

11. WELCOMING PLACE AIM OVERVIEW

1. Purpose

To inform Members about the Authority's progress in responding to the Welcoming Place aim since April 2024 and what this means for the future.

2. Context

2.1 One of the four 20 year aims for the NPMP is focused on developing the national park as a place where 'all are welcomed and inspired to care for and connect to its special qualities.' The five-year objectives that underpin this aim, and prioritise delivery over the plan period, are Objectives 7, 8 and 9 please see [Welcoming Place](#).

2.2 Key Issues:

2.2.1 The 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) 2018 sets out the framework and vision for what the Government wants to do to improve the environment within a generation. Updated by the [Environmental Improvement Plan 2023](#) with plans to deliver ten goals. Goal 10 is to enhance beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment. The Government wants everyone to enjoy our landscapes, but also recognises that to restore nature, we need to enjoy its beauty responsibly. In July 2024 the Secretary of State for Defra announced a rapid review of EIP23 with an [interim statement](#) in January 2025 which highlighted further improvements to the plan later in 2025.

2.2.2 The [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) (PLTOF) was published on the 31 January 2024. It seeks to support Protected Landscapes (PLs) in meeting their huge potential for nature, climate, people and place and to deliver the EIP23 goals. Area 9 is to improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with PLs for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme. However, this access target is currently under review and we expect further guidance from Natural England regarding a more appropriate metric to measure this outcome. The strategy team have been asked to work with NE and colleagues from National Landscapes to sense check both PLTOF target data and the supporting statistics prior to release. It is anticipated that the full data set will be available by the end of April and Members will be given a detailed presentation on the PLTOF targets at the 9th May forum meeting.

2.2.3 The Authority is legally required to set a balanced budget and the Authority uses its Medium Term Financial Forecast to do this which Members considered and approved on the 21 March 2025. An organisational change process took place during 2024-25 which included moving Engagement activities from a core-funded to an externally-funded delivery model. This includes potentially disestablishing a number of Engagement Team posts. In recognising the specialist role of the Engagement Team in delivering the core purpose "to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public", a new Engagement Programme Manager role has been established. This role will develop and manage the delivery of externally-funded priority engagement projects and provide expert engagement advice and support across the Authority. They will also work closely with the Peak District Foundation (PDF). Four priority engagement projects have already been identified and sources of external funding are being explored:

- 2.2.3.1 The Authority is working with the National Trust (NT) to move the full cost of delivering the Moorland Discovery Centre on the Longshaw Estate to the NT with the Authority withdrawing from the current partnership arrangement by 1 March 2026.
- 2.2.3.2 The required funding for the Landscape Discovery Centre at Longdendale, Ambassador Schools and Community Engagement projects is yet to be secured.
- 2.2.4 The [Diverse Audience Plan \(DAP\)](#) is aligned with the National Park Management Plan (NPMP) and Authority Plan. With reduced engagement capacity delivery of the current targeted actions with diverse audiences is no longer viable. Mitigation will include ensuring that all staff incorporate engagement methods to meet the ambitions of the Diverse Audience Plan in all their business as usual activities. The DAP will need to be reviewed in 2025-26 and aligned with the Authority's emerging Equality Plan for which an update is provided for members at this same meeting.
- 2.2.5 Whilst the economic benefits to the national park from tourism are acknowledged the need for better and more shared data across partners has also been recognized. Work is on-going to use data to better understand the changes in terms of user numbers and patterns and the impact that this may be having on the area's communities, its fragile natural environment and cultural heritage assets. This has started to be explored with Members with next steps identified along with the drafting of a Tourism Charter. Any emerging proposals will need to be discussed with partners.
- 2.2.6 The Authority works with its constituent authorities who are responsible for rights of way within the national park. The Authority's role, as its limited resources allow, is to enhance access on priority routes e.g. those promoted, connected to visitor hubs and access for all. Constituent authorities' resources are also becoming more limited and this coupled with increasing severe weather events and visitor usage has led to deterioration in rights of way condition.
- 2.2.7 Since the April 2024 Programmes and Resources meeting the Authority has undertaken many activities, both on our own and in partnership, that assist in meeting our welcoming place ambitions. These are outlined from paragraph 3 below. Some of these activities will continue to be delivered and developed through 2025-26 but there will need to be a further review following completion of the organisational change process in terms of the reduced capacity and need for external funding.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 As reported to this Committee in April 2024 the Authority is already undertaking many activities, both on our own and in partnership, that assist in delivering our welcoming place ambitions. We will review the activities that the Authority delivers going forward based on priority projects and external funding being secured following the recent organisational change. The summary below updates Members on the activities we have focused our resources on since April 2024.
- 3.1.1 Priority routes within the national park - have been identified by Rangers and mapped on a GIS mapping layer. Regular volunteer ranger patrols to check and maintain the rights of way furniture.

