

7. CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT (PM)

1. Purpose of the report

To up-date members of key items since the previous Authority meeting

2. Recommendation:

1. For Members to note the report

3. Key Items

National and regional issues

A visit to the Peak District is being organised for Toby Perkins, Labour shadow for Nature & Rural Affairs. We are planning on taking Toby to see rural housing issues, farming issues and visitor economy issues. This visit should have taken place by the time of the Authority meeting so a verbal update will be given.

Defra's £2.5m of extra Access funding is being discussed with the hope of delivering a second round of Generation Green. The focus will be a 'night under the stars' (as per the Glover Review recommendations) rather than supporting young people doing day visits.

Work is ongoing to try and secure £500k of additional capital funding from Defra for next year. It is hoped this will be added to our core grant and become the future baseline for further grant agreements.

Funding has been confirmed, via Active Travel England, for £100k for us to work on walking and cycling strategies locally.

Nature North held their annual conference recently in Newcastle, which I attended. Nature North is a partnership designed to develop largescale investable propositions such as the Great North Bog and the Northern Forest.

I recently attended a Natural England strategy session with the Board and Executive of Natural England. The emphasis was on nature and placemaking. It is accepted that English devolution is gathering momentum and it is not yet clear how nature recovery will be delivered in a more devolved setting. It is recognised that we will need to push nature recovery by starting with the best/most appropriate sites and spreading out from there. It needs to be more widely accepted that recovering nature may make places look 'messy' and that there are conflicting environmental outcomes that will have to be addressed, such as the use of land for more appropriately placed solar versus more woodland creation or greater public access to green spaces. The lack of quality green spaces in urban areas was discussed, which does drive more visits to our National Park, given the number who live in urban areas in close proximity who do not have local alternatives for accessing quality greenspaces on their doorstep. The danger of Natural England and other players falling into process/strategy mode was discussed whilst the need to make progress before we know what perfect looks like is paramount. Also discussed was the balance between supporting fewer major interventions at scale verses the significant local impact smaller projects can have.

The Campaign for National Parks (CNP) has undertaken a health check on English and Welsh National Parks. The focus has been on the state of nature and the natural environment in National Parks. The report recognises National Parks were designated in a very different era, that there is a lack of resources for our work and that we have limited ability to control what happens on private land. CNP will be making a number of recommendations.

The Chair and myself hosted a visit by Matt Relf, independent Mayoral candidate for the new East Midlands Combined Authority. Offers to meet other candidates have also been made. I will be attending a hustings for all the candidates at Cromford Mill and we have sent all of them a policy briefing note on our National Park, which will be the new region's only protected landscape and a significant area for residents across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire to gain access to quality green space for health, wellbeing, stimulation and enjoyment.

The February MP and local leaders' newsletter has been sent out, all Members should have seen this. All EMCA Mayoral candidates are now also receiving this ahead of the election.

National Park Management Plan (NPMP)

The new duty to further the aims of National Parks is still awaiting guidance from Defra. The Campaign for National Parks (CNP) has taken legal advice on what this might mean but this has not yet been shared beyond CNP. National Parks England is continuing to work with the National Landscapes Association on influencing what might be in the guidance.

By the time of the Authority meeting there will have been a meeting of the NPMP Delivery Group. This meeting will build on the identification of challenges and factors affecting overall delivery that partners identified at the first meeting and move towards identifying solutions to address these. There will also be an update on the Chatsworth Whole Estate Plan and the National Trust's vision for their High Peak estate.

For the Authority Plan, each Service now has its own annual plan for the year ahead. These will be discussed with Members at the Forum after the Authority meeting.

Some points to note under each of our four aims in the NPMP:

Climate Change

Moors for the Future Partnership is undertaking extensive restoration works this season. I visited Snailsden Moor with Hannah Turner, Head of Assets and Enterprise, Chris Dean, Moors for the Future Partnership Manager and Chris Pembroke, Senior Conservation Works Officer who has planned and organised this restoration. This is an area of deep peat blanket bog that has been degraded by air pollution from the industrial revolution. Restoration works of £1.2m have been funded by Defra's 'Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme'. Along with similar work on Twizle Head the works have involved:

- 34km of reprofiling of steep eroding peat gully sides
- Spreading 3,600 bags of heather brash and planting native cotton grass and crowberry
- Building 2,000 stone dams in eroding gullies
- Constructing 600 timber dams
- Creating 3,000 peat dams to block gullies and help re-wet the peat
- 10ha of bunding
- Sphagnum planting across 530 ha (over 700,000 sphagnum plugs)

The experience and skill of our staff to organise such complex works in challenging and dynamic environments is very impressive as is the nature of the partnership working involved. The site is owned by Yorkshire Water with a shooting tenant. We also met the local gamekeeper to discuss his work in predator control and moorland management.

