

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

Dame Angela Eagle is now the Secretary of State for Defra.

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter is the Defra Minister with responsibility for protected landscapes. Minister Riddell-Carpenter chose the Peak District National Park as the first national park she visited in her new role. We hosted this visit and showed the Minister moorland restoration and science monitoring undertaken on Snake Summit by Moors for the Future Partnership, access improvements and volunteering at Brunt's Barn, nature enhancements and farm diversification funded by Farming in Protected Landscapes at Bubnell Cliff farm and the work of the Landscape Observatory.

Defra has just launched a new funding scheme for Farmer Collaboration, that we are planning to apply for.

Defra has responded to the recent drought with the following measures:

- More flexibility in environmental schemes, so farmers affected by drought can continue to receive payments and take practical steps to protect livestock, crops and land.
- An extra £50 million for the Sustainable Farming Incentive 2026.
- Action to make it easier to build reservoirs, including reducing barriers and updating planning guidance.
- Up to £15 million for on-farm reservoirs.
- Improved access to water during drought conditions, including Environment Agency support and simpler water access arrangements.

A revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been issued. The most relevant points for national parks include:

- Changes to fast-track quality homes in well-connected areas (close to stations), making better use of underdeveloped land around stations - there will be a default 'yes' for homes within reasonable walking distance of well-connected stations, alongside new minimum expectations for how much housing should be built in these areas.
- Making it easier for farmers and rural businesses to deliver reservoirs, greenhouses, polytunnels and farm shops.
- Providing clearer national policies for both plan-making and decision-making, reducing reliance on subjective judgement and limiting duplication between local and national policy. It means that conflicting local policies will carry less weight where they are inconsistent with national decision-making policies.
- Stronger in-principle support for development, meaning a more explicit presumption in favour of development in sustainable locations, including development within settlements.
- Streamlining decision-making by aiming to make planning decisions faster and more proportionate.
- Stronger support for growth and infrastructure.

There is a new initiative from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) putting young people's voices at the heart of climate and nature policy. They are looking to establish a panel of passionate young people from across the UK who want to help shape the future of climate and nature policy, share their views, and inspire wider action. The panel will bring together young people aged 16 to 25 from across the UK, representing a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives to:

- provide insight and advice to government on climate and nature policies
- support better engagement with young people
- strengthen collaboration between different generations on climate and nature issues
- help amplify youth voices and action across the UK

2.1.2 Protected Landscape Partnership (PLP) news

No update

2.1.3 National Parks England (NPE) news

No update

2.1.4 National Parks Partnership (NPP) news

NPP will be holding its annual Big Ideas Forum (9-10 Nov). Key areas of focus will be brand (with a proposed MOU on brand and reputation), Big Bounce Back (proposed fundraising campaign), corporate volunteering (how to have a consistent offer across NPAs) and NPUK's three-year comms plan.

NPP is still in the process of appointing a new development manager to lead on income generation with a view to growing beyond corporate partnerships and green finance into philanthropy.

A proposed new clothing deal is still being developed. PDNPA is supportive of the proposed sponsorship deal subject to necessary approvals.

2.2 Natural England news

Neil Hornby is starting as CEO on 1 October, he will be replacing Marion Spain.

Our local nature team joined together with regional NE staff to hold a strategic meeting covering local issues. This was important as there have been staff changes on both sides. These meetings will now take place every six months.

2.3 Local Government Reorganisation

A decision had been taken to progress with local government reorganisation in Derbyshire with the creation of two unitary Authorities covering north and south of the county. This would involve the disestablishment of borough and district councils. Plans had been underway for setting out the orders for such a change and laying them before Parliament, however it has just been announced that the government are putting this reorganisation of local government on hold, pending a review.

2.4 MP engagement

Nothing significant to note in this report.

2.5 EMCCA engagement

Our regional mayor Clare Ward has just been appointed as the Chair of the national umbrella group of mayors.

The government has confirmed some details for the proposed Overnight Visitor Levy. The levy will be a percentage of the cost of the accommodation rather than a flat fee. It is yet to be confirmed whether the regional mayor will exempt any types of accommodation. We also don't know the percentage to be charged but all Labour mayors have committed to capping any charge at 5%. We are now seeking engagement with the mayor over how funds should be distributed and what initiatives they could support that help deliver the national park management plan.

