

# North York Moors National Park Authority Scrutiny Meeting

30 July 2018

## Rights of Way Programme Review

**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To report back to Members on the findings of a review of the Authority's Rights of Way (RoW) Programme.

**2. Introduction**

- 2.2 Each year, in line with the Authority's performance framework, officers have committed to completing 'Performance and Learning reviews' as part of the review of progress on the Authority's Business Plan.
- 2.3 At the Authority meeting in December 2017 members agreed to focus on the Authority's RoW programme for this first review with findings presented at the annual Scrutiny meeting

**3. For Consideration**

- 3.1 The attached report makes an assessment of the current effectiveness and value for money of the RoW (RoW) programme. It looks at whether the programme is achieving its objectives, and considers key issues for the future.

**4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 Members are asked to review the contents of the attached report.

**5. Financial and Staffing Implications**

- 5.1 None.

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

- 6.1 The Authority's RoW work directly contributes to the aims of the National Park Management Plan

**7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 None arising directly from this report.

**8. Recommendation**

- 8.1 That Members review and comment on the attached report

Contact Officers:  
Debbie Trafford, Head of Recreation and Ranger Services  
Jo Swiers, Performance Officer  
Tel No. 01439 772700

## Performance and Learning Review of the Authority's RoW Programme

### The Issues

#### What are the specific issues that the review has been set up to consider?

1. The review was set up to look at the performance of the Authority's RoW Programme – in particular since the programme experienced a reduction in resources in 2014.
2. The aim is to:
  - Take a snapshot of how the programme is currently being delivered,
  - Assess whether the programme is meeting its targets
  - Consider how the programme can best be delivered in the future

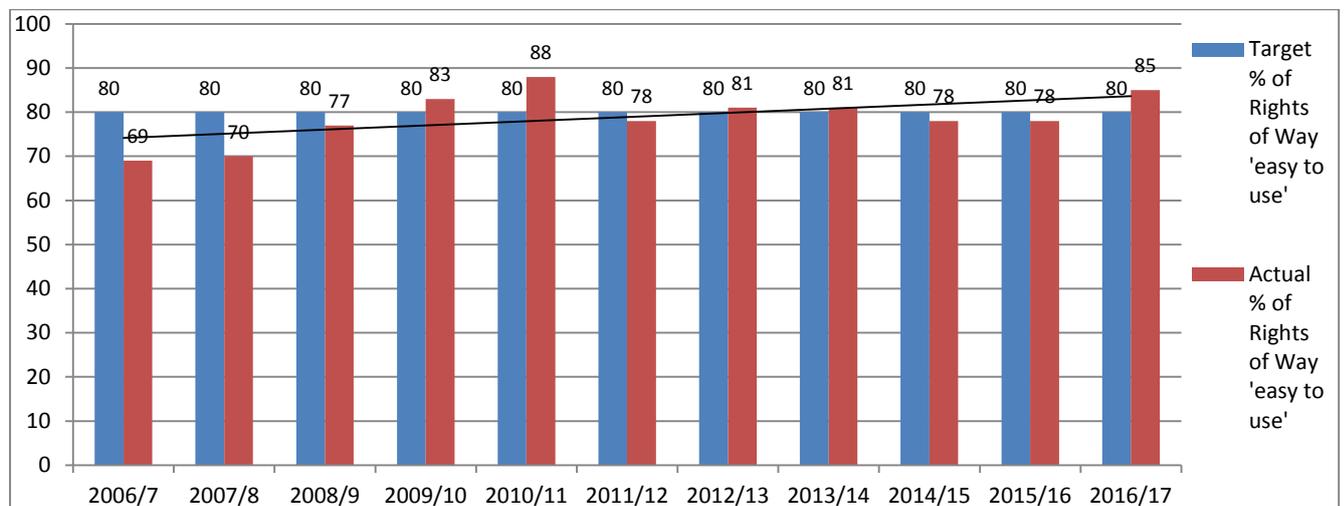
#### Why do the Issues matter?

3. The Authority's RoW work is its single biggest area of investment in direct delivery 'on the ground.' The programme covers 2,200km of public RoW and in surveys features as the top priority of both residents and visitors to the National Park. In the 2016 Visitors Survey, 86% of visitors stated that they were visiting the National Park to go for a walk.
4. The NPA does not have a statutory responsibility to deliver RoW maintenance; this lies with North Yorkshire County Council and Redcar and Cleveland Council. However, the importance of a well maintained RoW network in contributing to National Park purposes is well recognised and the Authority has committed significant resources over the years to providing a network that meets the needs of visitors and residents.