- 3.1.2 White Peak Loop - in March 2025 Derbyshire County Council (DCC) officially launched the 42-mile circular trail designed for walkers, cyclists, and horse riders although further development is still required for sections such as along Woo Dale. Please see [White Peak Loop Launch](#).
- 3.1.3 Defra Access for All funding - has delivered more miles, more places, and more mobility across the national park over 2024-25. An additional £26,200 of funding was provided by the Foundation making the overall spend £181,000. Details are set out in Appendix 1. A separate report on the funding available for 2025-26 and delivery in 2024-25 is being presented to this committee.
- 3.1.4 Changing places facilities – have been installed and are now open at Millers Dale and at Parsley Hay using Access for All funding.
- 3.1.5 Active Travel England funding - is identifying a high-level network of routes for walking, wheeling and cycling across the national park as well as developing and allowing for data monitoring, accessibility mapping, and scheme feasibility. Approximately 5,500 website views have been made during the consultation period.
- 3.1.6 Recreation hubs pilot – the Dovedale area an improvement plan and NT has carried out works to improve car park management and infrastructure on their sites. FIPL funding of over £100,000 in 2023 & 2024 installed more accessible routes. Progress to continue now through Planning e.g. consulting on an additional footbridge to ease pressure around stepping stones. The Authority focus is now on Castleton. A visitor pressures & management meeting about Mam Tor took place in March 2025 between the Authority, Police, DCC Highways, and NT, sharing current practice, data on visitor movements, enforcement and engagement actions to date. Potential actions discussed include car park expansion, clearer parking signage, vehicle towing, and greater Ranger presence. Learnings will inform the identification of key areas to work with.
- 3.1.7 Biennial Ease of Use survey - 5% of the rights of way network have been surveyed using a bespoke app allowing for in-field recording of the condition and accessibility of rights of way. The CROW Access Land monitoring app continues to be used by rangers to record the state of all access points and its easy usage is helping to increase monitoring overall.
- 3.1.8 Fire Operations Group – this multi-stakeholder forum is chaired by Authority Rangers and has continued to meet twice a year for effective partner working and management of wildfires. A Key Concept of Operations document has been developed for landowners to allow best practice and more consistent work for wildfire management across the National Park. Please see Appendix 2 for details.
- 3.1.9 The Authority has continued to support the Environmental Quality Mark (EQM) Community Interest Company to deliver the Peak District EQM. A further 16 Peak District businesses have achieved the award (7 within the national park).
- 3.1.10 #PeakDistrictProud – as reported last year this has lost traction and the user environment has also changed since the inception of the scheme in 2019-20 and some partners continue to query whether it is still the right approach. A review of #PeakDistrictProud will need to take place now that up to date user data is available but will be dependent on future capacity following the organisational change.

