

## **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 Government news*

The Office of Environmental Protection has announced that it will undertake a review of the government's environmental targets as set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan. We will input into this as required when details are announced.

There is ongoing work within Defra to look at governance reform for protected landscapes. The Countryside and Communities Research Institute at the University of Gloucester has been appointed to undertake a study of potential improvements to the governance of protected landscapes. Their focus is on what can be achieved by 'soft' means (culture, values, behaviors) to create more dynamic, ambitious and inclusive organisations although they will also be making recommendations as to any 'hard' changes (requiring new legislation, regulation or guidance) which may be required. A series of interviews and workshops are currently taking place (the Chair, Deputy Chair and myself have input into these) with recommendations expected in the spring.

We are currently preparing for our annual review meeting with Defra (this will have taken place by the time the Authority meets). This review period covers April 2024 to March 2025. A standard template is provided to each national park which we have to report against. I will share our slide deck with Members when it has been finalised.

There is currently a government consultation on powers that will be given to Mayoral Authorities that will allow them to introduce visitor levies on accommodation in their area in order to raise money from the tourism sector. The consultation is about how such a levy should operate. National Parks England has submitted a response on behalf of the ten English national parks collectively. We have also submitted our own response and we have input into the EMCCA Mayor's response. The key points from our response are:

- Raising revenue from tourism through taxation presents an opportunity to invest money back into protected landscapes and mitigate negative externalities that arise from the tourism industry.
- We oppose the current "pro-growth" framing of revenue use, funds should be ring-fenced for the visitor economy and destination management, especially within protected landscapes.
- We argue for mandatory or clearly defined revenue sharing with protected landscapes, ensuring funds are transparently reinvested into core assets such as footpaths, ranger services, wildlife regeneration, and delivery of national park and national landscape management plans.
- We would prefer allocation of revenue mechanisms that reflect total visitor impact not just overnight stays. In national parks as a whole and the Peak District especially, day visitors present a much larger proportion of visitors and this should be recognised.
- We would support a broad application of the levy to commercially let accommodation with some exemptions and we would favour a simple flat-rate model over a percentage-based approach due to the administrative burden percentage-based models place on businesses and Local Authorities.
- We would support local flexibility (including seasonal variation and different rates by area or accommodation type) but there is a concern of fragmentation across multiple

authorities within a single national park, therefore a coordinated approach through mandatory consultation with NPAs is ideal.

A government Green Paper on access is now at an advanced stage and it is anticipated that this will be published before the end of the year. Health and wellbeing has been flagged as a key priority.

The government is proposing to create new national river walks, one per region. We are supporting an application for the River Derwent in Derbyshire as the East Midland's National River Walk. This walk follows our strategic active travel network, via the Thornhill Trail and Chatsworth. A section outside the National Park (Rowsley to Cromford) forms part of the White Peak Loop. There may be the possibility of extending it northwards to Fairholmes. It is not yet clear when decisions will be made and what level of funding will be available for implementation.

There is currently a consultation on revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework which could have significant implications for national parks. The NPE Heads of Planning group are meeting next week to review this and finalise our submission to the consultation.

There is some concern that government commitments to Biodiversity Net Gain may be weakened, potentially with smaller sites being ruled out of inclusion from such a requirement. Given the vast majority of development within the national park is on smaller sites, this could have a significant impact and potentially remove an important way of gaining nature enhancements.

#### *2.1.2 Protected Landscape Partnership (PLP) news*

The PLP brings together national parks, national landscapes, national trails and Natural England. Mary-Ann Ochota has been appointed as the new independent chair. This is a welcome appointment as Mary-Ann has a high profile and strong following as a broadcaster and Chair of Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE). As an independent Chair, Mary-Ann should be able to make the case for support and investment across government. The PLP is currently awaiting news of its funding settlement but it is committed to providing ongoing support to projects such as the Landscape Observatory, which is being led by us in the Peak District.

#### *2.1.3 National Parks England (NPE) news*

NPE has appointed a new Executive Director. Debbie Stockwell will join the organisation in March from the Renewable Energy Association (REA). She has a Civil Service and campaigning background. She has extensive environment and climate policy experience, most recently at the Department of Transport as Deputy Director for Low Carbon Fuels and previously at Defra. At Defra, Debbie led the delivery of the government's 25 Year Environment Plan, Environment Act targets programme and Green Recovery from COVID-19. Debbie also headed up policy development to establish the Office for Environmental Protection.

