

# North York Moors National Park Authority

22 March 2021

## Item 8, Local Government Reform in York & North Yorkshire

### 1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To confirm the Authority's position in respect of the consultation on proposals for reform of local government in York and North Yorkshire.

### 2. Introduction

- 2.1 Government has launched a formal consultation on proposals to reform local government in Cumbria, Somerset and York and North Yorkshire. This follows the submission of proposals by principal councils in these areas to move towards unitary government in these areas. The North York Moors National Park Authority has been invited to respond as a named stakeholder.
- 2.2 The outcome of these proposals will have a direct impact on both the governance and local dynamics of our partnership working. Whilst the NPA has taken a formal position on the closely associated proposals for a devolution agreement for the county (confirmation of support whilst retaining efforts to ensure legislation protects the sole planning authority status of the Authority, NPA 14 Dec 2020), we have not, to date, taken a position on this issue.
- 2.3 Full details of the consultation, including consultation document and the proposals concerning York and North Yorkshire can be found at <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/governance-reform-and-democracy/northyorkshire/>

### 3. Background

- 3.1 Government invited proposals in October 2020 from principal local authorities in North Yorkshire, Cumbria & Somerset to move towards a unitary approach to local government in these areas.
- 3.2 Guidance offered to local authorities indicated that proposals should, through a single tier of local government, aim amongst others to:
  - Improve local government and service delivery across the area of the proposal
  - Give greater value for money
  - Provide stronger strategic and local leadership,
  - command a good deal of local support
  - Represent a credible geography consisting of one or more existing local government areas
- 3.3 Two proposals were submitted on 9 December 2020 by:

- A group of six local District Councils in North Yorkshire proposes an East/West split of two unitary authorities ([www.get-change-right.com](http://www.get-change-right.com))
- North Yorkshire County Council and the City of York unitary authority proposes a new unitary authority covering the whole of North Yorkshire alongside the existing York city authority ([www.northyorks.gov.uk/stronger-together](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/stronger-together))

3.4 The consultation on proposals to reform local government in York and North Yorkshire should be seen as distinct from proposals, supported by protagonists of both bids, for a devolution deal for the county. Nonetheless, there is a close relationship in that the achievement of unitary local government is seen by government as a necessary precondition of the devolution deal and combined mayoral authority for the area.

#### 4. Consultation questions and considerations for North York Moors National Park Authority

4.1 The consultation invites respondents to consider 6 questions:

- a. Whether the councils' proposals are likely to improve local government and service delivery.
- b. Where it is proposed that services will be delivered on a different geographic footprint to currently, or through some form of joint arrangements is this likely to improve those services?
- c. Whether the councils' proposals are also likely to impact local public services delivered by others, such as police, fire and rescue, and health services.
- d. Overall support for the proposals from the councils.
- e. Whether the unitary councils proposed represent a credible geography.
- f. Any other comments with regards to the proposed reorganisation of local government in each area.

4.2 Any response from the North York Moors NPA should focus on the impact of proposals on our ability to deliver our statutory purposes. As a result, our position is unlikely to be able to offer an informed view as to whether proposals might improve service delivery and efficiency by local authorities. However, we would have an interest in ensuring that the future arrangements ensured a strong, committed partnership with the future authority/ies.

4.3 Both proposals reference the National Parks in North Yorkshire. The East/West proposal describes National Parks as strategic partners with each lying within one of the two new areas (NYM being situated predominantly within proposed Eastern unitary). It states that the proposal would support the two NPAs' desire for a closer co-operation with local authorities and would seek to protect and enhance [our] functions through the reorganisation and devolution process. The proposal from NYCC/ City of York references the need to continue to work with National Parks, including our role as planning authorities, which would be protected. It sets out the need to change membership arrangements to safeguard the role of National Parks in future arrangements. It also references the opportunity to work with National Park Authorities on climate change.

- 4.4 Overall our recommendation is that the National Park Authority should respond to the consultation. Although there are some uncertainties in both proposals that warrant further exploration with the proponents our overall view is that both proposals can be supported on the basis that they unlock the opportunity of a devolution deal for York and North Yorkshire that this Authority has publicly supported.
- 4.5 Our response provides an opportunity to say what success would look like in a future working relationship with the new single tier of local government. Among the key issues for us are that the new arrangements should:
- Improve strategic relationships.
  - Increase our ability to deliver NP purposes and the profile of the NP brand.
  - Simplify operational aspects of partnership working on the ground (eg in relation to planning, management of rights of way).

## 5. Proposed response

- 5.1 Our response should reflect the following key points:
- 5.2 We support the proposals for local government reform in York and North Yorkshire. Our support is based largely on the premise that reform will help to unlock the benefits of a proposed devolution deal for the County that this Authority strongly supports. We have experience of working with a unitary authority in Redcar and Cleveland Council and so both proposals could be managed within the context of a National Park whose boundaries cover more than one authority area.
- 5.3 Partnership working between National Park Authorities and local authorities is critical to the delivery of our National Park purposes. We would expect to be seen as a strong strategic partner for the new authority/ies when they are established. The key attributes of a successful partnership would be:
- a. Working with us on developing and delivering the National Park Management Plan and vision for the North York Moors, particularly in regard to those aspects which fall within the statutory local authority role such as economic development, transport infrastructure and housing authority responsibility.
  - b. Commitment to furthering National Park purposes by ensuring significant decision making by the unitary authority/ies within the National Park area has regard to the impact on the first/second purpose and economic and social duty of NPAs.
  - c. Working positively with the planning role of the NPA through the duty to cooperate (or its replacement) to ensure that housing needs are met outside the designated area (where landscape constraints require) and that there is a consistent approach to recognising sensitivity of the setting of the National Park and its appropriate protection through planning policy.

- d. Working with National Park Authorities in relation to the development and delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies in North Yorkshire recognising that the environment is unconstrained by administrative boundaries.
- e. Recognising the national importance of the North York Moors National Park in terms of its environmental significance and contribution to health and well-being of the nation and to help us in promoting the North York Moors brand at a regional and national level.
- f. A commitment to meeting the objectives of the YNY Devolution proposal working with the NPA to deliver environmental aspects such as carbon reduction programmes within the National Park area.
- g. An appetite for future shared working of mutual benefit.

5.4 We would wish to see important strategic initiatives which the NPA is part of maintained or built upon such as the LGYNY&ER Strategic Housing Partnership & existing local nature partnerships.

5.5 Membership arrangements would need to be addressed to ensure a balance between local authority, Parish and Secretary of State members on the National Park Authority Board. Local authorities should seek to ensure that appointed members have a connection to the North York Moors and are committed to furthering the purposes of the National Park

5.6 Any new authority/ies and the NPA should seek to maintain a mutually supportive public sector relationship in which we may achieve best value for public expenditure by buying into expertise to provide services that are costly or less viable to secure in house.

## 6. Financial and staffing implications

6.1 There are no financial or staffing implications.

## 7. Contribution to National Park Management Plan

7.1 Local authorities play a significant role in supporting the delivery of National Park purposes and in co-creating and owning delivery of the Management Plan.

## 8. Legal and sustainability implications

8.1 None.

## 9. Recommendation

9.1 That Members support the proposed approach and lines of consultation response offered above. That Members delegate the finalising and submission of the response to the Chief Executive Officer.

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Background documents to this report

1. Written Ministerial Statement on local government reform 22/2/21