

7. CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT (PM)

1. Purpose

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

2. Context

2.1 National issues

2.1.1 Defra news

There is a new Secretary of State at Defra. This is Emma Reynolds and NPE are leading on the initial contact and engagement with her. She does not appear to have a previous environmental background. There is also a new Farming Minister, Angela Eagle, again, without much apparent background in farming. This is a shame as the previous Minister, Danial Zeichner, was very familiar with farming issues and supportive of initiatives such as FiPL. Mary Creagh retains the brief for national parks. Gabrielle Edwards, the Defra Deputy Director covering national parks has been doing more site visits and external meetings. She recently attended the Peak District for a Protected Landscapes Partnership meeting but unfortunately could not attend the excellent moorland restoration site visit we organised.

There is no further news from Defra on the future funding of national parks. We are awaiting news of when we will find out what our three-year settlement will be and how much it will be. The case continues to be made, via National Parks England, for an early settlement and one that puts national parks on a sustainable footing.

2.1.2 Protected Landscape Partnership (PLP) news

After a long wait, Defra are now recruiting for an independent Chair of the PLP. The PLP brings together national parks, national landscapes, national trails and Natural England. It is an important joint group and with a strong independent Chair should be able to make the case for support and investment across government. We recently hosted a board meeting for the PLP and organised site visits. The PLP are behind the £500k funding we have secured to develop the Landscape Observatory that came out of the AI mapping work we have pioneered in the Peak District.

2.1.3 National Parks England (NPE) news

NPE is the umbrella body for English national parks. NPE is a legal entity and is overseen by Directors, who are the Chairs of the English national parks. NPE normally employs a Director. This role was recently vacated by Jayne Butler. Tom Hind, CEO of North York Moors NPA, is temporarily acting as Company Secretary and taking on some of the leadership tasks of NPE whilst we wait to recruit a new Director. Tom is supported by Sion McGeever, CEO of South Downs NPA, who is leading on PLP matters. Various NPA CEOs, including myself, are helping cover other areas, all of which will be reviewed in the future as there are to be some personnel changes as three current English national park CEOs will shortly be retiring.

Before NPE recruits a new Director, some work is taking place to review the vision and mission of the organisation. This will inform the organisation's new strategy, which will then be used to refine the role of the Director and subsequent recruitment.

As well as leading at a strategic level with Defra, NPE carries out policy and communications work. This is carrying on with the current NPE staff team. A recent piece of work has been a report, drawing on independent experts, to consider future funding mechanisms for national parks. The four key recommendations from this report are for national parks to focus on:

- Scaling up charitable donations
- Maximising their comparative advantage on national issues such as health, wellbeing and flood risk
- Harnessing opportunities from emerging green credit markets

- Leveraging existing structures for collaborative learning between NPAs

My assessment would be that the Peak District NPA is already well engaged in all these opportunities, but we will consider what further could be done in all areas.

2.1.4 NPUK news

All 15 UK national parks also come together through NPUK, although unlike NPE, this is not a formally constituted organisation. One of the main topics that is addressed at a UK level is communications. There is an NPUK Comms Unit, that the Peak District NPA has been hosting. Recently all 15 NPAs, plus National Parks Partnership (NPP) and NPE, voted unanimously to shift the hosting of the UK Comms Unit from the Peak District to NPP. This represented the culmination of a significant amount of sensitive work over the last year that I have been leading on and is a great outcome for us all.

As part of the work to shift hosting of the UK Comms Unit, we have been undertaking a NPUK brand refresh and development of brand propositions. It is important that we can clearly articulate what national parks offer and why they are important. The new propositions are currently being market tested and will be shared further soon.

2.1.5 NPP news

NPP have appointed Sue Albion as their New Chair. Sue has been an NPP board member for a number of years and takes over Chairing the organisation from Cat Hawkins. Cat is staying on as interim CEO of NPP whilst NPP undertakes another campaign to find a new CEO. There have been a number of new corporate partnerships secured by NPP recently and a number of other potential partnerships close to being secured, including a new partnership to replace the Columbia clothing deal that has now expired.

2.1.6 Natural England news

In the last few weeks new regulations have come into effect around controlled burning on peat soils. The regulations cover less favorable agricultural areas (predominantly uplands) and change the definition of deep peat from 40cm to 30cm, meaning a significant area of peatland will now require licensing for any burning. The whole of the Peak District will be covered by these regulations, with the challenge now being how to monitor and enforce against any unprescribed burning.

