

7. CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

Purpose

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

1. Context

- 1.1** This is a short CEO report due to a significant amount of time having been spent recently on funding and budget matters.
- 1.2** Potential cuts to Defra core grants for English National Parks and associated budgeting implications have dominated in the last few weeks. The scale of indicative funding cuts for the year ahead across all English National Parks has been shared with us. The budget presented for Member approval includes assumptions made about the scale of cuts we are likely to receive. There is an offer of increased capital for the year ahead, as a one-off. This is very welcome but does not replace the need for revenue or help much with mitigating the effects of a revenue decrease. Our team is currently reviewing plans for how we could spend additional capital in the year ahead in the most effective and revenue-relieving ways.
- 1.3** Confirmation has been received of a further year of Farming in Protected Landscapes funding, which is most welcome. The overall allocation for the Peak District has been established (once again the highest allocation to any protected landscape) which will mean we can continue offering farmers and land managers vital support to help deliver our shared goals for nature, climate, heritage and people.
- 1.4** Whilst we work out how to manage with a decreased budget for the year ahead we also await the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which is due to be concluded in April. This will inform what our next three-year grant settlement will be. We are not expected to hear how Defra's award gets allocated internally until the autumn. As such, we are currently planning to await news for our longer-term settlement before taking any significant measures to bring our medium-term financial forecast into an overall balanced position.
- 1.5** A new Defra Deputy Director with responsibility for National Parks has been appointed, Gabriella Edwards, and introductory calls have been established with English National Parks. Given the scale of cuts being made within Defra we are all grateful that this post has been continued. Defra are also trying to arrange a round-table meeting with Minister Creagh to discuss a range of matters.
- 1.6** Implementation of the recent organisational restructure is continuing. It has been difficult to see a number of colleagues receive confirmation of redundancy and I would like to pay tribute to and thank all those colleagues leaving the organisation due to this process. We are still attempting to redeploy affected colleagues where possible and undertaking some recruitment where there are vacancies or new roles. Efforts are continuing to confirm external funding which may help secure roles for some of the colleagues that have been affected.
- 1.7** Pressure from those visiting and using the National Park continues to be a topic of concern for many. At the Member Forum we will be presenting our latest evidence and research findings. Partner meetings have also taken place to discuss particular area pressures around Castleton. There is also consideration of a 'Tourism Charter' at the Member Forum.

- 1.8** Helping to manage visitor pressure is complex and requires multiple interventions. Included in this is the promotion of active travel and it has been good to see the Authority go out for consultation on a potential high level active travel network. I also enjoyed reading our new Welcome Guide for 2025, which is a key publication that we distribute freely across the National Park.
- 1.9** Issues of visitor pressure were raised at the recent CEO Roadshows in Bamford and Warslow, which were well attended by the local community. By the time of the Authority meeting I will also have done a live radio phone-in Roadshow on BBC Derby.
- 1.10** Our recently opened Changing Places facility and wider site developments at Miller's Dale have been shortlisted for the Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Award for the Peak District and Derbyshire Tourism Awards. We will know the outcome of the awards process by the time of the Authority meeting.
- 1.11** Jon Pearce, High Peak MP, joined myself and the Moors for the Future team for a site visit to see the new 'sphagnum lab' at the top of Snake Pass. This is where the team are trialing different sphagnum planting methods and densities in a controlled environment.
- 1.12** Within Planning there are a number of developments. Currently we have the Land Use Framework out for consultation. This is being responded to by staff across English National Parks as it is potentially a significant new approach. There is also a draft Planning and Infrastructure bill out for consultation which may seek to introduce national schemes of delegation and similar national development policies across local authorities. Our own Local Plan development has reached the point of undertaking some follow up consultation work on issues such as the affordability of rural housing.
- 1.13** I recently attended the Local Access Forum that we host. I was impressed by the commitment and knowledge of the individuals and organisations that attend this Forum. Likewise I attended the Fire Operations Group training exercise and witnessed excellent coordination and team working across organisations. The exercise involved knowledge sharing and practical training, all of which is invaluable when having to deal with real incidents.
- 1.14** We are one of the northern National Parks to be part of Nature North, a body that is promoting landscape scale nature restoration and developing investible proposition across the north of England. Nature North recently launched their new strategy in Sheffield, which I attended. There is a concern that in the push for housing and jobs, nature might get sidelined (nature doesn't get to vote) whereas we must see nature as essential to any development, not optional and not 'around the edges'. A key take-away for me was that nature security is a key underpinning to the other types of security we need.
- 1.15** Alongside the Chair and Deputy Chair, I attended a branding workshop, organised by National Parks Partnership, which is aiming to refresh and recalibrate the key messages that we use when talking about UK National Parks collectively. What is it that unites us, what is it that is common, what do we need to say to potential corporate supporters or policy makers in the ten seconds we might have their attention for that really lands and gets across our role and the value we bring collectively? The workshop was creative and challenging and is one of a pair of workshops that will see all 15 UK National Parks helping to inform the brand refresh that results.

2. Proposals

3.1 None

3. Recommendations

1. For Members to note the report

5. Corporate Implications

- a. Legal - none
- b. Financial – the report highlights significant financial implications due to our impending grant settlement.
- c. National Park Management Plan and Authority Plan – the report covers some of the work that is helping deliver the NPMP.
- d. Risk Management – a number of financial risks are noted in the report.
- e. 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. 13 March 2025

Responsible Officer, Job Title

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