New CEOs have now been appointed at Northumberland NPA (David Renwick, from Natural England), Dartmoor NPA (Tom Surrey, from Defra), and The Broad Authority (Sarah Cowley, from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office), with recruitment still live for a new CEO of the Yorkshire Dales NPA.

#### *2.1.4 National Parks Partnership (NPP) news*

NPP has appointed Natalie Harvey as the new Director of Communications and Brand. Natalie comes from working at the Lake District NPA on sensitive and complex communications issues around pollution on Lake Windermere. Natalie will take forward the UK brand proposition work on behalf of all UK national parks.

NPP is still actively working to try and secure a new national clothing provider to replace the Columbia clothing deal that has now expired.

### *3. Regional issues*

#### *3.1 Local Government Reform*

Proposals have been submitted to central government on local government reform that may have an impact on the Peak District National Park Authority. In Derbyshire there are two submissions, one for a single combined authority for the whole county and one for two combined authorities with a north/south split. In both proposals the parts of the national park in Derbyshire would be within one combined authority. The situation is more complex in Staffordshire with a wider variety of proposals submitted but again, the parts of the national park within Staffordshire should end up being entirely within a single combined authority. In Cheshire there is a single proposal supported by all local authorities for a single combined authority. The government are currently consulting on these proposals. The consultation will inform an assessment of the merits of the proposals. Proposals will be considered by government alongside consultation responses, further representations, and any other relevant information, before Ministers reach a judgement on which proposals, if any, to implement.

#### *3.2 MP engagement*

Nothing significant to note in this report.

#### *3.3 EMCCA engagement*

We have submitted a response to the Mayor's consultation on the Local Transport Plan.

We have taken part in various engagement events on proposals for a visitor levy.

We have met with the new CEO of EMCCA and senior officers to build relations and explain the priorities, workings and purposes of the National Park Authority. The importance of working together on the visitor economy and managing visitor pressure was emphasised. It is important to create the right level of engagement with EMCCA, particularly in relation to the National Park Management Plan (NPMP). When our NPMP was created EMCCA did not exist yet they are now clearly important partners in the delivery of the NPMP objectives.

#### *3.4 Community engagement*

The next CEO Roadshow will be in Peak Forest on 25<sup>th</sup> March.

#### *3.5 Moorland engagement*

Our work continues to bring together different perspectives on moorland management. There was a very successful gathering this month on the Roaches, hosted by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT). A range of partners from environmental organisations, water companies, Natural England, and shooting estates gathered to see how SWT is managing an area of moorland that is highly accessible and heavily visited. Re-wetting and vegetation management was discussed and we saw first-hand the impact of and recovery from a major wildfire that took place in 2018. Discussions not only covered techniques for restoration work itself but also the importance of visitor engagement and the opportunities to use drone technology and remote sensors to try and limit the impacts of wildfires.

#### *3.6 Internal issues*

##### *3.6.1 Funding news*

News of our potential settlement for next year has been included in the Part B budget items for this meeting as it has not yet been confirmed officially by Defra. We do know that we can expect a one year confirmed settlement for 2026-27 and a further two years given indicatively at this stage. It is understood there is likely to be some additional capital funding for the year ahead as well as a revenue grant. The context for government funding is challenging, as we all know. It is because of the ongoing challenge and long-term trend of declining real term funding that we made difficult decisions at the end of last year to reduce the Authority's cost base (staffing levels). We are currently working through the final stages of that restructure which we hope will put the Authority in a stable position. Such stability, while positive, has

been achieved through the loss of important and impactful work in certain areas, which is highly regretted by all involved. I would like to recognise how difficult this has been for everyone and pay tribute to the professionalism and commitment of all our colleagues that have been affected.

Aside from the core grant settlement we have also been given indicative news that there will be further funding for access work and for active travel work.