3. Regional issues

3.1 MP engagement

The Chair and I had a productive meeting with Marie Tidbull, MP for Penistone and Stoksbridge, at Langset woods. The meeting covered increasing access, public transport improvements and links into local communities. I have had a number of meetings with Jon Pearce, MP for High Peak, on issues ranging from car parks, rail improvements, disposable BBQs and community relations.

3.2 EMCCA engagement

3.2.1 Peak Partnership

The EMCCA Mayor Claire Ward has initiated the 'Peak Partnership' which brings together the combined East Midlands Authority with the Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham and South Yorkshire Mayor Oliver Coppard. The partnership is designed to bring a coordinated approach to those with responsibilities for services that affect the Peak District. The partnership recognises that there are many people in all three combined authorities that work in, visit or travel across the Peak District. Claire Ward's aims for the partnership are to focus on the shared goals of:

1. Having a productive partnership with the Peak District National Park: focusing on spatial planning, futureproofing, and tourism.

2. Securing the future of Snake Pass: focusing on infrastructure investment and climate adaptation.
3. Strengthening connectivity between regions: building shared approaches to transport investment to ensure that people who live, work, and play in the Peak District can benefit from improved public transport, better roads, and active travel links.

The Authority has not been involved in any meetings of the Partnership yet, but Claire Ward has confirmed that we will be involved in the workings of the partnership and now that an initial meeting of the three mayors has taken place, officer level working will follow.

3.2.2 Biodiversity and Nature Taskforce

I sit on this Taskforce which continues to meet to provide advice and guidance to EMCCA in support of more nature and biodiversity friendly delivery being embedded in its evolving Spatial Vision and Strategy.

3.2.3 Inclusive Growth Commission

EMCCA has now launched the report of its Inclusive Growth Commission. I was able to feed into the report via the Biodiversity and Nature Taskforce, emphasising that there is an opportunity to grow health and wellbeing in the region, not just jobs and GDP, through considered and targeted use of the National Park.

3.3 Tourism and user impact

Work is progressing on preparations for a workshop in October to develop an action plan based on the Tourism Charter the Authority recently adopted. Key partners will be asked to sign the Charter before the workshop and wider partners and stakeholders will be given the chance to sign up to the Charter and action plan following the workshop. We are still waiting to see the latest draft of the EMCCA Destination Management Plan, which we have fed into. We are also continuing with our area-based management approach, focusing particularly on the Castleton area. At the same time, we are developing our active travel network and should be able to access further funding this year to work up full details (get shovel ready) of the most strategic projects that have been identified.

Area management involves working with partners to try to manage pressures in a particular area, but this is also being done in the context of work across the National Park on trying to improve active travel, public transport and connectivity. The possibility of an ultra-light rail link from Buxton to the start of the Monsal trail took a step forward recently when Claire Ward offered to support the development of a business case for such a service. Good work has already been done on the technical feasibility of such a project but ahead of any investment decision the ongoing viability of any service needs to be assessed. Coming from the other side of the National Park, we have also been working with the Foundation to help develop partnership options stemming from the Peak Gateway development near Chesterfield.

Our Visitor Centre transformation project is progressing well. Significant operating changes have already been made with a new staffing structure and clearer remit as to the purpose of our Centres. Welcome volunteers have been introduced to increase our engagement with visitors about the special qualities of the national park and to allow our paid staff to focus on increasing the profitability of the Centres. A new online bike booking system has been introduced for our Cycle Hire Centres, which is already proving popular and will allow improvements in management to be made.

3.4 Wildfires

We have experienced over 30 wildfires in the Peak District this year. We continue to run the Fire Officers Group and coordinate training for partners. Staff changes will mean there is new leadership for this group, still to be finalised.

