

7. CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

1. Purpose

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

2. Context

2.1 Defra grant situation – the position on our future one and three year grant settlements has not changed since the last Authority meeting: we are still waiting to hear what our settlements will be and we have still not been given a date when we will hear by. Our understanding is that Defra now has its total allocation agreed but is doing internal business planning to allocate to different areas within the department. Our understanding is that final decisions have not yet been made so there is still time to try and influence the outcome. However, the mood music is that the fiscal position is very tight and we can expect cuts across the department. National Parks England is working hard on our behalf to try and get the best possible settlement. Individual National Parks are also undertaking activity to try and promote our cause to Minister and officials. We have written to all our local MPs to ask for their support in efforts to influence our funding position. We are also expecting confirmation on the future of Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL). The staffing roles for FiPL have already been extended and we are waiting to hear whether there will be any project funds to distribute next year.

2.2 Secretary of State and Ministerial visit – before Christmas we hosted a visit by SoS Steve Reed and Nature Minister Mary Creagh. This was a Protected Landscapes Partnership visit with the Peak District hosting on behalf of National Parks England, National Landscapes, National Trails and Natural England. The visit was short but did allow for engagement with the Ministerial team and the case around funding to be presented.

2.3 Defra national announcements – following the above Ministerial visit, Defra launched guidance on the new duty to further the purposes of National Park Management Plans. This announcement was tied in to marking the 75th anniversary of the legislation that created National Parks. Clarification and developments have also been coming forward around the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF), in particular how targets are going to be calculated and what the targets might be for each individual National Park.

2.4 Defra annual review meeting – on 22nd January the annual review meeting took place with Defra officials to present an update on our spending, activity and outcomes for the current financial year. This was an opportunity to highlight some of our achievements and to present officials with an assessment of some of the risks and opportunities we face. The meeting included our asks of government to help with the delivery of the National Park Management Plan and key government targets. These asks included:

- Core grant uplift to meet our higher National Insurance contributions

- Extra capital to create revenue generation

- Additional funding to cover unfunded statutory requirements

- Provide power and resources for climate smart conservation objectives

- Make Protected Landscapes the sole Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) conveners for their areas and give powers to create bespoke ELM options relevant to the place

- Acknowledge increase in negative visitor/user behaviour and increase funding to mitigate harm to wildlife, environment and local communities

- Additional funding for major development control projects

- Strategic land use framework

- 2.5 Restructure – consultations have taken place on cost saving proposals. Notwithstanding this consultation, Pioneer conversations have been going ahead to set objectives for the year ahead. Our Investors In People survey received a 62% response and we will be undertaking our renewal assessment in April. We are trying to maintain positive engagement with staff through activities such as our ongoing corporate volunteering days and ‘show and tell’ presentations at our weekly team tea breaks. We have put thought and resources into how we can care for and support our people during this difficult process.
- 2.6 Nature recovery work – we are continuing engagement as a ‘supporting authority’ to six Local Nature Recovery Strategies covering the National Park. There are still issues to work through around the most effective process for nature enhancements using BNG funding. Our Landscape Recovery Project, Morridge Hill Country, is progressing well in its set up phase. The project focuses a cluster of farms and land holdings in the South West Peak where we hope to demonstrate novel private finance options, increasing the sustainability of farm businesses, and the use of AI to record land type/use and open up natural capital funding options. Eight further land owners and managers are wishing to be included in the project which is a testament to the project team.
- 2.7 Asset improvement work – tree safety work on our trails has been taking place this winter and is going well, all ahead of schedule and with no incidents. Plans for the repair and redevelopment of Cruck Barn (on our North Lees estate) are progressing internally with temporary propping of the barn and external weather proofing to be installed until permanent repairs are agreed. Moors for the Future Partnership is awaiting the outcome of the Ofwat AMP8 asset investment decision process with significant funding for restoration expected. In the meantime, the team is progressing existing work, including planting over 200,000 sphagnum plugs in the last two months.
- 2.8 Planning news – the team has been delivering excellent performance with decisions being made within eight weeks now averaging 85% over the two-year assessment period. The Policy and Community team is currently working through 2,743 comments from the Issues and Options consultation. They are also commissioning further evidence to refine topics such as housing need, development viability and rural economy, to ensure a robust approach moving forward. Our active travel work has involved workshops with highways authorities, land owners and the Local Access Forum. We are now preparing a High-Level Network Plan for Active Travel, ready for public consultation in the next few weeks. The enforcement team are now imbedded within the development management area teams, which is proving an effective way to monitor and progress cases. The trend of reducing our backlog of enforcement cases is continuing. A handful of high-profile enforcement cases are being carefully considered and appropriate action is being taken. The cultural heritage team has just delivered another successful Derbyshire Archeology Day which showcases a selection of projects from across the county and cultural heritage volunteering continues to expand. The team is also awaiting news of two funding bids that would see a further expansion in this area.
- 2.9 Resources team – we have received over 250 applications for our new legal apprentice role which means we will be able to grow our specialists legal officer taking someone from A levels through to a qualified solicitor. Congratulations to the finance team for achieving an unqualified external audit opinion for 2023-24. The strategy team are currently analysing the results of the 2024-25 visitor survey along with data from mobile phones, Strava and counters on our trails. They have also been successful in getting funding for a PhD role to help develop our AI mapping. The team are working with Natural England, Sheffield University and across our services to understand climate change adaptation for the National Park.

