



Annual Review

2001 - 2002

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Working in partnership to sustain a living landscape

www.nnpa.org.uk

Chairman's Introduction

We will all remember 2001 for the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease. We were forcibly reminded that the economy of many rural areas is narrowly based and very vulnerable. We are determined to alter the way we work so that our activity strengthens the rural economy and we have set this out in a new Management Plan.

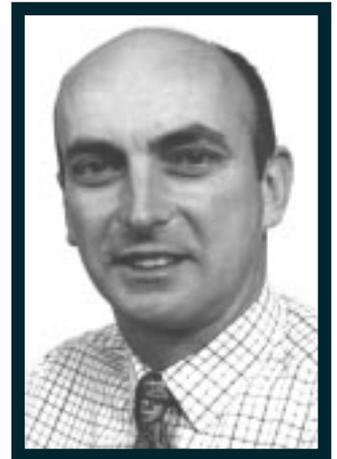
Every commentator agrees that there needs to be a radical overhaul of rural policy in general. We have anticipated much of the new thinking in our new 'Vision Statement' which guides the Management Plan. It puts the economy and community at the heart of our work:

VISION STATEMENT

Northumberland National Park Authority will be proactive, innovative and forward looking, working towards a National Park with thriving communities and a sustainable economy grounded in the special qualities, including a richness of cultural heritage and biodiversity, a true sense of tranquillity and a distinct character associated with a living, working landscape, in which everyone has an opportunity to understand, enjoy and contribute to those special qualities.

What holds our vision together is the appeal of our superb countryside, a major economic asset for tourism but also a key attraction for many other businesses that will breathe life into local communities. An economy and community dependent largely on a narrow base of farming and tourism would remain vulnerable, so I

believe that the Authority and those communities have to be open to change. Change, not for its own sake, but in order to build a new economy, more diverse, but still grounded in the special qualities of the place.



John Riddle
Chairman

We will work with others, especially the local communities, to prepare Area Action Plans and we will work in 'joined-up' ways to achieve a more secure future for the communities. We will be sympathetic to new development that is not in conflict with the special qualities and especially if it delivers positive environmental gain. We will review our planning policies to see what the scope is for greater flexibility within the limits of national and regional planning policy.

In October 2001 the Secretary of State announced that he was giving the go-ahead to the major developments at the Otterburn Training Area. While we regret that exceptional need required the Minister to allow these developments to proceed, the undertakings and conditions will mean a new management regime with the MoD, ourselves and others sharing the stewardship of this extraordinary place. Also, there will be a significant investment in conservation and access which will go a long way to balance the environmental impact.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Riddle". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Chief Executive's Commentary

Dealing with Foot and Mouth disease effectively closed the National Park. The effect was dramatic and lasted far longer than anyone anticipated. Closing the National Park was easily done. Within hours of confirmation of the first Northumberland case we had posted signs discouraging access and we closed all our sites as a precautionary measure. A few days later the official closures followed. Re-opening the countryside proved very difficult because of the extreme official reluctance to relax controls, with all the consequences for the rural economy that are now familiar.



We were right to take precautions at the start of the outbreak. We were criticised for not re-opening the Once Brewed Visitor Centre sooner. I could say that we were hampered by the official procedure, which is true, but I am prepared to accept the criticism.

Our walks and events programmes were revised four times to assist with revitalising the countryside later in the summer. Our conservation programmes were curtailed because we could not get onto any farm land until late in the year. The final losses to us are hard to calculate, but they hardly compare to those of family run businesses in farming and tourism.

Helping With the Recovery

We now have to look to the recovery. We are not an economic development agency, of course, but the work we are doing, especially on the Land Management Initiative (LMI) and

the People and Place Project is intended to work towards the creation of the “new economy, grounded in the special qualities of the area.” Research for the LMI is of national importance. Among the studies has been work with focus groups.



Graham Taylor

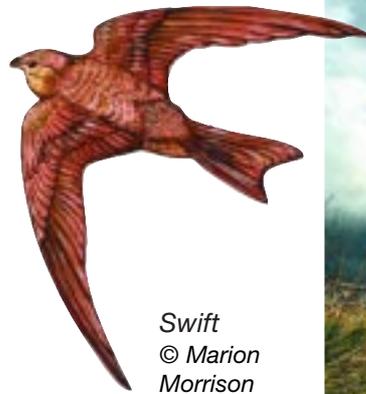
Regardless of whether the people attending were urban or rural they shared similar attitudes. They showed an acceptance of the need for change and the possibility of the creation of new rural landscapes. Most wished to see the countryside continue to be a living landscape, although that landscape might be managed very differently.