Derbyshire Dales District Council have extended a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) covering land it owns and manages. All land with public access is now covered by the powers

that allow the council to fine those who break the rules. Prohibited actions included the lighting of fires, the lighting or use of stoves - with some exceptions - barbecues and other devices using an open flame, and the discarding of lighted matches and other things likely to cause fire. High Peak Borough Council has also banned barbecues and campfires in their area. The issue of effective enforcement of such bans remains a challenge. Our volunteers, rangers and seasonal fire ranges continue to engage the public and this is an area we shall increasingly promote in our Visitor and Cycle Hire hubs. Moors for the Future Partnership has developed new social media content aimed at those not using traditional platforms, in an attempt to reach the kind of new audiences who are increasingly visiting the national park. They also trialled wildfire risk indicator boards in prominent access points to the national park.

Jon Pearce, one of our local MPs, was about to take a Ten-Minute Rule Bill through the House Commons, with the intention of introducing a ban on disposable BBQs, when the cabinet reshuffle meant he went from being a back bencher to the Prime Minister's PPS. This meant Jon had to drop the Bill but there is significant interest from other parliamentarians to carry on this debate.

3.5 Nature recovery

Our nature recovery lead, Sarah Bird, has been seconded into the National Parks England policy team so our capacity to support the development and implementation of six Local Nature Recovery Strategies is lower than we would like. We also need to develop our own action plan for our Local Nature Recovery Plan. We are progressing nature recovery in other ways as well, such as through FiPL, a new Woodland Creation staff role, the landscape recovery Morridge Hill Country project, by choosing new tenants for Pump Farm in Warslow that have a nature friendly farming approach and through the new Landscapes Connection funding from nature recovery in the White Peak.

3.6 Cultural heritage

North Lees Hall, which we own as part of the North Lees Estate, is currently between tenants, so this year we opened it up to the public as part of the national Heritage Open Days weekend. Despite stormy weather, we welcomed around 220 people to visit the Hall and see the Cruck Barn. A dedicated team of heritage and ranger volunteers helped staff out and created a really interesting visit for many people who will have known about the Hall or walked past it many times and now got the opportunity to look behind the curtains. Thanks to all involved.

At the Heritage Open Day we were able to let the public know more about People of the Peak, which is a funded project to recruit and train a new cohort of heritage volunteers to help us monitor scheduled ancient monuments (SAMs) and other heritage assets, and then to undertake some repair works. This project will not only be fascinating for those taking part, but it will significantly increase our understanding of the current condition of hundreds of SAMs in the national park and help with the conservation and preservation of those most needing attention.

3.7 Police engagement

We have now held our first meeting of the new DPARC forum (Derbyshire Partnership Against Rural Crime) which is jointly run by us and the Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). Rural crime often does not feature in our thinking or work at the Authority but it is a major issue for many of those living in the National Park. Greater awareness of crime prevention initiatives is helpful for all partners, and it was impressive to see the successes that result from intelligence led policing. Lots of stolen property is being recovered and increasing numbers of offenders are being caught and prosecuted. Acquisitive crime targeting farm machinery and rural property are the main areas of concern in the national park.

3.8 CEO engagement

CEO Roadshows go on hold during the summer months, with the last one being held in Tissington. A new round of Roadshows is now being organised. I was also able to meet many

partners and key stakeholders at the Chatsworth Country Fair and Manifold Show over the summer. By the time of the Authority meeting, I will also have attended our all volunteers day in Bakewell where we expect a couple of hundred of our volunteers to gather for training and knowledge sharing.

3.9 Internal issues

3.9.1 Organisational change and staffing

As we await news of our future funding settlement from Defra, the opportunity to express an interest in voluntary redundancy or reduced hours has been opened to all staff. This has understandably caused some concern, however it was done early in response to staff feedback from the last round of restructuring, to give colleagues the opportunity to think about future options ahead of being in a full organisational change programme. At this stage it is not known what kind of savings the Authority may be looking for, but we are assuming some savings will be needed and we are trying to be as transparent with staff as possible. We have not implemented a recruitment freeze and there are several new funded roles that also need filling. We generally find that application numbers for our jobs are strong and the Planning Service is nearing being fully staffed. There have also been a number of new apprentices and trainees brought into the organisation.

3.9.2 75th anniversary preparations

Plans for next year's 75th anniversary are being actively considered. These will be presented in more detail to Members at the Forum following the Authority meeting.

4. Proposals

3.1 None

5. Recommendations

1. For Members to note the report

5. Corporate Implications

- a. Legal - none
- b. Financial – the report notes some concerns over our future funding position. There is ongoing work to manage potential cuts and generate additional income.
- 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

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