- 3.1.11 Social listening pilot - commenced in 2023 and concluded in July 2024 the learnings from which include the recommendation to establish a digital and potentially a hard copy toolkit based around the year and seasons i.e. fires, dogs on leads, safety in winter etc. The cost for the provision of such an interactive, dynamic approach is not yet known and will be dependent on funding post organisational change.
- 3.1.12 Volunteering – all types of volunteer activities have been merged onto 1 Better Impact page (our volunteer software) allowing volunteers to see the full range of opportunities across the Authority.
- 3.1.13 Volunteering hours - 67,718 hours of volunteering have been delivered across the Authority: Volunteer Rangers & Engagement contributing 21,561 hours; Peak Park Conservation Volunteers (PPCV) delivering 15,166 hours, working with groups including United Utilities, Staffordshire County Council; tree planting schemes (6,000 trees); engagement with diverse audience groups e.g. Green Leaders (18-30yrs) and We Go Outside Too community group.
- 3.1.14 Other Authority grant support includes: Community grants (reported in the Thriving Communities update report); Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grants (already summarised in the landscape and nature recovery aim update report shared at the same meeting).
- 3.1.15 Access Unlimited Coalition - the Authority has supported the Youth Hostel Association who lead the coalition, to deliver Access to Nature, a £4.5 million Defra funded project across the English National Parks and consortium partners. The Authority has delivered nature connection experiences in the National Park to 431 young people. An expression of interest is being developed for the next steps towards a £10 million NHLF Grant led by Access Unlimited to expand the project across the UK.
- 3.1.16 Ambassador Schools - a flagship project delivered by the Authority was launched in 2022 and currently has 20 schools, both primary and secondary, participating from across the national park and within 30 minutes travel of the boundary. Funding through the PDF Connecting New Audiences project has enabled delivery of focused activity and an external evaluation to better understand the impact, influence of and next steps for the project. Please see Appendix 3 for the evaluation report. Potential next steps include working with the PDF to secure external funding and a revised version of this project is one of the four priority engagement projects identified in the issues section above.
- 3.1.17 The school visit programme - was fully booked engaging over 9,000 young people and exceeding the income target. The quote *"This is seriously the best day ever!"* evidences the value to young people and this year celebrates 25 years of outdoor learning at Landscape Discovery Centre at Longdendale.
- 3.1.18 Junior Rangers - has continued as a gateway to Green Pathway of youth volunteering with groups meeting across the National Park. This together with the success and growth of Green Leaders (volunteers aged 18-30), has identified youth environmental social action as a focus for future funding.
- 3.1.19 The Youth Impact Collective - with support from Animo Leadership is now underway. The first meeting was held, bringing together 13 participants, creating a vision and presenting at the Members Forum on the 21 March 2025, setting out their ambitions for the future to have a voice and role in decision making and co-creation opportunities. New volunteer opportunities for ages 12-25 are being created. It is hoped that the Trainee Academy trainees can help drive this forward in future years.

- 3.1.20 Championing National Parks for Everyone - led by Peak District Mosaic is well underway, celebrating great successes with the first Community Championing Training programme oversubscribed, monthly event programmes fully booked and greater diversity reached in re-recruiting to new roles. A key outcome of this project is working to address low representation of people from diverse backgrounds in the environmental sector. Please see [The RACE Report - Racial Action for the Climate Emergency](#). All roles are now filled and the project activity programme operates to March 2026.
- 3.1.21 National Parks UK and the Protected Landscapes Partnership – there has been joint working on creating a shared vision for belonging in our National Parks. Community group support examples include: Dal Kular Black Writer in residence, please see [Peak District Residencing – Black Nature in Residence](#);
- 3.1.22 Health and Wellbeing Project:
- 3.1.22.1 Prevent: Developing and relaunching Peak District wide Nature Prescription resource, building on existing focus groups and relationships. Developing clear volunteer pathway.
- 3.1.22.2 Restore: 6 events trailing different approaches to Health and Wellbeing work in the National Park, including family events and collaborating with the Peak Park conservation Volunteers
- 3.1.22.3 Excel: Peaks of Health - Support and advice around Health and Wellbeing approaches to the new Championing National Parks for Everyone project. Please see Appendix 4 for the Peaks of Health Evaluation Report.
- 3.1.23 The Authority Plan 2023-28 enabling delivery aim sets out actions that will assist in the delivery of the Authority's essential business. Objective B (Access): To achieve timescales and follow processes for the statutory functions under Countryside and Rights of Way Act and Town and Country Planning Act includes the following essential business actions:
- 3.1.23.1 Supporting the statutory functions of the Local Access Forum so that it continues to offer a good overview of access and accessibility issues within the National Park.
- 3.1.23.2 Identify, enhance and maintain access to Access Land and ensure the public has the greatest possible access to rights of way. The app continues to be used by rangers to record the state of all access points to open access land (Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act).