### Current Performance

#### How is the service currently being delivered?

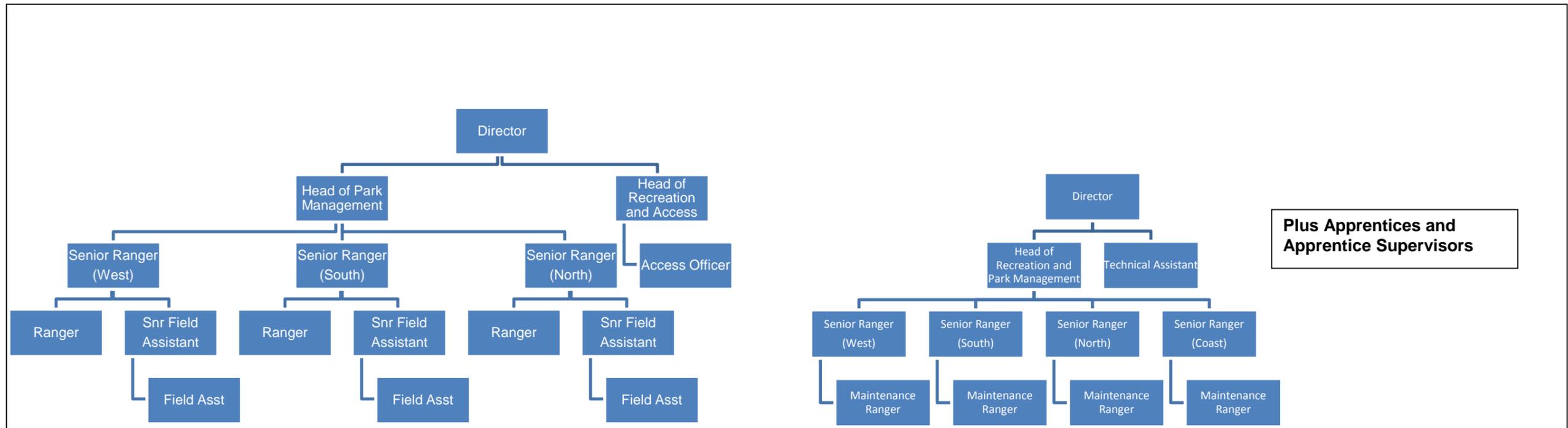
5. For 50 years the National Park has worked hard to improve the quality of the public RoW network. It is a hugely complex task managing a 2200km network with 13,000 individual structures such as gates, bridges and stiles
6. Between 2006 and 2016 the Authority delivered a steady increase in the quality of RoW in the National Park. The graph below illustrates:



*NB the 85% figure for 2016/17 was an average taken from two BVPI surveys carried out that year (in May and November). The last figure recorded (in November 2016) was 80% and the next surveys are due to take place later this year.*

7. In 2015, in the face of reduced resources, the Authority resolved to focus on maintaining current standards, consolidating the improvements that have been achieved and continuing to offer the public a good quality of RoW network.
8. In response to the DEFRA grant reduction, in 2014/15, very significant changes were made to the numbers of paid staff delivering RoW work, which saw the team reduced by 7 full time equivalents. The changes were as follows;
  - An increase in the number of Ranger areas from 3 to 4 with a similar increase in the number of Senior Ranger posts;
  - 3 Ranger posts made redundant;
  - 8 Field staff posts made redundant and replaced with 4 Maintenance Ranger posts;
  - Technical Public RoW Officer post made redundant;
  - Maintenance Rangers to receive additional 'people' support from teams of volunteers who would develop their practical skills. This change was in line with the Volunteer Strategy;
  - The Maintenance Ranger job role revised. In replacing field staff they were given more responsibility and freedom to plan their own work
9. Must explain increase in effort from apps and vols led to no reduction in resource compared with noughties. The aim was to minimise the impact of the changes on public enjoyment with a move away from maintaining the whole network to a clear focus on the most used part of the network. The reductions in ranger staff were mitigated by the 'boots on the ground' of increased apprentice and volunteer numbers. These increases mean that the numbers working on RoW are comparable to the levels in 2000.
10. It was estimated in 2015 that by focussing on the 60% of current work which relates to the most popular routes and those most important to local communities, around 90% of use would be unaffected.
11. There are now 24.2 Full Time Equivalent staff currently spending approximately 70% of their time working on the RoW Programme. This includes 12 full time apprentices, 2 Apprentice Supervisors, four Maintenance Rangers, and four Senior Ranger posts whose duties extend well beyond RoW work. This means that 14% of the 124 FTE posts within the Authority are committed to RoW work.
12. In January 2018, selected Level 3 apprentices formally became Apprentice Rangers. They work as part of the area ranger teams, developing their skills in RoW maintenance, communications, partnership working, customer service and management.
13. In addition it's estimated that volunteers provide approximately 300 volunteer days per month of input to the RoW programme, every month throughout the year i.e. a total of 3,600 volunteer days annually. One of the most valuable volunteer assets is the established groups, such as the Hobs and the Coasties. See Annex A for case study – Volunteer Groups.
14. These changes and their impact on the roles and responsibilities of rangers are summarised on the next page.