A New Management Plan

This was the year when the Authority set a new direction in its work through the National Park Management Plan. Making that a reality starts immediately. As the year drew to an end, Alun Michael MP, Minister for Rural Affairs, announced that he intended to establish a fund in each National Park to encourage sustainable development projects. We look forward to hearing details and establishing the community networks to develop new projects. We also plan to improve our information services using new money from the Government for “Implementing Electronic Government”. This will bring practical benefits to all our communities, customers and partners. These are exciting developments.

Fredden Hill, Wooler: The final removal of this conifer plantation was completed this year. Planted between 1960 - 1980 the trees were of poor economic value and intrusive in the wild, open landscape of the Cheviots. Felling began in 1999 and the final phase of grinding the tree stumps has been completed. Heather seedlings have begun to colonise. This project has been grant aided by the NPA and will assist in achieving our biodiversity targets of increasing the area of upland heath.

Thirlwall Castle
© Keith Paisley

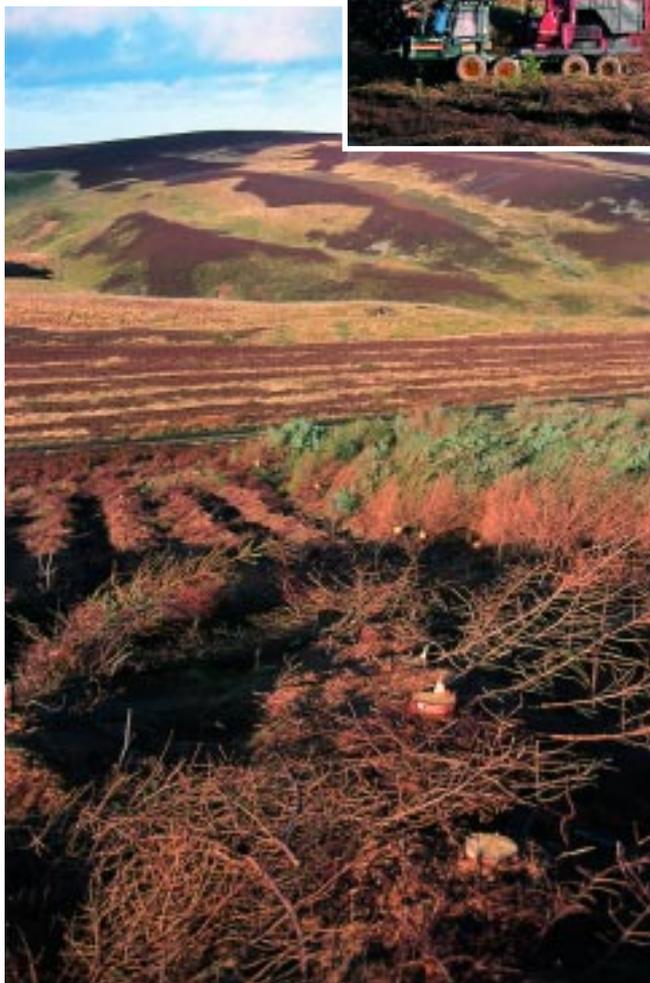


Swift
© Marion Morrison



Conifer Removal

Fredden Hill



The Border Mires: A collection of peat bogs in Cumbria and Northumberland which are recognised as being the best outside the flow country in Scotland. In the past many bogs, or mires, have had drainage ditches, or grips, dug across them to improve the land for agriculture or forestry.

The Border Mires Active Blanket Bog Rehabilitation Project is an EU LIFE project that aims to reverse some of these effects. This partnership is in its final year, with approximately 150 hectares of mature and seedling conifers cleared from bogs, 2,500 dams installed to block ditches and 100 wader pools created.



Sundew

Threestone Burn Plantation: As part of the Tweed Heritage Lottery project, the aim is to restore 5ha of spruce plantation to open habitats. This will help otters, dragonflies, water shrew, black grouse and bog plants.