2.6 Engagement

By the time of the Authority meeting there will have been a CEO Roadshow for parishes. This is an innovation, to hold an online CEO Roadshow aimed not at a particular village but for all parishes to attend. There is also a Bakewell CEO Roadshow coming up on 22 October at the Town Hall

I have been attending a number of engagement events including a new initiative out of our Castleton National Park Centre. We are working with Moors for the Future Partnership to hold an engagement event for the public based on moorland restoration which will involve talks and presentations followed by a Ranger lead walk to discuss management issues on site. This is part of our programme of animating the new space at the National Park Centre before a new retail tenant is secured. We also used the space to hold a public screening of the Peoples Emergency Briefing film which was well attended and prompted an inspiring discussion about action that people could take to help address the climate crisis.

By the time of the Authority meeting, I will have attended our annual volunteer engagement day, which we are holding at Chatsworth House this year. I was also at Chatsworth for the Country Fair where we were given a stall in the Chatsworth Village to engage the public around volunteering opportunities in the national park.

Other recent engagement activities included participating in the Hope Valley Climate Action Mini Switzerland launch event in Edale and attending the 90th birthday celebration for Hathersage Lido.

By the time of the Authority meeting I will have attended, along with the Chair and Deputy, the biannual National Parks UK conference, which is being held in the Cairngorms National Park.

2.7 NGO engagement

This summer we hosted the annual retreat of English NPA CEOs and CEOs/leaders from major landholding environmental NGOs. This year the retreat included National Parks England, the Campaign for National Parks and Natural England. The purpose of the retreat is to build understanding and better working relationships and identify issues that would benefit from a joint response. The intention is to now produce a joint vision between English national parks and major environmental NGOs. As part of the retreat, we visited Haddon Hall to hear about estate-wide rewilding and how a significant landowner in the national park is taking initiative and delivering nature enhancements.

To compliment the gathering of national NGO leaders, I organised a retreat for local environmental NGOs and Natural England, following a similar event two years ago. There have been significant personnel changes at the Authority in the area of nature recovery and with a number of partner organisations. The retreat was an excellent opportunity to build relationships and identify joint priorities.

I recently attended the Wild Summit in Bristol, which is an annual event organised by Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) as a way of bringing practitioners, activists, academics and policy makers together. The event was attended by Minister Riddell-Carpenter and included a key note address by Zack Polanski.

The Campaign for National Parks has launched its annual National Parks Protectors Awards, for which there will be a parliamentary reception in the autumn.

2.8 Wildfires

We have experienced one of the worst summers on record for wildfires in the national park. Our staff were exceptionally busy in fighting fires, undertaking closers of Access Land and ongoing engagement work. We have had a very effective Wildfire Engagement Ranger post this year, funded in part by the British Mountaineering Council, and both Wildfire Engagement casuals working on weekend evenings and a team of wildfire volunteers. Our staff have put in an exceptional effort, working for days on end on the frontline of helping fight fires. This has put both a strain on them and on our equipment. We now need to urgently review our equipment provision and undertake repairs and new procurement. We also need more people trained to use and move some of our specialist kit as this proved vital in assisting the Fire and Rescue Service.

We are undertaking a number of 'end of season' reviews and participating in the reviews being carried out by other organisations. We are also calling on partners (local authority and police) to undertake an enforcement 'blitz' around the existing Public Space Protection Orders that ban fires, BBQs, naked flames etc. There is support for this approach as a way of highlighting the existence of PSPOs and publicising a number of prosecution cases to act as a deterrent. Given where we are in the year, this is something we will plan to deliver at the start of next wildfire season.

We are also 'rebooting' of the Fire Operations Group (FOG) with a clear focus on operational responses to fire. In recent years the remit and membership of the group had expanded to include a wider range of issues. We will take these other issues forward with the creation of a Prevention of Wildfire Group (POW) to focus on communications and engagement, and by using our existing moorland managers group to focus on land management for wildfire prevention.

We saw a positive response from government over wildfires this summer with a package of measures that included:

- A temporary ban on disposable BBQs
- Emergency funding for fire and rescue services facing the greatest operational pressures
- A national wildfire summit to strengthen future preparedness and consider additional capabilities

At a national level there is an emerging National Parks UK position statement on wildfires and there will be a workshop on wildfires at the National Parks UK conference in the Cairngorms. NPE is also working with the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for national parks on trying to make the ban on disposable BBQs permanent.

I have also just been informed that representatives from our Ranger Service and our Wildfire Engagement Officer have been invited to a 'thank you' reception with the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street, in recognition of all the work undertaken this year on wildfires.

2.9 Internal issues

2.9.1 Funding news

Our Defra grant agreement has now been signed and funds transferred.

We are working through our capital programme to take advantage of additional one-off capital grants from Defra. We still have a number of potential capital acquisitions to explore with the aim of trying to increase future revenue streams.

The Landscape Observatory (LO) team is now fully complete and working from Aldern House. Discussions are ongoing to try and secure longer-term funding for the LO as currently funding is only being made available on an annual basis.