Figure 1: Prior (left) and current staffing arrangements (right)



## Is The Programme Meeting Its Targets?

What are we *supposed* to be achieving (i.e. what are our current objectives, targets, standards etc.)?

15. The Authority's Business plan sets out two key objectives related to RoW in the National Park:

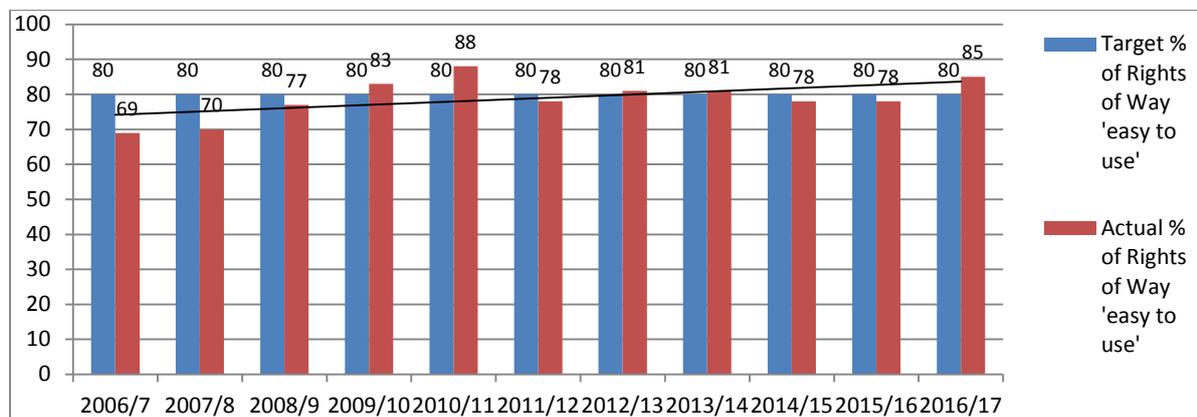
- **U2.** Manage, maintain and improve public RoW and other priority access routes in the National Park. **Targets:** 80% of public RoW easy to use; At least 90% user satisfaction with RW.
- **U3.** Improve the accessibility to landscapes of the National Park. **Targets:** Cleveland Way is stile-free by end of Business Plan period; Additional 5km of RoW network each year accessible for disabled people.

**Note – performance against the targets associated with Business Plan objective U3 is being addressed separately by NPA officers and the Authority will be updated separately at a later date about this very important area.**

16. In addition, the RoW Programme facilitates a number of other key objectives in the Business Plan. From increasing the number of volunteer days offered to supporting local businesses and delivering excellent customer service, the quality of the National Park's RoW influences the achievement of a wide range of Authority objectives.

## What are we *actually* achieving?

17. In relation to objective U2 above, for the past five years the RoW 'ease of use' survey results have been around the 80% mark. Despite the reduction in programme resources in 2014, to date the standard of the ease of use results has been maintained.



18. In relation to satisfaction, in the 2017 RoW user survey, 99% of users rated their visit as 'Enjoyable or Very Enjoyable'.

19. It is notable that the ease of use survey results steadily increased from 2006/7, reaching a peak of 88% in 2010/11. Since then, results have remained steady at or just below 80%. The 2016/7 result of 85% looks to be an anomaly. The BVPI ease of use survey is based on random selection of routes within the National Park, and is conducted for the NPA by local Rambler group volunteers.

20. The programme is currently meeting its targets. The 2016/7 BVPI score should be viewed as an unexpectedly high score. The five years to 2023 are expected to see the BVPI ease of use score, based on the current assessment system, declining from 80% to high 70%. It is important to note that in 2014 Members and Directors agreed in principle that RoW work should prioritise the most popular paths. However because BVPI measures performance against ease of use on a random selection of paths, the principle of prioritisation was not formally adopted. This report will recommend that this performance indicator is amended in order to measure performance against our stated priorities.

