

North York Moors National Park Authority Scrutiny Meeting

Public Minutes of the meeting held at The Old Vicarage, Helmsley on 11 July 2016.

Present:

Leslie Atkinson, Jim Bailey, Malcolm Bowes, Ena Dent, Alison Fisher, David Jeffels, Christopher Massey, Sarah Oswald, Caroline Patmore, Clive Pearson, John Ritchie, Ted Sanderson, Andrew Scott, Jeremy Walker.

Apologies:

Guy Coulson, David Hugill, Janet Frank

Officers in Attendance:

Richard Gunton (Director of Park Services), Chris France (Director of Planning), David Renwick (Director of Conservation), Irene Brannon (Director of Corporate Services), Ian Nicholls (Assistant Director of Corporate Services), Graham Stubbs (Head of Volunteer Service), Sue Wilkinson (Education Manager), Jo Swiers (Performance Consultant), Vanessa Burgess (Committees & Customer Services Officer).

01/16 Minutes

Resolved:

That the public minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2015, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Action: Vanessa Burgess to send draft minutes to members as soon as available

02/16 Members Interests

Members were reminded of their responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interests relating to any agenda item prior to its consideration.

Note: After seeking agreement from the Chair, to a change in the agenda running order, Item 6 of the agenda was considered before Item 5

03/16 Scrutiny of Business Plans 2012-15 and 2015/16 (Agenda Item 6)

Considered:

The report of the Chief Executive and the Performance Consultant.

Ian Nicholls, Assistant Director of Corporate Services, summarised the paper, informing members that the discussions at Scrutiny and the planned August Evening Seminar would help inform discussion for the next business plan. A copy of the presentation can be found in the minute book.

Initial discussions followed:

- Scrutiny – important to clearly define outcomes

- Consider performance since last business plan
- Good NP settlement, but how will BREXIT affect things in the future
- If NP Trust successful – how will monies be spent?
- Continue brand development
- Priorities around working with young people, health, education
- Greater/improved partnership working in relation to PRow work

Richard Gunton reminded members that the PRow work was the statutory responsibility of NYCC and that the NYMNP received no funding in support of the work the NP did in relation to PRow work. Community volunteers and the Volunteers service were working to keep RoW open. Andy Wilson had had some initial discussion with the Clinical Commissioning Group

Action: Richard Gunton to follow this up and speak to the CCG.

Members agreed that scrutiny was an important matter and asked for a brief Director input on each of their areas of work as guidance on successes, failures and work they considered important to carry forward. Members commented further on:

- Environment/Conservation – stalled/challenges, impact, benefits of taking forward
- Elements of Understanding and Enjoyment, where has NP been really strong
- Benefits of reviewing Standing Orders
- PI's, can be useful, but not necessarily an indicator of spending money in the right way

Irene Brannon, Director of Corporate Services, updated members on:

Customer Service Excellence, remained strong despite reduced resources, this good work should continue as part of the next business plan as should the good work in relation to strengthening/improving H&S. Work had already taken place in relation to Standing Orders; some additional minor work was needed in relation to financial workings/Irene Brannon's working arrangements. It was considered to be a good time for a light touch review.

The Chair of the Authority, Jim Bailey queried the current complaints procedure, saying that the Authority seemed to spend a lot of time processing complaints, particularly in relation to planning decisions.

Irene Brannon advised that the Authority did deliver on a faster time scale, than expected by the LGO and that the Authority had received good guidance from the Information Commissioner in the handling of vexatious complaints. Ian Nicholls said that a balanced approach was needed, resolving issues at source whenever it was sensible to do so, but recognising that this was not always desirable.

Chris France, Director of Planning informed members that many of the complaints received were planning related, but some were using the complaints system as a "3rd party right of appeal" challenging the planning merits of the decision rather than any procedural, behavioural or service related failing. This results in the Authority incurring costs in relation to staff time/effort investigating, particularly as some complaints involved historical planning decisions. Chris considered that the complaints process needed a review to ensure it delivered a proportionate response in this respect.

Action: Officers to review complaints/compliments procedure/processes

Members asked David Renwick, Director of Conservation, to update them on the work undertaken by the Conservation team and specifically the challenges in relation to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme:

David informed members that the Authority needed to be mindful of the implications future large project work could have on staff resources. Over the last BP period there had been some big challenges, including developing large projects such as TEL and contributing comments and input to the Potash application. This had been demanding of departmental resources. These also had to be balanced against a continued cultural change within the department and a need to deliver new and different grant schemes, as well as ongoing statutory work all with fewer resources. Despite these challenges performance in some areas was still disappointing, whilst progress in other areas was positive – securing TEL was a standout achievement. The national Countryside Stewardship Scheme has been disappointing, the new scheme was making it difficult for farmers to pull together decent applications, some changes had been made, but it was too early to say if these had helped. Position now compounded by BREXIT.

Action: Officers to note - Members requested considerable focus be placed on Conservation at the August Evening seminar.

Richard Gunton, Director of Park Services, updated members on work undertaken by the Park Services department:

The department had done well, under very difficult circumstances. Changes in culture such as income generation, increased working with volunteers, delegation etc. had had a positive impact on delivery. There had been success in adapting to cuts in service, within the Education dept. and more recently in establishing new ways of working in Ranger and Field Services Work on tourism had been transformed and the Authority's relationship with tourism businesses was stronger. Website and social media use had been a focus of communications and was delivering increasingly good results. There is still some work to be done around all parties understanding of key tourism brands. The impact of reductions in resources for public rights of way would start to be revealed by a user survey to be issued later in the year. Areas where we might have hoped to see more progress included engagement with Public Health, delivery of the Volunteer Strategy and outreach to nearby urban communities. The Director informed members that the areas the department might consider taking forward to the next business plan included: profile (especially signage) and tourism (secure EARDF funds for partnership development), volunteers strategy, PRoW work, Education and young people engagement, work relating to Apprenticeships.