Cranberry
© Marion Morrison



Repointing at Thirlwall

*Iron Age Hillfort at Ring Chesters, College Valley
© Tim Gates*

Discovering our Hillfort Heritage: Important survey, conservation and interpretive work was completed this year as the £0.7 million DoHH project wrestled with its own tight timetable and the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease. Detailed surveys of several Cheviot prehistoric landscapes were completed, and management agreements were concluded covering a further 4 hillforts within their surrounding archaeological landscapes. An exhibition focusing on the project has been installed at the Cheviot Centre in Wooler. Funding is now being sought for Phase II of the project, which should enable more exciting research and interpretive work to continue until summer 2004.



*Prince Charles opening the Cheviot Centre, Wooler
© Tweeddale Press Group*

Bus AD122



Thirlwall Castle: A £0.5million project was completed, funded by the European Union, Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage to conserve and interpret the dramatic ruins of a 14th century hall house, built largely of stone plundered from Hadrian's Wall. This complex project included conservation work in the adjacent woodland and the protection of bat roosts and swift nesting sites within the walls of the castle. The site, which sits on both the Hadrian's Wall and Pennine Way National Trails, is now open to the public.



Hadrian's Wall Bus: Route AD122 has provided a particularly valuable service to visitors and residents in this difficult year. Passenger numbers were half those of previous years yet it still carried 7,200 people. Financial and staff resources achieved with Single Regeneration Budget funding, increased the marketing and guiding and provided new livery. Special promotions such as 'kids free on Mondays' proved popular. In November 2001, the Service was 'Highly Commended' in the National Bus Industry Awards 'Buses for Pleasure' category.

Bridging the Border: The Project Officer and the Northern Area Rangers have completed a successful year working with local schools to develop the use of school grounds as an outdoor learning resource. A package of activities was delivered in each of the four seasons, for pupils to increase their understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and culminated in a week of educational events in the Breamish valley.



Pupils at Norham School



The new bridge at Hareshaw Linn



Hareshaw Linn:

The last stages of the project were completed once Foot and Mouth restrictions were lifted. Work included a new site leaflet, installation of two interpretative panels, ongoing footpath surfacing work and the construction of a new bridge, designed by Keith Barrett.



People and Place: The project works with individuals, groups and tourism businesses taking forward ideas at a local level and focusing on tourism as one way of encouraging rural regeneration. Examples this year include:

- Falstone Riverside Trail.
- Support for Rothbury Music Festival.
- Wooler.org website - input into development of a community based website.
- Stainedglass window in Holystone Church.
- Harbottle School playground.



Finance

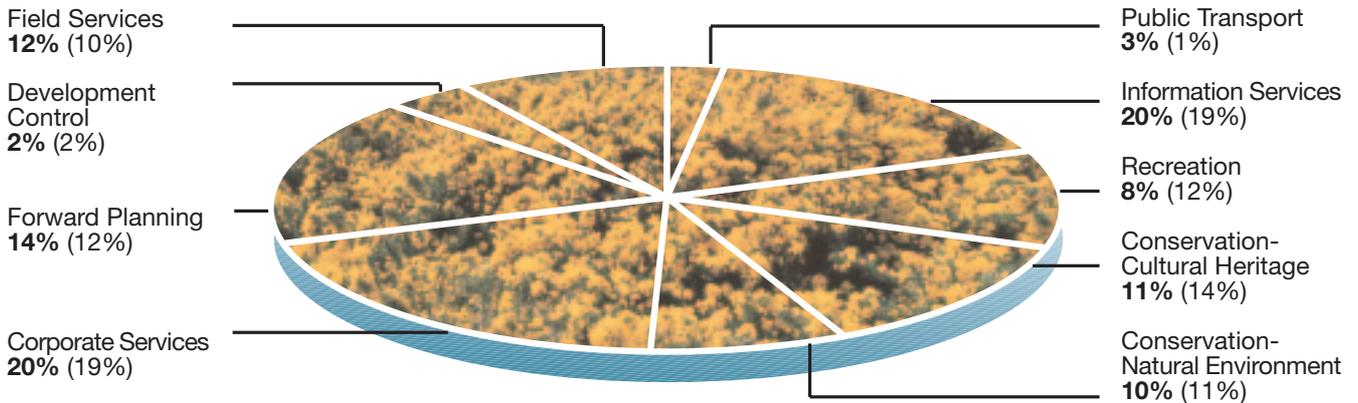
Gross expenditure was slightly lower than the previous year. Core government grant and council levies accounted for 58% of income. The Authority was very active in 2001/02, managing a large number of externally financed projects. £1.2 million of external grant aided funds were applied to the overall programme of works.