### How much is it costing?

21. The table below provides a summary of costs associated with the programme.

Overview:

	<b>Budget excluding staff costs</b>	<b>Staff costs</b>	<b>BVPI score (ease of use survey)</b>
<b>2014/15</b>	£190,000	£643,000	80%
<b>2015/16</b>	£246,000	£656,000	80%
<b>2016/17</b>	£263,000	£657,000	85%
<b>2017/18</b>	£199,000	£650,000	
<b>2018/19</b>	£203,000	£681,000	

22. . In summary, the budgets associated with RoW management also deliver general access management, capital works on car parks and toilets, Voluntary Rangers, tools, equipment, H&S and vehicles. These budgets have been steadily reduced over the past five years – and the Ranger Service has often closed the Financial Year with underspend. Previous years' austerity has caused an accumulation of works that are required on RoW, toilets, car parks and premises, all affecting the RoW budget in future years. A future £20k/year will be committed to the RoW budgets from 19/20 and this will be spent on improving promoted routes.

23. Voluntary Rangers a low cost resource; the budget for travel claims is regularly significantly underspent. VRs have suggested that if the NPA were claiming back VAT on their claims, they would be more inclined to submit the claim because it would benefit us. This budget has been combined with the main volunteer travel budget so that claims can be processed more efficiently by one team.

### Evaluation

#### How do our current costs and performance compare to other bodies providing the same type of service?

24. Every year all the English National Park Authorities share their data on RoW ease of use – the table below sets out these results for the last six years. (What these figures don't show is the level of priority attached to RoW work in each of the National Parks and related levels of resources attached to programmes. This varies widely between Authorities too). Unfortunately the figures are no longer validated.

		2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Mean
1	Peak District	93%	91%	90%	89%	89%	92%	91
2	Exmoor	95%	82%	86%	90%	93%	96%	90
3	Yorkshire Dales	89%	87%	90%	93%	88%	88%	89
4	Dartmoor	95%	94%	93%	85%	83%	79%	88
5	South Downs	Not applicable	N/A	Not collected	0%	87%	88%	88
<b>6</b>	<b>North York Moors</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>80</b>
7	Lake District	74%	78%	80%	78%	77%	73%	77
8	Broads	Not available	87%	72%	75%	75%	78%	77
9	Northumberland	74%	66%	70%	71%	80%	93%	76
10	New Forest	Not applicable	N/A	Not collected	77%	62%	60%	66

25. A comparison of costs and resources spent on RoW work between NPAs (as you might expect) is not straightforward and it's difficult to compare between Parks. Rather than trying to make direct comparisons a few observations are made here:

26. The role of volunteers in RoW work varies widely – some authorities ask volunteers only to carry out RoW surveys; whereas others task volunteers with practical work. Taking a look across four National Parks similar in size to the North York Moors, the North York Moors employs the largest number of volunteer days on practical work.

27. Funding of RoW work also varies – some Authorities still receive a small amount of finance from their County Councils, but most don't. Partnership working is key; allowing organisations with similar objectives to share resources. See Annex A – case study in Partnership Working.

28. An increased focus on securing external funding for RoW work also features for some National Parks, both for specific projects and particularly iconic routes (such as the Yorkshire Dales 3 Peaks, which funds its own ranger for example). The Yorkshire Dales place an expectation on all of their staff, including rangers, to seek funding opportunities at every level, as part of their projects skills and personal development. This creative approach is part of the organisational culture.

**Are the current objectives realistic given the current priority and resourcing levels of the programme?**

29. While the ease of use figures have remained stable over the past few years, it is clear from the level of resource available and the workloads which the rangers are managing that our mean BVPI target of maintaining the entire RoW network at 80% is not maintainable. This should be addressed by formalising our priorities and accurately

measuring our performance against those priorities. This report is considered timely as it gives early warning to the Authority that long term changes need to be identified to protect the standards of our RoW network.

