

7. CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT (PM)

1. Purpose

To up-date Members of key items since the previous Authority meeting and to give an update on corporate risks.

2. Context

For this CEO report I am going to focus on giving an update on national issues.

As part of National Parks England (NPE) we have access to senior Defra officials and through NPE we have ongoing dialogue with government. From our discussions the messaging we are getting is that government is looking for National Parks to be greener, wilder and more accessible. We know that government is focused on accessibility but this means more than physical access, there is also a concern for socio-economic access and there may be a Green Paper on access to nature coming in the near future.

There is also talk of a new land use framework, which is something that would be helpful.

There is clear talk of addressing National Park governance to make it more representative and efficient. In reality this is likely to mean looking at the size of National Park boards and possibly addressing diversity. Messages have been sent back to government that whilst many boards are large and not very diverse, it is not governance issues that really hold National Parks back from delivering more, it is the poor funding settlement we have. That said, it is sensible for us to be thinking about ways in which we could get on the front foot and try to influence any potential governance changes that may be initiated by government. There is a planned Member Forum discussion on this coming up.

There has been slow progress with the guidance on the new duty to further the purposes of National Parks. It is now expected that guidance will be out before Christmas. There are also positive noises about the potential for extending the power of competence that National Parks have, which would help enable more creative income generation. The government are looking at what levers can be used to help get more non-government funding into National Parks.

It is now clear we are going to get a one year funding settlement, following the budget. The departmental budget will be confirmed after the budget and then Defra will go into a business planning phase, at the end of which we should know our grant for April 2025 to March 2026. We are, however, only likely to find out what this annual grant will be in March or even April of next year. Immediately after the budget the Treasury will start working on the comprehensive spending review for agreeing a three-year settlement from 2026 onwards. The messages we are hearing are that effort is going in to protecting what we have rather than getting any increase. This is disappointing if not worrying but it does reflect the state of finances across government. NPE effort is now going into trying to get the best possible one-year settlement as a good settlement is both needed for the year ahead and because whatever that settlement is, it is likely to form the basis of the following three-year settlement.

Government is looking for multiple benefits from spending, which is something we know National Parks deliver. NPE are therefore making the case to government around five 'missions' that tie in with the Labour Party missions that have been widely used. NPE are making a case for a positive funding settlement based around the role National Parks play in the following missions:

- Climate resilience and adaptation
- Nature recovery

- Diving sustainable economic growth
- Access to nature
- Health, wellbeing and future generations

Various National Park CEOs are leading on building each of these cases. I am leading on the climate mission and will work with the officer group that covers climate and energy. There is a need for haste in this work so we are expecting to develop just a core message and vision for each mission.

Aside from the above focus on national engagement to get the best possible funding deal for National Parks, there has also been national engagement between National Park CEOs and CEOs/leaders of the main land holding national environmental NGOs. This work resulted in a joint letter being sent to the Secretary of State from NPE and these major NGOs. This has landed well with government as officials are pleased to see there is joint working and a single voice. It has also helped with building relations with these NGOs and getting them to accept the important role National Parks play in nature recovery. This should help avoid a repeat of some of the less helpful comments made by some of these NGOs around implicating National Park Authorities in the poor state of nature within National Parks. At a local level we have just convened a similar retreat for the regional leaders of environmental NGOs which was very successful in relationship building and identifying core issues to work together on.

Natural England recently held a parliamentary reception to celebrate the 75th anniversary of National Park legislation which I attended. This was an excellent networking opportunity and there were very clear messages by Steve Reed, Marian Spain and Tony Juniper about the important role National Parks play.

Finally, it is worth noting the National Parks UK bi-annual conference has now taken place. The focus of this conference was landscapes for everyone. It was an inspiring, if at times challenging, event where there were clear calls for National Parks to do more for diverse audiences and be more inclusive in their staffing and governance. The insights and learnings from this conference have helped inform the paper that Members will be discussing about governance at the Member Forum.

Below is a list of some of the meetings attended recently:

- Moors for the Future Green Financing in the Uplands Conference
- Jo Dilly, Managing Director of Peak District & Derbyshire
- CEO Roadshow at Bradfield (met with Olivia Blake MP)
- Changing Places opening at Millers Dale
- Stephen Vickers, CEO The Devonshire Group
- English National Park Officer Group (ENPOG) Meeting
- UK National Parks Conference, Newcastle
- Hosted Defra's visit to the Peak District
- Chatsworth Strategic Planning Meeting
- John Whitby MP
- National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Landscape Connections working group meeting
- CEO Roadshow in Kettleshulme
- Chris Henning – Executive Director of PLACE, Derbyshire County Council
- Environmental NGO Retreat at Longshaw
- ENPOG & NPE Board meetings in person London
- Natural England Parliamentary Reception, London
- CEO Roadshow, Holme

3. Proposals

3.1 None

4. Recommendations

1. For Members to note the report

5. Corporate Implications

a. Legal
None

b. Financial
None

c. National Park Management Plan and Authority Plan
None

d. Risk Management
None

e. Net Zero
None

6. Background papers (not previously published)

None.

7. Appendices

None.

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

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