The actual revenue accounts show a surplus (income less expenditure) of £73,385 but this masks the fact that the Authority has used £80,000 of its capital reserves to finance the budget. This includes additional costs resulting from the effects of Foot and Mouth Disease, and litigation concerning public access.

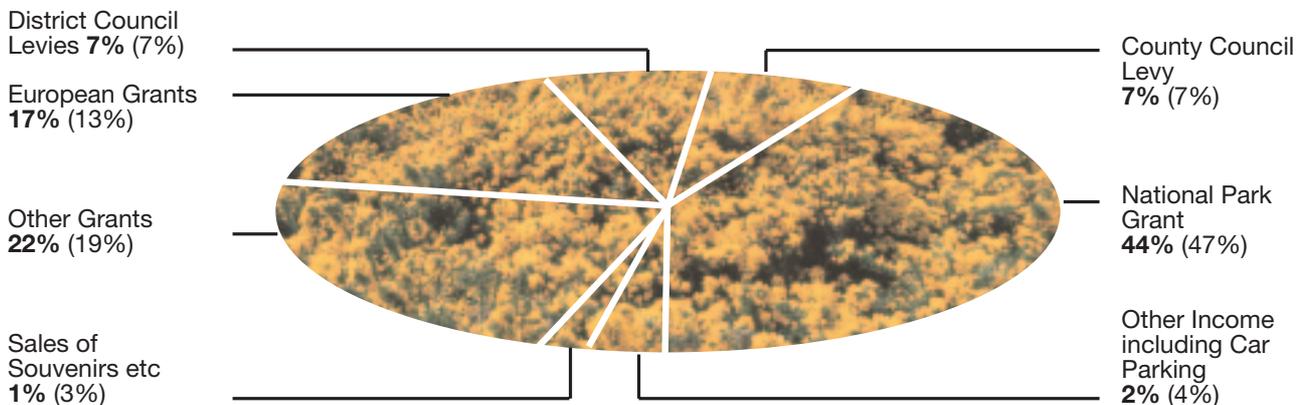
The financial impact of the effects of Foot and Mouth Disease can also be seen from the dramatic reduction in income from sales of souvenirs and other income (including car parking). Car parks were closed for most of the year and visits to the National Park were dramatically down. During the year the Authority made substantial cutbacks to contain the financial impacts of Foot and Mouth Disease and the legal case to the period 2001/02.

The very welcome additional core government funds in 2002/03 will assist the Authority in recovering from the non-financial impacts of Foot and Mouth Disease such as the loss of visitors and whole work programmes. We start the new year with fresh optimism.

Total Spending 2001/02: £3,197,604 (2000/01: £3,257,752)



Income Sources 2001/02: £3,270,989 (2000/01: £2,982,699)



Performance Review

Northumberland National Park Authority has a legal duty to comply with new Best Value legislation and we aim to make significant improvements to our services. We will:

- Produce an annual Best Value Performance Plan; and
- Review all our services over the next five years, for inspection by the Audit Commission.

We will use Best Value as a tool to make significant improvements to our services focussed on delivering the Vision for the National Park. It will ensure that our services are delivered in an efficient and economical manner.

The Authority has completed two service reviews. The first was a trial review of planning services and the second was a full review of visitor services. Both the improvement plan and inspection by the Audit Commission were delayed due to the effects of Foot and Mouth Disease. The improvement plan has been fully financed as part of the generous 2002/03 budget settlement and the results of the inspection will be known by Autumn 2002.

The main improvements will include:

- Closing ineffective Information Points and developing new ones;
- Increasing the accessibility of Visitor Centres for people with disabilities;
- Introducing e-mail and internet access to the Visitor Centres;
- Establishing an annual tourism forum;
- Increasing visits to Visitor Centres by approximately 20%;
- Gaining a 95% effectiveness rating for the service; and
- Developing multi-use facilities at the Visitor Centres with major improvement at the Rothbury and Once Brewed (Hadrian's Wall) Visitor Centres.

The Authority sets annual improvement targets for all its services in the Best Value Performance Plan. The targets include both local ones specific to the aims of Northumberland National Park Authority and national targets where comparisons can be made with other councils. There are also 'family' comparisons with other National Park Authorities. Performance in 2001/02 was badly hit by Foot and Mouth Disease curtailing work in the field and reducing the number of visitors.