30. Ways of working on the RoW Programme have changed hugely in the past few years. Staff spend an increasing amount of time setting up tasks and supporting volunteers and apprentices to deliver work on the ground and, while this works well, the level of delivery has reached a peak. See coast study at Annex A – Coast to Coast walk.
31. At the same time the lifespan of longer term investment into bridges, boardwalks and other larger maintenance projects is reaching its end in a lot of cases and a longer term well prioritised plan is needed to address these larger proactive pieces of work. For example, the Riverside Walk at the Moors Centre has an Easy Access boardwalk which is around 15 years old. It is in clear need of replacement, and many other structures around the National Park are in a similar condition.
32. It is also relevant to note that H&S has moved on greatly in recent years, and in many cases bridge building will require scaffolding structures to ensure the safety of our staff and volunteers when working at height. This additional requirement is likely to increase the cost of a bridge substantially.
33. Staff have worked hard to develop the skills and support of a dedicated and hardworking volunteer team, but the capacity of staff to RoW this further is limited – with appropriate and interesting tasks not always on hand for volunteers to engage with.
34. It must be taken into account that while the role of a Ranger is naturally busy, and also highly rewarding, our Rangers are currently managing extremely high workloads and often feel overwhelmed by the amount that they need to do. It's important to be mindful of the impact that such a workload has on personal mental health, job satisfaction and home life.
35. The current Business Plan targets for adding an extra 5km of accessible route to the network and making the Cleveland Way 'stile free' are not currently on track to be met.

### **How can the programme best be delivered in the future?**

36. Completion of this review has provided a timely opportunity for staff and volunteers to feed in their ideas on how the RoW programme can be better delivered in the future.

### **Recommendations**

1	Protected Landscapes review	Provide feedback to the current DEFRA led protected landscapes review on the issue of NPA's statutory responsibilities and funding for the delivery of RoW maintenance after discussion with relevant local authorities, potentially recommending that statutory responsibility for maintenance of RoW is transferred from higher tier councils to NPAs where applicable, along with proportionate funding.
2	Prioritisation of RoW maintenance	Formalise the intention to identify the most popular routes using a percentage split (i.e. 20/80). Focus resources on maintaining the most popular routes to a high standard. Adopt a secondary prioritisation system to assist rangers in allocating resources to the issues on the least popular routes – for instance any dangerous reports will still need to be resolved immediately. Publish prioritisation system.

3	Performance indicators	Adjust BVPI ease of use system to select two separate samples. Set a target of 80-85% for the most popular routes. Accept a target of 65-70% for the less popular routes.
4	Performance indicators	Routinely link our performance against PIs to actual spend in that area, to demonstrate cost effectiveness of budget allocation.
5	Easy Access routes	Easy Access routes to be considered priority routes for maintenance. Decide on approach to BP target of 5km additional access, supported by realistic funding.
6	Regular RoW reporting	Establish a stronger connection between Ranger Service, directors and Members. Regular 6 monthly reports on RoW to the Directors, and an annual report to the Authority.
7	Community and volunteer support	Develop path adoption schemes enabling community and volunteer groups to take on low level, routine maintenance of less popular paths which are still considered important community links.
8	Framework agreements	Continue work which has been starting making use of NYCC support to establish framework agreement to make savings on our highest spend areas.
9	Car Parks	Conduct a strategic review of car park income generation. Identify opportunities to enhance revenue from this area and calculate level of investment required. Establish requirement for dedicated role to manage this asset proactively.
10	Income generation	Incentivise and empower ranger staff to identify low level funding opportunities for their projects – cRoWdfunding, corporate sponsorship, targeted donations <i>where this can be shown to be adding to resource after staff time is fully taken into account</i> . When staff see the money they generate directly funding the projects they are working on, they can be much more incentivised and solution focused.
11	Infrastructure	Centralise details of all RoW infrastructure which has a shelf life, schedule likely replacement date and identify funding gaps.
12	Ranger workload	Review data on Ranger time-use and prioritise in line with B Plan and this review; seek project or self-funded staff; for instance a RoW officer who could charge a fee for processing PPOs for the public or a ranger who works with corporate groups for a daily fee. Review duty ranger requirement and weekend working commitments
13	Volunteers	Work closely with the volunteer team to connect with groups of people who are suited to the physically challenging tasks; offer challenges for local gyms and running groups. Keep volunteers engaged with a varying programme of volunteer tasks.

## Future Action

### 37. Recommended action plan and timetable.

1	Protected Landscapes review	Provide feedback to the current DEFRA led protected landscapes review on the issue of NPA's statutory responsibilities and funding for the delivery of RoW maintenance.	Within timing of review
2	Prioritisation of RoW maintenance	Routes to be agreed by Rangers and Information staff.	Oct 2018
3	Performance indicators	New BVPI selection system adopted for November 2018 survey.	Nov 2018
4	Performance indicators	PIs reporting to include the most recent financial data.	End of year and half year FRASC reports