Members commented on:

- Confused tourism message,
- Vital to encourage the Authority to pursue CCG, with regard the health issues
- Tourism Partnership model needs to operate better, members to support

Chris France, updated members on business plan themes relating to Planning:

The department had undergone massive changes relating to funding, culture and planning systems over the last four-five years. The team had coped very well and met the challenges of reductions in staffing and re-structuring whilst maintaining good PIs and customer care. Areas of work for future consideration included:

- Pressure on department – gas extraction work
- Potash – potential changes to the approved scheme and funding

- Continued planning deregulation – resulting in challenges, less control and potential erosion of special qualities from less regulated development
- Minerals Plan, Local Plan – mechanisms to cope with workload challenges
- Challenge the changes to the planning system through the Local Plan to ensure local issues have local policies and NP protection is not eroded
- Broadband/Mobile – challenges re: delivering services to our local communities
- Raising our profile – Devolution agenda

Members shared concerns regarding Teesside devolution deal

Action: Chris France to contact Northumberland NP Chief Officer, regarding devolution issues.

The Chair introduced Jo Swiers, Performance Consultant who would be working with the Authority over the coming months, assisting with PI work and the new Business Plan.

Resolved: Members: scrutinised the report in the light of their own knowledge of the Business Plan and the Authority's achievements and informed Officers of relevant issues/areas for consideration which were to be taken into account when developing the next Business Plan as indicated above.

04/16 **Draft SWOT Analysis (Paper Circulated – Agenda Item 5)**

Jo Swiers, Performance Consultant, updated members on the recent staff workshops which had taken place, then asked for members comments on the SWOT analysis, a copy of which can be found in the minute book.

Members commented on the following:

- Weaknesses – brand, signage, coastal marine presence. Opportunities to take a lead on Tourism, confused message at present.
- Confused position on devolution
- Opportunities – Cultural engagement, design role, securing grants

Sarah Oswald left the meeting at midday

- Weakness – Broadband/Mobile connection
- Changing demographics – include Young Families

Jeremy Walker left the meeting at 12.10pm

Caroline Patmore, Christopher Massey left the meeting at 12.20pm

05/16 **Brief look at what should we stop doing - Verbal**

Jo Swiers, Performance Consultant, showed members a slide of suggestions from Staff regarding items we could stop doing. A copy of the slide can be found in the minute book. Jo reminded members that the Authority may need to create some capacity to undertake important work areas. Members commented that the better than expected DEFRA grant, improved income generation etc. had resulted in more resources being available, so they were not considering stopping any significant areas of work.

John Ritchie, member suggested a hierarchy of priorities be established. Ian Nicholls confirmed that this would be discussed as part of the members evening seminar in August.

06/16 Discussion - Ideas for the New Plan

Ted Sanderson, member, suggested the Authority consider creating a land-based visitor attraction to encourage more families into the NP. The Chair said it was important for the Authority to try to influence policy makers where ever possible, especially post BREXIT.

07/16 Engagement of Young People

Considered:

The report of the Director of Park Services.

Richard Gunton, Director of Park Services introduced his report then asked Sue Wilkinson, Education Manager, to update members on the work of the Education Department informing them that the Education Strategy provided clear target areas including, which schools and how best to engage with them based on a 1-3 priority system, plus an additional priority 4 which covered the rest of the Country. Sue informed members of the Authority's need to work in other ways (such as volunteering) and with other agencies, not just schools/education, especially when seeking to engage with teenagers.

Members views were as follows:

- Pleased to hear about approach being used by the Education team
- Encourage more work with schools, young people in deprived areas
- Scope/opportunity re: teenagers and volunteering in support of their broader education
- Models of good practice we could learn from

Sue Wilkinson informed members that the Education service had allocated money for transport, so schools from deprived areas could travel to Danby and make use of the resource. Sue spoke to members about schemes already in operation such as the National Citizenship Service, Duke of Edinburgh and the John Muir Scheme. Sue also told members about a successful youth fishing club.

Graham Stubbs, Head of Volunteer Service, talked about the idea of a Young Persons Committee, to engage with young people and find out about things they would like to do in relation to visiting the NP.

Members commented that educational objectives were important in relation to young people valuing the NP and helping them understand that they can make a difference. One member suggested looking at how the Young Farmers network is promoted to young people, with a view to promoting the NP in the same way.

<p>Resolved: Members gave their views regarding potential areas for expanding the Authority's engagement with young people, as indicated in the bullet points above</p>
--

Andrew Scott, Malcolm Bowes left the meeting at 12.50pm

08/16 Staff/Member Training and Development

Considered:

The report of the Assistant Director of Corporate Services.

Members commented that it was important to continue to spend money on staff training and that member training was also important. They felt that, on occasion, more informal member training sessions, which didn't impact to a great degree on Officers time, would be appropriate. Members particularly highlighted Standards for Planning, Housing and Building Regulations as possible future topics for training along with understanding more about the working of a Shooting Estate.

Resolved: Members noted the contents of the report, commented on Section 3 with regard to staff training and gave their views as requested in Paragraph 4.3 with regard to their own training needs as indicated above.

..... (Chair)
15 September 2016