Nature Recovery

Defra funding of £523k has been secured for the purchase of Boarsgrove adjacent to our

Warslow Estate and the deal has been completed. Excellent team working by many colleagues allowed us to take advantage of this restrictive and short notice funding opportunity. We are now mobilising contractors and purchasing materials that will be used to undertake a variety of enhancements to improve water quality and increase biodiversity.

Morrige Hill Country Landscape Recovery project is progressing well through the enrolment period. Various queries from Defra have been worked through and additional overhead costs for new staff have been accepted. In early February an initial meeting was held with the farmers and land managers who had agreed to work with the Authority during the development phase. This meeting was well supported and whilst there were some concerns about the balance between nature recovery, addressing climate change and food production all attendees were keen to be part of the project and explore opportunities for landscape recovery supported by private as well as public funding. It is hoped that a contract will be offered by the end of March.

Our Landscape Recovery bid for the White Peak was unsuccessful but we are looking at ways we can maintain momentum and develop the concept further ahead of a revised application, which Defra are keen to see.

I recently helped convene a meeting of environmental NGOs to review opportunities for greater collaboration and increasing our shared ambitions around woodland creation, nature-friendly farming, managing visitor pressure, reducing wildfire risk and achieving more inclusive access to nature. This was intended to be a retreat but the planned accommodation was not available so the retreat will be attempted again later in the year.

A small new project is being developed to improve the habitat in our grounds at Aldern House. The 'Aldern House Biosphere' project will involve enhancements and creation of new habitats, areas for food growing and it will involve volunteers (including staff volunteering) and existing partner groups helping transform the space where we work with a view to both promoting the health and wellbeing of those volunteering and showcasing what can be achieved to help restore nature. A grant from the Foundation is being sought to help support this work and PPCV will also start using the project to run certain volunteering tasks. Our Bakewell Engagement Ranger will be seeking new and renewed links with local groups in Bakewell to also involve them.

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) budget 2023/24 has now been fully allocated and £1.1m of the £2.4m available for 24/25 has also been allocated so that spending can take place at the beginning of the new financial year. As this is the last year of FiPL funding available it is important money gets allocated and spent early. The February Local Assessment Panel supported 16 projects, the highest number at any panel, approving just over £400k. An additional 15 projects under £10k each have been approved without the need for a panel decision since the start of 2024, totalling £100k. Significantly:

- Two-thirds of those entering agreements are new to FiPL
- Our first permissive bridleways have been supported through FiPL
- A project with Whirlow Hall farm on the edge of Sheffield has been supported, giving disadvantaged people access into the countryside
- Support has been given to ten farmers managing SSSIs

Welcoming Place

I attended the Local Access Forum recently where the case for dogs always being on leads was made very passionately by a local farmer who often experiences distressing stock worrying. A growing issue of professional dog walkers using the National Park was raised. The provision of 'dog runs' at a number of visitor attractions is being explored. Our own seasonal comms around dogs on leads is about to pick up and we now have

new dedicated online information on such responsible behaviours. The issue of whether there should be any designated BBQ places was also discussed. Our message is always don't BBQ but by providing designated areas there may be a benefit in not displacing BBQ use to higher/more risky areas. The issue of access to water within the National Park was also raised. Our upcoming work with the National Trust (and others) around a 'recreation hub' approach in the Dovedale area should allow a number of these issues to be explored and different management options/trails considered.

The consultants reviewing our Visitor and Cycle Hire Centres are still in the evidence gathering stage so there is nothing further yet to report to Members. I have held a catch-up meeting with the Foundation's donor who is supporting this work.