5	Easy Access routes	Identify funding shortfalls in maintenance of current routes;; assess cost of existing target; add this item to list of external funding priorities. Officers to review BP target of 5km additional access in light of prioritisation exercise; report back to Authority and DAG.	By Mar 2019  Sep 2018
6	Regular RoW reporting	Head of Recreation and Ranger Services to commence reporting regime from Jan 2019	Jan 2019
7	Community and volunteer support	Using Cleveland Way adoption scheme model, identify priority areas and begin trial (one per ranger area). Review, and if appropriate extend accordingly.	Mar 2019  Sep 2019
8	Framework agreements	Head of Recreation and Ranger Services to work with NYCC team to identify opportunities for savings and efficiencies, and implement with their support.	By Mar 2019
9	Car Parks	Conduct strategic review	By Mar 2019
10	Income generation	Identify projects suitable for trialling new income generation approaches. If successful, establish a model and encourage ranger staff to explore opportunities. Maintain balance and proportionality – it should not increase workloads or lead to additional projects being undertaken.  Training to ensure all income generation efforts are aligned with NYMNP values.  External funding bids across the organisation should prioritise those where Ranger time can be fully counted as match or fundable.	Immediate
11	Infrastructure	Ranger Service to undertake project and present deficiencies to MT.	Jan 2019
12	Ranger workload	Seek creative methods of increasing our staffing resource. Conduct weekend working review	By Mar 2019  Sept 2018
13	Volunteers	Review the numbers and types of tasks that are most difficult to resource; and source suggestions about how we could find groups/individuals who would be most suited to those tasks. Consider implications (insurance) of 'challenge' tasks; research any other organisations who have done something similar.	Sept 2018

### Future Funding/Resource Implications

38. The existing ranger team is delivering a high value product over several different fields of work. The limit to which it can be stretched to cover external funding projects and volunteer support has been reached unless significantly lower RoW performance results than those shown in 3 above are accepted, which is not recommended. Further prioritisation is needed to keep workloads manageable at current staffing levels. This report recognises that any additional funding must be self generated and has set out possible opportunities for doing so –charging for corporate volunteer groups; innovative funding for small discrete projects; project funded ranger staff; self funding staff. In

addition it is corporately important to manage car parks better and more strategically; Within that, we must be mindful of protecting our values and our image. All efforts to generate income must be in accordance with our values so that the public perception of the North York Moors National Park as a friendly face and a public benefit is not damaged. Additionally, it must not impact adversely on staff workloads.

39. The review of the BP target attached to U3 must take into account the increased expense associated with maintaining Easy Access routes to the necessary standard and make recommendations accordingly.

## **Annex A to RoW Programme Review**

### **Ranger Case Studies**

#### **1. Partnership Working: Sheepwash, Osmotherley**

This case study refers to a working group which was successful in addressing anti social behaviour at a honey pot location. It does not refer directly to PROW, but the lessons which can be drawn demonstrate that effective and creative partnership working can be highly effective when focused on a problem area or issue.

Around 20 years ago a working group was convened to address the increase in anti-social behaviour and associated public safety at the honey pot location known locally as Sheepwash (the area around Cod Beck Reservoir and Scarth Wood Moor between Osmotherley and Swainby). Over the years the group has involved significant contribution from Yorkshire Water and the National Trust as the primary landowners, North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, North Yorkshire County Council Highways, Hambleton District Council, Osmotherley Parish Council, Whorlton Parish Council, Cote Ghyll Caravan Park and the North York Moors National Park Ranger Service. The informal gathering has worked as a Problem Solving Group in line with government initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour through the turn of the millennium and has evolved into an Action Group as major anti-social behaviour initiatives have started to show results through effective partnership working. Initially the initiative was chaired by North Yorkshire Police and has passed to the North York Moors National Park Ranger Service for the last 10 years.

Initially the focus of the group related to anti-social behaviour associated with illegal camping and parking issues that caused disruption to the free flow of traffic, service busses and emergency services. Sheepwash is uniquely a rural location, now, with a Designated Public Place order that allows the Police to remove alcohol from people participating in anti-social behaviour, this has been a successful initiative in dissuading people from camping (they like their alcohol more than they like camping). The National Park Ranger Service has been key in attracting Police resources to join in joint patrols in specifically tackling this issue. Inconsiderate parking has been partially tackled through the National Trust formalising their car parks and North Yorkshire County Council Highways introducing a Clearway Order to stop parking on the highway and associated verges. Dangers of swimming in reservoirs has been a key public safety topic following two drownings in Cod Beck Reservoir in the space of 18 months a number of years ago. Initially the National Trust employed a local resident as a Warden for the locality but as funding became constrained for them Yorkshire Water stepped in to match the funding if terms of employment could be agreed upon, it was clearly uneconomic for the Warden to become self-employed so the North York Moors National Park Authority has taken on the employment of the Sheepwash Joint Ranger through a Yorkshire Water grant annually for the last 11 years. With the various initiatives having positive effects on the environment a group of local dog walkers have now volunteered as Wardens for the National Trust to carry out twice daily litter picks to keep on top of the background accumulation of litter.

