it says ie that such habitats have been restored, not just that measures have been put in place which it is hoped will restore them at some point in the future. (This is not the definition used at a national level where grassland 'in restoration' is counted as been 'restored'). However, even on this much looser definition the figure for the NPA shows a figure of just 80 hectares 'in restoration' (plus another 46 hectares subject to at least some level of management or monitoring).
- 8.10 The overall picture for grassland in the National Park is not as bleak as this might seem because through national agri-environment schemes nearly 400 hectares are 'in restoration' – a figure to which NP staff have contributed significantly. Unfortunately however, almost none of this area (via National Park or National agri-environment schemes) is under much more than five year agreements. The economics of grassland management still weigh heavily in favour of more or less intensive management usually including the use of artificial fertilizers and herbicides. It is unclear at present what action by the Authority would represent a good use of public money in this field. Making a powerful case for better incentives whilst doing the minimum to conserve existing sites might be the most valuable contribution.

9. Understanding and Enjoyment

- 9.1 The two most notable areas for expansion in this field in the 2012/15 Business Plan were improved profile for the National Park and continued growth in the level of volunteers across the Authority. Evidence of a significantly increased profile has been presented to Members over the past few years. The number of volunteer days has grown at a significantly faster rate than the 3% annual target (which required 12,556 days by 2015 against an output of 13,382, though there are some definitional issues which need resolving for future Business Plan Targets.

Working to raise the profile of the North York Moors, including a new website, local distinctiveness work, developing and promoting the brand and local produce, a bigger events programme and achieving Geopark status for the area.	See above; new website successful, social media likewise etc. Members specifically agreed not to attempt Geopark status.
Reviewing the way in which we deliver information and use of our visitor centres, completing the refurbishment of Sutton Bank and reviewing retail at both centres.	Situation transformed; major changes in operation of visitor centres; the then planned refurbishment of Sutton Bank completed and further work (bike shop, play areas) added; retail offer improved. Comms review reduced print with web and social media reaching wider audience.
Continuing the growth in or volunteer services, including creation of teams of Visitor Centre Volunteers.	See Text above; good input from volunteers both inside the centres and in terms of grounds maintenance, the gallery etc. Moorswork and involvement of disabled volunteers has been less successful.

Maintaining the current high standards of Rights of Way rather than aim for further improvement. During years one and two we will make improvements to the definitive map that most affect public enjoyment before handing back to NYCC responsibility for definitive map and larger structures.	Completed.
Working on open access will be strictly limited to continuing delivery of access management plans and providing input into the development of coastal access – optimising benefits and minimising conflicts with land management.	Completed.
Working with the Highway Authority, we will development a clear approach to tackling a unsustainable use of ‘green lanes’ where this is having significant impact on the conservation and enjoyment of our special qualities.	This approach was completed then handed over to the Highways Authority as part of the second round of cuts.
Continuing to mainstream outreach in our core activities including volunteering and support to community champions and transport for underrepresented groups.	Expanded Young Explorers replaced Hedgehog Club; 60 Community Champions; Targeted transport initiative successful. Health walks maintained.
Moorsbus will operate for the first two years following which it will cease. We will then help specific under-represented groups reach the National Park without a car.	This has been done.
Engaging with every child and around the National Park during their time at school in a most cost effective way.	The education strategy which fulfils this is on target and the service is now generating substantially more income.
Continuing work to optimise income generation from visitor facilities, reviewing the retail offer at our centres and investigating visitor payback (including at car parks.	Previously reported: successful increase in income, though strict visitor payback relatively minor proportion of this.
Completing the Community Access Project and, working with local people, we will deliver new/improved access around 14 more communities.	Projected completed; 20 more communities benefitted.
Competing the Lime and Ice project and the Coastal Alive Project whilst seeking new opportunities and developing the ‘This Exploited Land’ project.	These three items carried out plus substantial CCF and other projects.

10. Strategic Performance Indicators

- 10.1 The Management Plan and subsequently the Business Plan set out how more visitors could be brought to the Park without harming the Park’s special qualities. One indication of the success of the work on raising the profile of the North York Moors - one of the two Strategic Priorities is the increase in visitor numbers shown in STEAM data, nearly 1 million more visitor days from 2011 to 2015, a rise of about 10%. This is attributable to various factors, but the Authority should take a good measure of the credit.

- 10.2 Data for the long term Management Plan target relating to visitor awareness of the National Park is due to be collected this summer as part of the quinquennial cycle. This data will be available by the end of September. Officers will be disappointed if there has not been an increase in these figures.
- 10.3 Data for the long term target relating to regional awareness of the Park and its special qualities, which was due to be collected in 2013 was not. This survey had previously been jointly funded between the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and the North York Moors National Park Authority. The Yorkshire Dales decided they could no longer afford the expense in light of the austerity measures they were taking. Officers believe that this Authority should seriously consider funding this survey on its own at some point in the next Business Plan period. Without comparable data it is impossible to judge whether the undoubtable successful work of gaining publicity for the National Park has had a lasting impact on the public's awareness of the Park's existence.

