

9. ACCESS FOR ALL FUNDING

1. Purpose

The report provides an update on funding for the Defra Access for All programme. For 2025/26, the funding available to the Peak District is approximately £255,899. The funding is for capital infrastructure improvements for inclusive access.

Members are asked to delegate acceptance of this funding to the Head of Landscape & Engagement in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer/Finance Manager.

2. Context

2.1 The Defra Access for All programme commenced in November 2022. Grant funding of £287,000 over 3 years was approved at the September 2022 Authority meeting (Min 81/22). The funding was allocated as follows

- Year 1: 2022/23 - £131,164.81 (46%)
- Year 3: 2024/25 - £155,847.91 (54%)

2.2 The full amount of funding allocated was spent in Years 1 and 3. No funding was received in Year 2. Details of the delivery in 2022/23 was reported to Programme and Resources Committee in April 2023 as part of the Welcoming Place Aim Overview (Min 18/23). The delivery for 2024/25 is set out in Appendix 1 and forms part of the update to the Welcoming Place report to this meeting.

3. Proposals

3.1 The funding provides for accessibility improvements, operating at the level of each individual Protected Landscape with local flexibility for their areas of focus.

3.2 The funding is for capital expenditure only. This could cover equipment, facilities, routes, signage, interpretation, filming, mapping, and design. It could also include external professional fees and for the capitalisation of staff time where directly attributable to the creation or acquisition of an asset. No revenue funding has been made available for the appointment of project officers or for administration and other general overhead costs. Details are set out in Appendix 2.

3.3 Expenditure would be allocated in accordance with the principles set out by Defra and the objectives of the Authority and to meet the Authority's standing orders. Expenditure in excess of £5k (excluding VAT) would be subject to the receipt of quotes or full tenders in accordance with the Authority's standing orders. However, an exemption to standing orders would be required where works to provide for accessibility improvements are undertaken by a Highway Authority on their assets (rather than by external contractors following a tender process) as such works are part of a common undertaking. Where this is an option, this would be undertaken in accordance with a Service Level Agreement.

3.4 The Peak District Local Access Forum and disability groups will continue to be involved in the infrastructure improvements, accompanied by close working with Highway Authorities, land owners and managers, and communities. Joint working with the other National Parks for the combined ambition to develop and promote the accessibility offer in Protected Landscapes also continues.

3.5 The acceptance of the Access for All funding would be by way of an uplift to the Defra core grant agreement and would be subject to the terms of the core grant agreement and the requirements of the framework for this funding. Previously, there have been additional funds identified, as a result of underspend by other Protected Landscapes. For this eventuality, delegation of the acceptance of funding up to £350,000 is sought.

3.6 The Chair of this committee has been consulted on and confirms approval to apply, accept, and spend this funding.

4. Recommendations:

- 4.1 That Committee supports the bid for and approves acceptance of Access for All funding for the project described in this report of up to a maximum of £350,000 for the period ending March 2026. Approval of the terms of funding is delegated to the Head of Landscape and Engagement in consultation with the Finance Manager/Chief Finance Officer (or such other person appointed under S151 of the Local Government Act 1972).
- 4.2 That authority be delegated to the Authority Solicitor to enter into and determine the terms and conditions of the funding agreement for the project in the best interests of the Authority.
- 4.3 That approval be granted to incur expenditure up to £350,000 as detailed in the report, pursuant to Part 3, C3.(c), subject to compliance with the Contract Procedure Rules and Standing Orders.
- 4.4 That authority be delegated to the Authority Solicitor to enter into and determine the terms and conditions of any contracts required for the project, subject to a compliant procurement exercise and tender evaluation being carried out as required in line with Standing Orders.
- 4.5 That approval be granted to exempt Standing Orders in respect of the delivery by Highway Authorities of works, services, and supplies in respect of the project.
- 4.6 That authority be delegated to the Authority Solicitor to enter into and determine the terms and conditions of Service Level Agreements with Highways Authorities in the best interests of the Authority.
- 4.7 That this project be monitored by the Audit, Budget, and Project Risk Management Group or any equivalent group or committee.

5. Corporate Implications

a) Legal –

- i) Pursuant to section 65(5) of the Environment Act 1995, the Authority has power to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the accomplishment of its statutory purposes. This project falls within the Authority's statutory purposes. This power is subject to any express statutory or public law constraints which should be considered holistically and as the project progresses.
- ii) As the funding for the project is anticipated to exceed the sum of £200,000, approval to apply for and accept the grant and thereafter to incur the expenditure is required to be submitted to this committee. pursuant to Part 7, delegation 7.C-2(a) and 2(b) and Part 3, C3.(c), respectively. In addition, the Chair of Programmes and Resources Committee has been consulted and has given approval to apply, accept, and incur the expenditure.
- iii) Exemptions from Contract Procedure Rules and Standing Orders where there is a written arrangement to provide works, goods or services as a common undertaking requires the approval of this committee where the value of the contract (or service level agreement) exceeds £150,000 (Part 2, CP13.1 and CP13.2.4)

b) Financial - Funding would relate to capital expenditure only. Works would need to have been completed or items purchased and delivered by March 2026, if the allocation is to be met. Any monies not spent by this time would be subject to a clawback provision.

c) National Park Management Plan and Authority Plan - It is considered that the funding would meet the Management Plan's outcome of a Welcoming Place where all are inspired to enjoy, care for and connect to its special qualities by improving access so that everyone can

experience its special qualities, including those with limited mobility, and to build up the confidence of those who do not feel able to visit.

d) Risk Management - There are four risks:

- (i) Programme Design & Spend – There is no flexibility on year spend. The funding would need to be spent within the financial year or returned to Defra.
- (ii) Core Grant – there is a risk that Defra would use the funding to state that they have increased the funding for National Parks and AONBs, despite a cut in real terms.
- (iii) Delivery – the funding is for capital expenditure only. The continuing ability to handle significant project expenditure relating to infrastructure improvements remains important in order to meet grant and contractual conditions and in relation to the statutory functions of the Authority for Access and Rights of Way and Planning.
- (iv) Reputation - There is a reputational risk of not delivering disability access improvements, resulting from any delays to the approval/receipt of the funding.

e) Net Zero - The work on active travel and a plan for walking, wheeling, and cycling provides a mechanism for the Authority to engage with visitors to the National Park regarding issues associated with climate change and for engagement with actions to protect its assets. The funding will not directly contribute to carbon net zero targets. The Authority recognises that for some people options are more limited but would not seek to promote unsustainable transport decisions

f) Equality, Diversity, & Inclusion - The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 have been met in the consideration of actions and the Authority will continue to have regard to its duties under the Act to address inequalities in its visitor and audience profile.

6. Background papers (not previously published)

None

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Defra Access for All - 2024/25

Appendix 2 – Areas of Spend

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

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Responsible Officer, Job Title

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