Similarly, as Yorkshire Water have seen the improvements through the partnership working, they have improved access around Cod Beck Reservoir by improving the permissive paths available to the public. Initially these paths were only connected via stepping stones so this caused issues for people with limited physical abilities of with push chairs and mobility scooters who were under the misapprehension that the improved route was circular. To resolve this issue in 2017 the North Yorkshire County Councillor for the Ward gained grant funding from North Yorkshire County Council and North York Moors National Park to build a connecting bridge. The National Park Ranger Service managed the design and planning

process and the bridge was constructed over the winter of 2017/2018 almost single handed by the National Park Maintenance Ranger for the area with some support from National Park Apprentices and a little bit of voluntary assistance. The bridge has been greatly received by visitors and Yorkshire Water are currently (July 2018) removing the last obstacles to the route being a single level easy access trail, by removing two flights of steps and replacing them with an engineered slopes.

Simon Bassindale, West area Senior Ranger

## **2. Established Volunteer Groups**

Volunteer groups are a major part of the volunteering offer in the National Park. Aside from Voluntary Rangers (which has been established for many decades) the volunteer groups are the longest established volunteering opportunities available with the HOBS group (2001) and the Heritage Coast Volunteers (Coasties 2005) being the longest established.

Both these groups carry out a weekly task, HOBS Tuesday and Coasties Wednesday, and do this for the entire year. Cancellations are few and usually due to very bad weather or other operational difficulties and never because the volunteer numbers have not been adequate. This level of commitment and the longevity of these groups is a testament to the effectiveness of organising volunteer in this way.

A key part of their effectiveness is having good task organisers and leaders and a consistency in the task leaders. Experience has proven that staff lead tasks are the most effective.

### **What are the plus sides of group working?**

- A regular committed volunteer workforce who volunteer in sufficient numbers to allow tasks to go ahead regardless of job type or weather.
- A group that form friendships and commit to each other and the group thereby strengthening the commitment to the task and the National Park
- Relatively easy for task leaders to organise and administer
- Knowledge that task leaders can rely on enough volunteer each week to carry out a task – the job will get done
- Individuals within the group learn the necessary skills to carry out the tasks asked of them and after a short period of time have all the skills necessary
- All the volunteers are familiar with the necessary health and safety requirement of the task, notwithstanding they are reminded at every task
- Communication between the group and the National Park and within the group individuals is effective

### **Possible negative side of group working and measures to mitigate against this.**

- Group can become closed and cliques form
- If closed the group has no means of replacing members when they leave it will eventually become less effective and ultimately cease.
- Members age together and can become less able to carry out the required task

The simple way to avoid the above negative side of group working is to be positive about recruitment to the group. This doesn't mean new members are needed all the time but that there is an understanding from within the group and the group organisers that new volunteers are needed to maintain and sustain the group into the future - active recruitment at the appropriate time.

## **Conclusion**

Groups managed correctly, with appropriate levels of recruitment are consistency of task leaders are able to carry out regular tasks with little by way of administration.

They develop and maintain a high skill level for the task.

They work very well together and understand and work to each other's strengths.

They form very strong bonds with each other and the task leaders to the benefit to the of the National Park (getting the task done).

They are very visible and active ambassadors for the National Park.

Bernie McLinden, Coast area Senior Ranger

## **3. Coast to Coast Walk – Littlebeck, a S106 Project**

### **The project**

In May 2017 several access projects were awarded funds as part of the 106 agreement with Sirius Minerals. One of which was to improve access in Sneaton Forest and along Wainwrights Coast to Coast walk.

Confirmation of 106 funds and project allocation came part way into the financial year when work programmes and appraisal objectives had been set. The 106 project proposals and cost estimates were over 3 years old and needed to be revised. The Ranger adjusted the annual work programme for the North Ranger Team and appraisal objectives were reviewed to accommodate the 106 project. Some ranger led projects were abandoned in 2017.

The Ranger provided revised and fully costed proposals, some of which were subject to landowner agreement. The Ranger attended a Local Access Forum meeting to consult members and took them on a walk along the proposed route. Local Access Forum members were very supportive of the proposals.

### **Landowners**

The Ranger consulted landowners, parish councils and communities and several meetings took place to agree work, access, car parking etc. Some landowners were more agreeable to the proposals to enhance access within the wood, than others. Two proposals were sadly abandoned as the Forestry Commission were not willing to grant permission for access improvements/ provision.