11. Business and Land Management

- 11.1 The last Business Plan was completed during in the recent prolonged recession and emphasis was put on support for the local economy within National Park purposes. Officers believed that the work on tourism has been an unmitigated success in this regard, increasing enjoyment and understanding of the Park while significantly helping local business and employment. The other two key areas highlighted in the Business Plan were implementation of the Local Development Framework and increasing the area of the Park under agri-environment schemes.
- 11.2 Liberalisation of the planning regime in general and a new emphasis on growth in the National Planning Policy Framework have brought dilemmas. The Authority has maintained a highly efficient planning department and an approval rate of over 90% for planning applications. Approvals have included significant expansions of some of the major hotels in the National Park, significant agricultural buildings, what is potentially the world's largest potash mine as well as numerous minor approvals. Officers believe, overall, and without singling out a particular application or indeed sector, that the scales are likely to have been tipped too far towards growth, at the expense of the National Park's special qualities. Thus many of the economic advantages have been gained but some of the environmental assets potentially degraded.
- 11.3 The record on agri-environment schemes is also mixed. The coverage of the National Park peaked in 2013 at which point the long term indicator of the percentage of the National Park managed in line with National Park purposes was at an all-time maximum. That figure is now declining, due to the difficulties of encouraging land managers to enter the new Countryside Stewardship schemes, which are in an upland context are seen as being complex and poorly rewarding. Some helpful changes in the scheme have been made and it is suggested that one of the main issues for the next Business Plan period is trying to ensure that options more suitable to North York Moors are readily available.
- 11.4 The highlighted actions in this area from the 2012-15 Business Plan were:

<p>Producing and implementing the Promoting the Park Plan, to identify actions to promote the National Park and the wider North York Moors area, developing the Local Distinctiveness Project, and more generally promoting the National Park brand.</p>	<p>This has been done with great vim, the one exception being signage from the National Park to major roads.</p>
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Linked to the above, assisting businesses to develop the local food economy.	Completed with great innovation.
Forums covering land-based, tourism and wider business interest will be held.	The forums have been held though the best manageable format is yet to be discovered.
Developing an agricultural skills project to help businesses deliver more sustainable and efficient production.	Members agreed to remove this project from the work programme following the further cuts in resources.
Encouraging further uptake of agri-environment schemes.	Considerable effort has been put into this, the current decline masks significant success.
Continuing the Authority's apprentice schemes and supporting other apprentice schemes which operate within the Park.	Completed with huge success and national acclaim.
Working with the forestry Commission and private woodland owners to support sustainable timber and wood fuel production.	Done indirectly via PAWS and partners such as YWT. Consultations on FC Forest Design Plans are also relevant here.
Allocating land for employment uses at Whitby Business Park.	Completed.
Supporting appropriate economic development elsewhere in the Park through a pragmatic approach to the application of the LDF.	Done in spades.

12. Communities

12.1 The key activities in the Business Plan have been:

Preparing for local involvement in Neighbourhood Planning.	Preparation done, opportunities publicised, only one Parish interested. This is probably a reflection of general support for the Authority's other Local Plan making work.
Supporting improvements to broadband and mobile phone network services.	The Authority more than fulfilled its side of the bargain. Others didn't.
Supporting sustainable economic development.	Done, see earlier comments.
Support for local community transport projects and reducing the need to travel by private car.	This has received less attention than previously with the loss of the staff concerned and the Moorsbus network. Grant aid to Friends of Moorsbus and spending on the targeted transport scheme has been extremely cost effective in giving communities and schools with the means of reaching the National Park.
Maintaining a positive approach to encouraging appropriate renewable energy technologies.	This has continued but on a reduced scale.
Completion of the Local Development Framework and rebranding as the North York Moors Local Plan, through the adoption of the Helmsley Plan, the Whitby Business Park Action Plan, and the Housing Development Plan.	First two plans are in place, the Housing Development Plan was not done. Instead we did a Housing SPD and made sure lots of affordable houses got built.

Ensuring Policy compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework.	Done.
Maintaining momentum on affordable housing delivery.	This was done and maintained at a level completely different to that being achieved in 2000.
Maintaining an effective and efficient, customer focused Development Management service.	PI's have improved, cost has decreased and public satisfaction is at its highest level.
Implementing locally set planning application fees.	The Government did not proceed with the plan to allow Local Authorities to set their own fees. Other arrangements have allowed the Authority to boost income in the planning sphere.
Assessing major minerals applications for gas and potash.	These have absorbed huge amounts of time and have been handled very professionally.
Improving effective cross boundary working with adjoining district councils under the duty to cooperate.	There is a wide variety of effective cross boundary working.