2.10 Local engagement

- 2.10.1 EMCCA Biodiversity Taskforce – by the time of the Authority meeting I will have attended the first gathering of the new EMCCA Biodiversity Taskforce. Membership of the group has a number of wildlife and nature experts and it is important this sector knowledge is complemented by an understanding of the role the National Park can play in nature recovery.
- 2.10.2 Peak Park Summit and Derbyshire Rural Crime Partnership – by the time of the Authority meeting the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Derbyshire will have held the Rural Crime Partnership meeting at Chatsworth that I will be attending with colleagues. Clare Ward, the EMCCA Mayor will also be attending. We will have also delivered the next Peak Park Summit jointly with the PCC, which is where we bring together stakeholders looking at crime and safety issues across the National Park.
- 2.10.3 Moorland nature recovery retreat – in December the Authority convened a high-level retreat for moorland owners, managers, regulators and environmental/nature organisations. The retreat was successful in building trust and relationships and managed to agree a number of high-level outcomes that everyone wants to see on our moorlands. There remains disagreement about some of the methods to achieve these outcomes but the group committed to continue meeting and undertake a programme of visits to each other's sites to gain better understanding over different methods and to be informed by best practice.
- 2.10.4 Farm visit – before Christmas I undertook an NFU organised visit to a local White Peak farm to meet a range of farmers who were gathered together. I was very impressed by the extent to which the farming I saw was informed by complex science monitoring and assessments. Challenges of diversification and visitor pressure on farmed areas were also discussed.
- 2.10.5 Cressbrook bridge opening – it was a pleasure to attend the opening of a replacement footbridge in Cressbrook in December. The project exemplified partnership working, the benefit of having a team of experienced, core funded, staff and the way in which the Authority can use its conveying powers and access to funding to leverage wider funding for projects. The Foundation was also instrumental in seeing this project delivered. Press coverage of the opening has previously been made available to Members.
- 2.10.6 Landscape Connections NLHF bid – work is progressing with key partners on the development of a bid (up to £10m) to undertake nature enhancements along and between our trails network in the White Peak. The Authority is funding initial development work to unlock much greater funding over a longer period of time, with the outcomes being nature rich green corridors connected across an area of intensive agricultural land with the secondary benefit of some heritage restoration and opportunity to engage new diverse audiences.
- 2.10.7 Magpie Mine – I recently visited the Peak District Mines Historical Society to look at a recent FiPL funded restoration at the site and meet with Duncan Wilson, the CEO of Historic England.
- 2.10.8 BBC Countryfile – Members have previously been made aware of December's BBC Countryfile from the Peak District. The coverage was very positive about the National Park but also touched on wider funding issues for protected landscapes.
- 2.10.9 75th anniversary celebrations – in December we held a small event to mark the 75th anniversary of the legislation that created National Parks. The event

brought together members of the Silkin family whose great grandfather, Lewis Silkin, was the Minister that drove the creation of National Parks, with trainees from our National Park Training Academy. Work will shortly be starting to plan for the 75th anniversary of the creation of the country's first National Park, in the Peak District, in April 2026.

3. Proposals

3.1 None

4. Recommendations

4.1 For Members to note the report

5. Corporate Implications

5.1 Legal – none

5.2 Financial – the report highlights the importance of the impending government decision on our future grant. Significant financial implications for the Authority will result if the settlement is not as positive as our forecasting assumes.

5.3 National Park Management Plan and Authority Plan – the report covers work that is helping deliver the NPMP and indicates efforts to secure additional resources for further delivery. The report notes the current restructure which will require a review of our ability to deliver some aspects of the NPMP.

5.4 Risk Management – a number of financial risks are noted in the report. There are also potential reputational risks if some of what is reported above transpires.

5.5 Net Zero – no major net zero implications from the report.

6. Background papers (not previously published)

None

7. Appendices

None

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

Phil Mulligan, CEO, Publication Date, 30 January 2025

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