In addition to these annual core targets the Authority has set 5-year targets including:

- Completing all the species action plans in the local biodiversity action plan;
- Increasing the area of the National Park with open access for the public from 19% to 63%;
- Nearly doubling the number of visitors using public transport from 6% to 11%;
- Maintaining a 95% effectiveness rating for our visitor, education and interpretation services;
- Maintaining the the average time taken to process planning applications at 8 weeks; and
- Ensuring that all the Authority's public buildings are suitable for disabled people.

These are ambitious targets which will indicate how well the Authority is delivering on its Vision Statement. The achievement of these targets will be dependent on effective working within the Authority and with our partners. The most resource intensive targets, such as increased open access, will only be achieved if government implements a fairer allocation of funding to Northumberland National Park Authority than has been the case for the past 25 years.

Best Value

Key Targets Target met ■ Target not met ■ (to greater or lesser degree)	2000/01 Performance	2001/02 Target	2001/02 Performance	2002/03 Target	5 year Target
Area of land brought into 'good management' during the year ■	not measured	6,300ha	not measured	not set	not set
Area of new woodland ■■	91ha	33ha	96ha	60ha	1,000ha
% of Biodiversity Action Plans completed ■■	not measured	80%	48%	84%	100%
Area of archaeological landscape surveyed ■■■	21,076ha	21,000ha	28ha	200ha	30,000ha
No. of historic sites newly opened to the public with site interpretation ■■■	0	10	0	10	24
% of rights of way which are easy to use ■	70%	73%	83%	73%	90%
Visitor Centre effectiveness rating	new	new	83%	86%	95%
User satisfaction with Interpretive & Visitor Services ■	97%	99%	94%	95%	95%
No. of passengers using the Hadrian's Wall Bus ■■	14,383	15,000	7,215	12,000	20,000
No. of volunteer days supported ■	746	1,093	1,103	1,250	1,700
Average time to determine Planning Applications ■	10½ weeks	10 weeks	8 weeks	8 weeks	8 weeks
Planning score against best practice ■■■	56%	66%	30%	not set	not set
% of invoices paid within 30 days ■	82%	97.5%	95%	100%	100%
No. of working days lost due to sickness ■■	6 days	5 days	3.4 days	4 days	3 days
Average time to answer letters from the public ■■	1 day	1 day	3.8 days	2 days	2 days

Membership of Northumberland

Chairman



John Riddle

Deputy Chairman

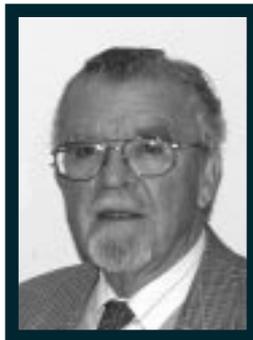


Peter Forrester

Local Authority
Appointees:
**Northumberland
County Council**



*Robert Arckless
to May 2002*



Albert Davidson



Sarah Davidson



Robert Parker



Lawrence Thompson



*Tony Williamson
from May 2002*

Secretary
of State
Appointees:
**Parish
Councillors**



*Graham Dixon
Coquetdale Group*



*Clive Emerson
N. Tyne & Redesdale Group*



*Philip Straker
Hadrian's Wall Group*



*John Wilson
Glendale Group*

**Local Authority
Appointees:
Berwick upon
Tweed Borough
Council**

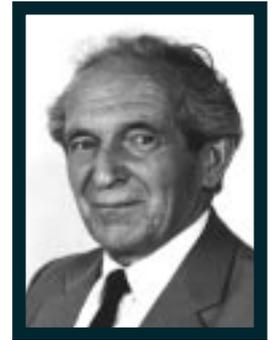


Scott Weightman

**Local Authority
Appointees:
Alnwick District
Council**



Sue Bolam



Richard Elliott

**Local Authority
Appointees:
Tynedale Council**



Brian Corbett



Flora Hewitson



Michael Walton

**Secretary of
State
Appointees:
Representing
the wider
public
interest**



Adrian Hinchcliffe



Eddie Idle

**Independent
Member of
Standards
Committee:
Representing
the wider
public
interest**



Gordon Hay



*Rachel Penn
from April 2002*



Frances Rowe



John Vaughan

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and also to:

**Northumberland Archaeological Group
Lilburn Estate
RAF Spadeadam
Cumbria County Council**



The National Park Authorities have formed an Association (ANPA) which speaks for them to government and its agencies. ANPA promotes collaboration and provides a focus for their corporate international activity.



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