13. Corporate

13.1 The key activities identified in the 2012-15 Business Plan were:

Maintaining the Customer Excellence Standard.	Maintained with flying colours.
Maintaining high Ethical Standards	Very low number of Member or Officer complaints
Ensuring that External Fundraising Activity is targeted on priority areas as described throughout the plan	Whereas the main target areas have all been the subject of bids some effort has been diverted to lower priority or small bids for money.
People remain at the heart of the Authority's activities and the delivery of the People Management Strategy will be a key focus for the department.	The main measures of morale (sickness absences, staff turnover, and questionnaire feedback) are good.
Developing the Leadership Skills of managers to ensure the optimum effectiveness of the Authority's people.	A major programme was run and significant changes in the way of working have been achieved.
Streamlining processes within the Finance Section and improving the budget support provision.	We have struggled here but it is expected that the 2016 collaboration with the County Council will address both these points.
Developing strong and effective relationships with North Yorkshire County Council and Veritau Ltd as providers of technical accountancy support and Deloitte as the Authority's external auditors.	Completed. Very strong audit reports during the Business Plan period.
Developing effective relationships with Scarborough Borough Council as the providers of legal and Monitoring Officer service.	Completed productively (and saving some money).

Ensuring that IT Systems are resilient and effectively support the Authorities business processes whilst reducing the cost of delivery.	Reliability and cost effectiveness are very good; resilience is improving and we've also managed some ground breaking innovation with the Earthlight/Aurora work.
Ensuring that the Authority's environmental footprint is minimised.	See commentary at the beginning of this paper.
Maintaining high standards in relation to Health and Safety Policies and Practice.	This has been the focus of additional attention over the last 18 months. Overall the Authority's record is very good.
Supporting work to achieve the priorities described throughout the plan.	Done, on reduced resources.
Implementation of the new Committee arrangements.	Completed with huge commitment and patience from the Members.
Performance Management arrangements will be reviewed to meet the needs of the revised National Park Management Plan and Business Plan.	This was continually put off as austerity changed the scope and nature of what we did. Special support in this area now in place.

- 13.2 Members may be aware that one of the other actions that the Business Plan identified was to keep the Standing Orders Scheme of Delegation Financial Regulations and Procurement Procedures up to date and consistent. Whereas some minor changes to these have been made to deal with critical points, Officers are aware that a broader view is overdue. With a significantly reduced resource in the Corporates Services Department there remains an issue as to how to find the time to carry out a full review of these interrelated documents. There will also be a need to update the property review over the next Business Plan period as market conditions and opportunities change. The scope for further shared services between the National Park Authorities is being discussed (again) at a national level. Given the level collaboration of already in existence between this Authority and neighbouring local authorities (eg on finance, legal, etc.) and the simple, low cost systems that the Authority in general operates, Members may wish to consider what priority they wish to attach to the drive for further shared services.

14. **Summary and Conclusion**

- 14.1 Approximately 67% of the key activities have made good or excellent progress, 26% have made some progress and 7% have made no or little progress. A very few items were deleted with Members' agreement and some major areas of work (notably Moorsbus) had been agreed to cease following funding reductions.
- 14.2 This suggests that the overall volume of work expected was not unrealistic, but it certainly pushed the boundaries. There are existing significant extra aspirations for the next Plan period which will require an investment of staff time (most obviously expansion of volunteering, apprenticeship trailblazers and income generation) plus major projects such as TEL. Members have also expressed a keenness for a third Strategic Priority around young people. Extra income generation should be able to resource much of this work if the economy remains reasonably buoyant but it will be essential that all parts of the organisation are functioning in the style agreed by Members, which maximises efficiency and endeavour. This requires continued prioritisation and willingness to adopt new areas of work and modes of working.
- 14.3 This analysis and the look back at the last Plan suggests the following areas need to be considered for the new Plan:

- Deciding what to stop doing (in some areas)
- Turning income aspirations into detailed targets
- Agreeing if we want more shared services
- Defining volunteer targets
- Surveying regional awareness of the NYMNP
- Ensuring options for Countryside Stewardship suit the NYM – and successor schemes exist.
- Strengthening work on wildlife corridors
- Replicating Trennet Bank project
- Agreeing approach to grassland restoration
- Review of Standing Orders, Delegation Scheme, Financial Regs and Procurement Procedures
- Setting environmental performance targets
- Do we want to re-instate the geodiversity work or replace with another theme?

Many other topics and ideas will of course emerge from other sources.

15. Financial and Staffing Implications

15.1 These are partially described in the report but will need close examination in the remainder of the Business plan process.

16. Contribution to National Park Management Plan

16.1 See the existing Business Plan text.

17. Legal Implications

17.1 None directly.

18. Recommendation

18.1 Members: scrutinise the report in the light of their own knowledge of the Business Plan and the Authority's achievements and use this to inform the development of the next Business Plan.

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Background papers to this Report

File ref

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