If it is confirmed that we have additional funding for access and active travel, the following areas will be our priority:

- Potential extension of the Monsal Trail west and east
- Connectivity to Sheffield
- Connectivity for Bakewell
- Further development of Quiet Lanes
- The creation and enhancement of more Miles without Stiles accessible routes
- The development of accessible facilities at key locations to allow greater access to nature and improvements in online information
- Increasing the number of people participating in health and wellbeing or volunteering activities, including more inclusive cycles and fast charging for e-bikes

It has also been confirmed that there will be a three-year extension to the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme. It is expected that the Peak District will have a similar allocation to previous years but there is an additional £10m to be allocated across all protected landscapes for the creation or enhancements of nature rich habitats. We will be looking at how we can access some of this additional funding.

Moors for the Future Partnership continues to explore new ways of funding moorland restoration as the Partnership is set to deliver its largest annual programme of work for the year ahead.

The Authority is seeking to increase income generation from earned activities, primarily to try and offset the long-term decline in core government funding, and much of the additional capital funding this year has been focused on that. There are a number of positive developments in this regard including new camping pods at one of the campsites we own and the enhancement of a number of carparking sites. The Visitor Centre and Cycle Hire transformation programme is also progressing well with initiatives that have been designed to reduce costs and bring in greater income from our National Park Centres (formally referred to as our Visitor and Cycle Hire Centres).

### *3.6.2 Governance*

#### *3.6.2.1 Member changes*

Andrew Hart's replacement as the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands is to be confirmed.

#### *3.6.2.2 Boardroom Apprentice*

The Authority has expressed interest in having another Boardroom Apprentice – we are waiting to hear whether central government will be progressing with the scheme again.

#### *3.6.2.3 Key staff changes*

Members will be aware that at the end of March we will be losing Sue Fletcher and Hannah Turner as Heads of Service. Recruitment is currently underway for a new Head of Assets and Enterprise to replace Hannah. With the loss of Hannah it is also important we now fill a long-term vacancy in Rural Surveying.

### *3.6.3 Corporate Risk update Quarter 3 movements*

We give a full report at the beginning, middle and end of each year as part of our performance reporting cycle. This report presents any movements to our risk environment in the interim. Details of movements are as follows:

**Reduced risk: National scale new infrastructure Impact - CO2 Pipeline**

High Likelihood – Medium Impact (**Amber risk rating**)

The Impact rating for this risk has been reduced from High to Medium, resulting in the overall Risk Rating reducing from Red to Amber. This is due to changes in the planned Peak Cluster project. Initially, the project proposed two pipelines which would be established within the Peak District, however the changes have resulted in this being reduced to one pipeline. While the installation of this infrastructure still poses a significant risk to the place of the Peak District National Park, and will require significant mitigating actions to reduce overall impact, the impact of the risk before mitigating action has been significantly reduced due to the reduction in the scale of the project within the National Park area. This risk will continue to be monitored, led by the Head of Planning, and will be reviewed in more detail the turn of year (end Q4).

*3.6.4 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary preparations*

Work continues at multiple levels to recognise and celebrate our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Since my last update to Members we have now installed our 75<sup>th</sup> logo on all our vehicles. We are also promoting an idea for bellringing on the day of the anniversary across churches in the national park. BBC Country File are due to film content celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> with a view to broadcasting on the Sunday following our actual birthday in April. The new visitor 'tube map' is nearing completion, ready for launching in this year's Welcome Guide. The special report we are commissioning along with the three other national parks celebrating their 75<sup>th</sup> this year is also progressing well. Launch of the report remains on track for 15<sup>th</sup> July, subject to Ministerial availability. Mary-Ann Ochota, the new Chair of the PLP, will host the launch event and debate for us in Bakewell. We have also secured Radio 4 Any Questions to come from Bakewell in August as part of recognising our anniversary. The launch of our Achieve Unlocked exhibition is on track for the opening of the Buxton International Festival on 10<sup>th</sup> July. The Aldern House garden party for staff, Members and volunteers remains on track for 22<sup>nd</sup> July, which our Staff Committee will be delivering for us and it is hoped that we can turn the whole of the front lawn at Aldern House into a restored habitat rich meadow as a lasting reminder of the anniversary.

**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 potential funding and grant settlement, which is still subject to confirmation. The report notes ongoing work to 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**

Phil Mulligan, CEO, Publication Date

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