

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 recent period has been relatively quiet in terms of government activity and announcements due to restrictions around the pre-election period.

That said, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026, which has extended the general power of competence for local authorities to National Park Authorities, received Royal Assent on 29 April. I have asked Angela to prepare a briefing for what this means for us in terms of what we can and can't now do and what options this may open up for us. I will send this on to Members when it is ready.

National planning issues

There is currently a proposal to revise the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We have fed into the consultation. The proposals represent the biggest changes to the framework since its creation in 2012. We are expecting the outcomes to be finalised 'in due course'.

There has been a consultation on proposed new Spatial Development Strategies (at a regional level). The government response is due 'in the summer'. It is recognised that the Peak District National Park is a special case as there will be six SDSs covering our area.

It is recognised that there are both economic headwinds stalling development and limitations in national infrastructure provision. There is a national ten-year infrastructure strategy that is updated every two years but there remains the need for cross-government coordination. Whilst the national park does not face the same development pressures as areas outside of the boundary, there are national infrastructure projects that do impact us – for example see the Peak Cluster below.

Defra and Natural England trials on improving alignment for nature recovery

There are a number of 'Pathfinder' and 'earned autonomy' pilots taking place involving several national park authorities, Natural England and Defra. There is also an uplands transformation project following the Hilary Cottam review on upland agriculture. There are also trials on trying to provide a single farm advice service within national parks. These trials are trying to gain better alignment across the family of Defra organisations involved in nature recovery and looking at large scale system engineering to bring in efficiencies. Although the PDNPA is not directly involved in many of these trials we are remaining engaged with and informed by what is going on elsewhere.

2.1.2 Protected Landscape Partnership (PLP) news

No update.

2.1.3 National Parks England (NPE) news

No update from NPE although it is worth noting the Yorkshire Dales NPA have now appointed James Blake as their new CEO. James is currently CEO of the YHA.

2.1.4 National Parks Partnership (NPP) news

No update

2.2 Local Government Reform

No update.

2.3 MP engagement

Nothing significant to note in this report.

2.4 EMCCA engagement

There has been no further news following the consultation on the Overnight Visitor Levy proposal which would give regional Mayors the power to collect a levy. My judgement is that the EMCCA Mayor's position has changed slightly from saying she would be looking to introduce such a levy, to one of waiting to see what is being proposed as no details are yet known as to how it would operate, how it would be set or collected or what would be the process for determining how funds are spent.

I joined the Mayor on the final leg of her 150 mile walk in a loop around the EMCCA region. This was an opportunity for me to press the case for the Ultra Light Rail project from Buxton to the end of the Monsal Trail and to talk about the possibility of the Authority helping deliver some of EMCCA's active travel ambitions.

2.5 Engagement

A successful CEO Roadshow took place at Wildboarclough with a strong turnout from local residents.

In the most recent Regional Leader's newsletter, you may have noticed a new layout. Our decision to switch to Mailchimp was to improve the experience of reading and engaging with the content which includes important updates and stories from our incredible teams. Thanks goes to Victoria Peel and the Comms team who helped streamline this workflow and provide much of the content. We hope you found the new format to be an improvement.

I was able to attend some of a Campaign for National Parks (CNP) trustees awayday as it was being held in the Peak District. This was a good chance to meet all their staff and trustees. Hannah Corran (Secretary of State Member of PDNPA) has been invited to attend CNP's Ministerial round table to discuss their new governance report.

Our Landscape Connections project is up and running. We are in a 'pre-development' phase and as part of this we have formed both a project Steering Group, made up of external partners, and an internal project Delivery Group, bringing together all the necessary staff that will be involved in delivery.

2.6 Peak Cluster position

The Authority is engaging in pre-application consultations with the Peak Cluster project in order to uphold and further our national park purposes where possible in the event that the project may ultimately be granted consent by the Secretary of State (SoS). As an Authority, we are not in a position to adopt an in-principle view on the project as a whole at this point in time. Once full details of the project are available, including an associated Environmental Statement, the Authority will be able to formulate a balanced view which will be expressed in a Local Impact Report (LIR) to be approved by Members. The LIR will then be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and the SoS for their consideration when determining the application. If Members are asked to comment on this project in their capacity as a Member of the Authority, then the above position should be cited. Any requests for comment or speaking can also be passed to me and I can get appropriate responses drafted.

2.7 Moorland fires

Since the last Authority meeting there have been a number of significant wildfires in the national park. Whenever these occur there is always an excellent response from staff and partners in working together to fight the fires. Our role in coordinating the Peak District National Park Fire Operations Group (FOG) is fundamental to this coordinated approach. However, due to the increase in frequency of wildfires it is worth reviewing our operational approach and abilities. This is something Rob Roddy, our new Head of Assets and Enterprise will be doing. It is sadly ironic that two days before the last major fire I was speaking at the premier of a new

film produced by Moors for the Future Partnership 'After the smoke clears'. The film follows the devastating wildfire in the Goyt valley two years ago. It is very well made and seeks to get important messages across in a sensitive way. The fifteen minute film can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/My9vQXDp2L8>

Our new seasonal Wildfire Ranger is operational and doing a fantastic job. This role is designed to give a visible presence in the evenings and at weekends and the role is also supported by a team of volunteer rangers. Our Ranger is an experienced ex-police officer and is doing great work in trying to progress enforcement of Public Space Protection Orders with the relevant authorities.