4. Recommendation

- 1. To note progress in delivering to the Peak District National Park Management Plan 2023-28 and Authority Plan Welcoming Place aim and targets.**

5. Corporate Implications

a. Legal

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. These projects and activities fall within the Authority's statutory purposes. Pursuant to sections 5 and 11A of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the Authority must deliver to the statutory

purposes and statutory duty, respectively, when carrying out its work. Monitoring the Authority's progress against the aims and objectives set out in the National Park Management Plan will enable appropriate scrutiny and safeguard legal compliance.

b. Financial

Activities in the early years of the Authority Plan and National Park Management Plan 2023-28 had funding and resources identified to deliver them. However, the recent organisational change included moving from a core funded delivery model to an externally funded delivery model for the Authority's engagement activities. Some level of financial support from the Authority will still be required as many funders require a cash or in-kind contribution and many do not contribute to overhead costs. The Authority's current and proposed contributions to externally funded priority projects across the Authority will be kept under review. The introduction of vacancy control and the 2025-26 budget reduction is also likely to impact on wider capacity across the Authority. Once the three-year Defra settlement is known a further review of capacity and activities will be needed.

c. National Park Management Plan and Authority Plan

The activities described in this report contribute to a number of our policies and legal obligations:

- The [Peak District National Park Management Plan 2023-28](#) Aim Three: [Welcoming Place](#) links closely to: [special qualities](#) 3, 6 and 7 and by developing a connection with the place visitors will benefit from all 7 [special qualities](#) which in turn will lead to support and understanding of the natural environment. Aim Three actions will also contribute to Aim One [Climate Change](#), Aim Two [Landscape and Nature Recovery](#), and Aim Four [Thriving Communities](#) including many of the objectives with their targets and headline delivery of the NPMP particularly for Aim Three.
- The Authority Plan 2023–28 Enabling delivery Aim: The Authority is inspiring, pioneering and enabling in delivering the National Park vision; Objective B (Access): To achieve timescales and follow processes for the statutory functions under Countryside and Rights of Way Act and Town and Country Planning Act.

d. Risk Management

- The main risk of the Authority being unable to deliver to the Welcoming Place aim continues to be the resource challenge of both partners and the Authority. The organisational change has severely reduced the breadth and depth of capacity to connect with communities, and provide services where all are inspired to enjoy, care for and connect to the special qualities which restricts capacity to deliver Welcoming Place initiatives going forward. Identified risks include maintaining partnerships and networks, closure of key educational visit site Macclesfield Forest Classroom, and potentially the Landscape Discovery Centre at Longdendale subject to completion of the proposed arrangement with NT. There is also uncertainty around delivery of Health and Communities, School visits, Junior Rangers and Ambassador Schools activities. Following the organisational change, the Authority now has a higher degree of risk in terms of securing the external funding required for externally funded priority engagement projects and activities than when these activities had core funding. The risk will continue to be mitigated by focusing on the highest priorities.
- In terms of the initial four priority projects identified and listed in the issues section above, there is a risk that external funding may not be secured in time to retain current officers delivering these activities, notice periods may end and experienced officers leave the Authority. Whilst there is a range of external funding sources for Diverse Audience Plan engagement activities and the opportunity for close working with the PDF, some level of on-going financial support from the Authority will also

be required as many funders require a cash or in-kind contribution and many do not contribute to overhead costs.

e. Net Zero

Climate change and its impacts feature in all engagement activities. A connection to the place is encouraged as research shows this leads to positive pro-environmental behaviours. Engagement activities highlight examples of good practice and encourage personal responsibility to take positive action. This work focuses on reaching out and engaging with communities that do not traditionally work with the Authority; to deepen the knowledge and understanding of those that do in order to encourage connection to the place and responsible pro-environmental behaviours, including sustainable transport use. Whilst this work will continue under the new model delivery activities will be less.

f. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The delivery of the Welcoming Place aim through the DAP work speaks directly to the ambition of ensuring equity of access (physical and intellectual) to the National Park with areas of most unequal access and gaps in provision being targeted. The DAP sets out a clear plan to address these inequalities and ways to evaluate and report this work. However, the DAP will need to be revised following the organisational change process and the alignment with the Authority's Equality Plan also considered.

6. Background papers (not previously published)

None.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Access for All Project Funding Update 2024-25.

Appendix 2 – Fire Operations Group Update.

Appendix 3 – Ambassador Schools Evaluation Report.

Appendix 4 – Peaks of Health Evaluation Report.

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