The issue of tourism pressure and sustainability is one that the Authority needs to further develop. Anecdotal accounts suggest visitor numbers are increasing. The Forum after the Authority meeting will be discussing these issues and considering our developing position and a statement on the subject.

We have secured funding from the Foundation to grow Ambassador Schools and expand our health and wellbeing work in the southern areas of the National Park. This will enable us to reach new communities to connect people of all ages to the health and wellbeing benefits and learning about the National Park's special qualities.

Thriving Communities

Our planning team is continuing to grow and go from strength to strength. The recent restructure is complete in that we have now imbedded enforcement within the area teams. A number of key appointments have been made and we are waiting for new colleagues to start in post. We are continuing to make good progress in reducing the number of enforcement cases we have on the books, which has been helped by the introduction of a new online enforcement reporting form. This ensures all vital information is captured in one place and saves Officer time which can then be focused on investigating cases. We are continuing to monitor and address a number of high-profile enforcement cases.

Following our joint letter with other local authorities to Homes England about the additional costs of house building in National Parks, a meeting has been organised with Homes England to discuss the matter.

We recently held another Peak Park Summit with the Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner. Attendance at the summit is growing with an expanding number of related organisations joining all the regional police forces. The sharing of information on current crime issues and joint approach to addressing some of these issues is very valuable. Some of our most significant crime issues continue to be off-road motorbiking, stock worrying, targeting of rural properties and machinery theft. We play a key role in coordinating communications among partners. The forum is also valuable as a way of addressing antisocial behaviour generally and specifically behaviour which can increase the risk of wild fires. There will be another Summit in six months' time.

I have started my CEO Roadshows with the first one being held in Castleton. This was a very successful event, as covered in the recent MP's newsletter. I now have a programme of similar events every month for the next year where I will be visiting all corners of the National Park.

Resource issues

Our new finance system is now bedding in well. With Members approving the budget at the last Authority meeting, the team is now focusing on closing the financial year.

Staffing update

Pioneering conversations are currently taking place for all staff, where annual objectives are set. This year we have a shared corporate objective for every member of staff to take part in a National Park volunteering activity. This will not only deliver valuable work that might otherwise not be prioritised but it will also demonstrate that volunteering can be done in many different ways and it will result in enjoyable teambuilding activities where colleagues work alongside each other delivering our objectives in different ways.

Recruitment is currently underway for our new Head of Resources. Indications so far are that there is an exceptional level of interest in this role. We have recently been able to appoint a new Finance Manager, who will have started in post by the time of the Authority meeting. The same is true for a new accountant who will be joining us and the new Authority Solicitor. There has also been a real turnaround in appointments into the planning team and some long-standing challenges in appointing into Assets and Enterprise are also being overcome. Our new structure, salary scales, softer incentives and a positive change in culture are all contributing to this improvement.

The National Park Training Academy has now been launched with our first new apprentice already in post in the Customer and Democratic Support Team. There has been strong interest in two other trainee roles in the Landscape and Engagement Service, where we received over 190 applications.

At the end of February I was honoured to attend the 'leaving do' of one of our volunteers, Derek Pay. Derek has patrolled, litter-picked, maintained and engaged for us since 1978. A number of the regular volunteers based at Fairholmes (Upper Derwent Valley) were gathered to say farewell to Derek with one of them calculating that those gathered had done 286 years of volunteering for us. Such longevity and commitment are testament to the benefits and enjoyment volunteers get by 'working' with us. We do however need to recruit more volunteers from a wider range of backgrounds who can undertake a more diverse set of roles. Dave Cramp, our Volunteer Manager is currently working on a volunteer development plan with the working vision of us having an empowered and diverse community of volunteers actively helping deliver all aspects of the work of the Peak District National Park.

Recent external meetings

Since my last report I have continued to meet with stakeholders, partners and organisations based in and around the National Park Authority. A number of such meetings have been covered above but they also include:

- Visit to the Moorland Discovery Centre at Longshaw where we jointly run a schools engagement programme with the National Trust
- Partnership Meeting Staffordshire Moorlands and High Peak – Andrew Stokes, CEO, Leaders Anthony McKeown and Mike Gledhill
- English National Parks Officer Group Meeting
- Natural England, Victoria Manton
- Visit Peak District & Derbyshire, Jo Dilley
- RSPB Raptor Group

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

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7th March 2024