### **A project of two halves...**

It was clear that the project would need to be delivered in two parts. One half of the woodland was accessible with machinery and lent itself well to employing contractors to construct tracks and install drainage. The Ranger produced the specifications and plans and undertook training on the My Tenders portal on which the projects were advertised. The Ranger organised two site visits with 11 interested contractors. The project received a range of offers and the lowest bid came from a company not previously known to the Authority and the offer was significantly lower than others. The Ranger talked this through with the company, followed up references and visited some recent work under taken by the company. Satisfied that the company could deliver the work to a satisfactory standard, the Ranger appointed the contractors. The Ranger managed the health and safety aspects, attended pre-commencement meetings and visited several times during delivery. The tracks and drainage system were installed to a high standard and received a great many compliments from users enjoying the improved access.

The other half of the woodland had limited access and all materials needed to be transported on foot. This part of the project involved replacement of lots of structures including boardwalks, steps and bridges and some surfacing and drainage work. The terrain, difficult access and type of work involved would have made it difficult to find a contractor willing to undertake the work and costs would have certainly exceeded the budget. The Ranger decided to deliver this part of the project with volunteers. It was clear that this would be one of the biggest and longest tasks that had been undertaken by volunteers in the national park. New specifications were drawn up taking in to account the longevity of structures, the integrity of materials and solutions for non-slip surfaces. Materials were ordered/delivered in stages as storage space was limited and transported to site to coincide with big group tasks. The ordering, transport and movement of materials presented a major logistical challenge.

## **Recruitment of Volunteers**

Volunteer task dates ran from September to May, 1-2 days per week. Each task needed a trained task leader. The two Area Rangers needed assistance in leading these volunteer tasks in addition to managing other aspects of the project and a heavy work load across the wider area. The Rangers organised a familiarisation day and asked the Volunteer Task Leaders if they would like to be involved in delivery of the project. Four Volunteer Task Leaders signed up to help and attended a training day with the Rangers. The Ranger advertised the volunteer task dates on My Volunteer Page, by email to partner organisations and to corporate groups.

A considerable amount of time was spent on recruiting and organising volunteers and corporate groups, transport, parking, risk assessing and training. Over 100 hundred volunteers were involved in the project, most volunteers returned more than once and some attended many tasks, keen to see it through to completion. Rangers and volunteers were joined by Wildlife Trust staff and volunteers, staff from TSYS, Sirius Minerals and Junior Soldiers. On a few occasions no volunteers signed up, leaving Rangers to work alone and some tasks were cancelled due to extremely poor travel or site conditions.

## **Challenges**

Access to site was on foot only; all materials had to be carried in. Rangers, Volunteers and Apprentices made over 800 trips through the wood to carry in timber, tools and stone. Over 40 tonne of stone was carried up to a mile in buckets and wheelbarrows. Over 400 pieces of timber (including heavy beams) were carried over a mile in to the wood.

In the early months, site conditions were good and the weather was warm and dry. As time went on, rangers and volunteers worked through storms, snow and extremely wet and cold conditions. Early winter nights shortened the working day. It became difficult to keep things dry or to dry out tools, PPE for the next task. Regularly working in deep mud and water meant that volunteer's personal clothing and belongings were damaged, degraded and still wet on return to task. This raised the question of provision of work wear for regular volunteers.

Tools were working hard, in damp conditions and started to break. Materials didn't turn up as requested and ranger had to think in their feet to reorganise groups and tasks. Late orders had to be moved to site with fewer people available than originally planned.

Mid way through the project and the evening before a large task with the Junior Soldiers the Ranger's trailer was stolen from the compound, it contained all of the wheelbarrows and spades. The Ranger had to come up with a useful task for 40 soldiers with 1 hours' notice. Volunteers became tired and fed up tediously carrying buckets filled with stone up and down slopes and multiple flights of steps. Rangers installed stone chutes made from drainage

pipes to take stone down the slopes, negating the need for multiple trips up and down. The volunteers welcomed this idea and enjoyed operating the chutes and the team work this entailed

### **Publicity and Promotion**

The Ranger has provided 2 talks to interested groups, led 2 guided walks and written a small piece for the Esk Valley News and parish council.

### **Conclusion**

The walk is much improved with good quality well-built surfaces and structures. The work has received a great many compliments from users. The volunteers feel very proud of their work and many have returned with family and friends. The Rangers have moved on to the next job.

Naomi Green, North Area Senior Ranger