Our Morridge Hill Country Landscape Recovery bid has been submitted and we are undertaking validation work with Defra. It is not yet clear when we will know the outcome of the bid but it is not expected until towards the end of 2027. It is hoped that Defra will maintain funding for core project staff during this time.

We have now submitted our funding proposal to National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) for our North Lees Estate. The funding is for an initial project development phase. We expect to hear in the next few months.

Our NLHF funded Landscape Connections project pre-development phase continues with progress reporting to NLHF being received positively.

The National Lottery Community Fund has launched a call for evidence which we will be contributing to via an NPE response.

The Peak District National Park Foundation is undergoing some staffing changes and plans are in place to ensure continuity of delivery and the opportunity for further development. The Foundation continues to deliver excellent projects and continues to grow in turnover.

We delivered our partnership with Skoda over the summer which provided funding for us to provide a week of free cycle hire to families at the start of the holidays. The week of cycle hire at Parsley Hay was fully booked out with over 700 people experiencing cycling on the Tissington and High Peak Trails for free. The partnership provoked significant media coverage and allowed us to promote our cycle hire services and make the case for more sustainable government funding for national parks. There was a small vocal opposition to the partnership, some of which was based on the misunderstanding that we had officially changed the name of the national park and that we had erected permanent new signage when there were in fact only six signs installed for a total of seven days. Social media posts also revealed significant support for this short creative campaign to raise awareness and generate unrestricted funds.

Carpark income remains positive thanks to carparking enhancements and better enforcement. We are still actively talking to partners about the potential to create further carparking capacity in hotspots or the potential transfer of car park ownership to help deliver the national park's management plan objectives. Income from charging for toilets is lower than expected in some locations but still represents an important new unrestricted income stream that has not provoked much adverse reaction.

I recently visited Tarmac and Buxton Lime to showcase the work we are achieving through their funding of our Peak Park Conservation Volunteers (PPCV). Not only does the partnership help fund our PPCV staff, it also provides PPCV with significant corporate volunteering opportunities, which all the staff at Tarmac and Buxton Lime greatly value.

2.9.2 Governance

We are awaiting the findings of the report by the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) at the University of Gloucestershire (CCRI), which Defra commissioned into soft governance (culture, behaviour and values). There is likely to be an overlap between this set of recommendations and those in the Campaign for National Parks recent report into governance. We expect NPE to lead on identifying priorities and clusters of actions across both reports.

Opportunities for changes to 'hard governance' (size and composition of boards) may be possible if there are going to have to be legislative changes associated with Local Government Reorganisation, should the current pause on this process be lifted. The Chair will be working with Members on a position the Authority takes on this, however, at the time of writing, it has just been announced that the government are putting LGR on hold, subject to a review.

There has been no change in our Members since the last Authority meeting. At the time of writing we do not yet know the outcome of the recent recruitment process for a new Secretary of State Member.

2.9.3 Staffing

Significant staff appointments since the last Authority meeting include:

- Katie Thomas as Strategy and Performance Manager. Katie will be leading the development of our next National Park Management Plan.
- Hayden Bridgeman as Ranger Team Manager.

2.9.4 75th anniversary update

The launch of our joint 75th anniversary report with the Lake District, Dartmoor and Eryri was a great success at Aldern House on 15th July. The event attracted national attendance and coverage, with the now departed Minister for national parks, Mary Creagh, giving a rousing keynote address. The event was an opportunity for National Parks England to set out a short vision document on the future of national parks.

Our talks at the Buxton International Festival were sold out and the small exhibition, Landscapes Unlocked, attracted a significant audience throughout the festival period. A larger version of the exhibition is now installed in our Bakewell National Park Centre and it will be there for the rest of the year.

The staff, volunteers and Member garden party for the anniversary was blessed with good weather and over 200 people attended to connect (and reconnect in the case of some long serving retired members of staff) and celebrate. Our programme of celebrations this year ended with the official launch of Norther Rail's 'Peak District 75' train from Manchester Piccadilly and the live broadcast of BBC Radio 4's Any Questions? which went out from a packed Medway Centre in Bakewell.

3. Proposals

3.1 None

4. Recommendations

- 1. For Members to note the report**
- 2. That Members note the appointment of Rob Roddy to the role of Head of Assets and Enterprise pursuant to delegation 7.A-5 (a) and (b) of Standing Orders.**

5. Corporate Implications

- a. Legal - none
- b. Financial – the report gives updates on recent funding developments.
- c. National Park Management Plan and Authority Plan – the report covers some of the work that is helping deliver the NPMP.
- d. Risk Management – there is a risk around the delay in getting our Defra grant agreement signed off and some risks stemming from the new terms and conditions we are likely to have to accept.
- 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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