2.8 Internal issues

2.8.1 Funding news

We now have our Defra core grant in place along with an additional capital allocation similar in size to last year and needing to be spent within the year. As a one-off we have also been given an additional block of funding for this year that we can use for capital or revenue. This funding now means that because of the difficult cost reduction exercise we went through at the beginning of the year, we are now not expecting to have to make any further cuts over the next few years.

We also have significant project funding from government for access work, active travel, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and a new stream of funding (£830k), for the creation of wildlife rich habitats, which is being distributed and reported against via the FiPL process.

The Authority is also continuing to host the Landscape Observatory, which is being funded via the Protected Landscapes Partnership and Defra directly. Following funding of £500k last year we have now secured funding of a further £2m for this year to rapidly scale up the outputs of the project.

We are close to submission of our Morridge Hill Country Landscape Recovery bid (see other agenda items this Authority meeting) which, if successful, would secure significant long-term funding from a mix of public and private sources.

Moors for the Future Partnership is continuing to secure significant investment and is set to deliver its biggest ever programme of work in the year ahead. Congratulations to the team on continued delivery of restoration work and in diversifying sources of income, particularly from the private sector.

Other private sector funding recently secured includes a new five-year commitment from Tarmac to support Peak Park Conservation Volunteers (PPCV) with a doubling of the size of their donation. We are also in discussions with a major corporation about the potential launch of a new product which would involve the promotion of our cycle hire business. Increasing the performance of our cycle hire activities is an important part of our visitor centre transformation programme so it is pleasing to see that preparations are ongoing for the opening of our new cycle hire centre at Millers Dale. We are also in discussions with EMCCA about other possible developments for cycle hire to help deliver the Mayor's sustainable travel aspirations.

The income we earn from car parks remains strong and will be bolstered this year following enhancement works at a number of our sites. The introduction of charging for toilets at three of our sites has attracted an expected amount of media coverage and complaint by some. The toilets in question have all been refurbished to a higher standard than before and the income from charging will now go towards their cleaning and maintenance as well as helping generate funds to maintain the trails they serve.

We are on track to develop our National Lottery Heritage Fund bid for our North Lees Estate.

The Foundation's Earth Rise funding campaign to create our own tree nursery at our Ashford-in-the-Water depot was successful in getting sufficient funding for capital works and equipment so the project can now commence.

2.8.2 Governance

2.8.2.1 Member news

Following recent resignations and local election results, we now have the following vacancies in our Members:

- 1 x Staffordshire Moorlands DC
- 1 x Barnsley MBC
- 1 x Cheshire East Council
- 1 x Parish Member
- 1 x Secretary of State Member

Defra has confirmed that it will include our Secretary of State vacancy in their upcoming summer recruitment campaign.

Whilst the Authority has expressed interest in having another Boardroom Apprentice, we have been informed that there is no central government funding for the scheme at this point in time.

The annual Member tour will take place on 19th June. Members will visit recent carpark developments and investments in our camping sites, cycle hire and National Park Centres. This is a chance for Members to get a better understanding on how we have spent some of our recent additional capital funding and to see the implementation of recent planning decisions.

2.8.2.2 Staffing

There are no significant staffing changes at the moment although there is a significant amount of staff secondment and recruitment, particularly with the rapid scaling up of the Landscape Observatory.

The results of this year's staff and volunteer engagement surveys are being considered by the management team and a new Investors in People action plan is being developed. Overall the survey results were positive although there was an expected amount of concern around the recent restructure. To help with engagement I will be pushing for managers and leaders in the organisation to be more visible and for us to work harder on getting across to everyone all that we are doing and the impact we are having.

2.8.3 75th anniversary update

Excellent coverage was achieved surrounding our anniversary in April. This included BBC Breakfast TV, local BBC TV and radio, ITV Calendar and national news coverage. On the anniversary day we planted our Sycamore Gap sapling in the grounds of Aldern House, launched our new 'tube map' of the national park and we had church bells peeling out across 22 parishes, including a live 'down the line' of the bells being rung from Hathersage on Radio 4's World at One. On the Sunday we also had an excellent Country File episode from the national park featuring lots of our volunteers, staff and partners. Recognition and celebrations are continuing throughout the year with Ranger Walks, talks, Buxton International Festival, the Landscapes Unlocked photo exhibition, the launch of a locally brewed celebratory 75th ale, new picnic benches being installed at seven sites and the potential of a new millstone plinth on one of the road entrances into the national park. Our joint 75th anniversary report with the Lake District, Dartmoor and Eryri is almost complete, with plans for a national launch in Bakewell on 15th July. Plans are also well underway for the staff, volunteers and Member garden party on 22nd July at Aldern House. We will then be having a stall at the Chatsworth Country Fair to promote our 75th and sign-up new volunteers...and radio fans will not want to miss Radio 4's Any Questions coming from Bakewell on 21st August.

3. Proposals

3.1 None

4. Recommendations

1. For Members to note the report

5. Corporate Implications

- a. Legal - none
- b. Financial – the report gives updates on recent funding developments and 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 – none.
- 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

Responsible Officer, Job Title

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