



Annual Review

2002 - 2003

NORTHUMBERLAND NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Working in partnership to sustain a living landscape

www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk

Chairman's Introduction

This year good foundations have been laid for an exciting future. New initiatives are taking shape and we have been given a vote of confidence by government.



John Riddle

Last year, Foot and Mouth Disease focussed the attention of many branches of government on rural issues. It reminded us how interdependant town and country are and how our rural economies are vulnerable. Our uplands are part of the appeal of this region and the environment and the distinctive culture and way of life can be regarded as key social and economic assets, locally and regionally.

This has added impetus to our own determination to change the way we work. Our new National Park Management Plan sets out our approach; the best way to achieve National Park purposes is by putting the economy and community at the heart of everything we do.



These are the core principles of sustainable development. The Rural Affairs Minister, Alun Michael, MP, has granted all National Parks special funding in the form of the 'Sustainable Development Fund' (SDF). It has to be spent through, or in association with, communities. We regard this as a great and very practical vote of confidence in our relevance to the rural regeneration agenda. Mr Michael also

announced the results of a review of National Park Authorities in England which also saw us playing our part in the wider regeneration of our local rural areas and we have been keen to act as advocate for the problems and opportunities of our particularly remote area.

This year we have reorganised our budgets, breaking our work down into action areas. In these areas we work with the local strategic partnerships to enable people to identify projects that help to regenerate their economy and communities using their natural and cultural assets. We have committed staff time to help implement the Northumberland Cultural Strategy where we have expertise in traditional music and literature. We have successfully attracted around £240,000 of the resources of ONE North East for a regional pilot project in integrated rural development in Upper Coquetdale. We have facilitated over half the farmland in the National Park into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. We have embarked on a new proactive approach to our role in tourism, and we plan to embark on new projects to promote training in traditional rural skills.

We hosted the Annual Conference of National Park Authorities in September 2002. Our many friends in the region and locally helped to make it so successful. It was a show case for the region and the National Park. We were touched by the many comments about the welcome delegates received and the beauty and interest of the County. Our thanks to the many sponsors and speakers, too numerous to mention.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Riddle'.

Attention Moves from the Centre to the Regions

We recognise a move to regionalise and join up decision making. Staff of the National Park Authority have contributed to numerous reviews and action plans - particularly the North East Rural Action Plan. Already we promote schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and the Rural Enterprise Scheme. The aim is to help our farming and other communities to adjust to change and shape a future in ways which sustain the National Park as well as their businesses.

Community, Economy and Environment

Helping communities address change is our approach to ensuring the achievement of our new vision, of a National Park with a thriving community and economy, rooted in the special qualities of the Park.

A 'planning for real' training programme we ran for ourselves and members of the community will help us to work with the communities to create a shared vision for their area. This will be reflected in the planning policies in our next local development plan.

Italian Inspiration

We have been inspired by the Italian National Parks in the Apennine Region that aim to support a new environmental and cultural economy. We have adapted some of their ideas in Northumberland as the changes at Rothbury National Park Centre demonstrate. We are developing our services so that a more seamless delivery of rural policy can be enjoyed by local businesses and community interests.

Change in the Landscape

We expect that the economic changes resulting from changes in rural policy will also lead to change in the landscape. We have evidence of that already where one woodland planting scheme was locally controversial because of the scale of landscape change. We believe that the final scheme strikes a sound balance, and in the coming year, we will discuss with local people and specialist interests the desirable direction and pace of change, as part of our action area and local plan work.



Graham Taylor

Our Cultural Assets are Priceless

One of our biggest built environment projects was launched at a well attended event where local people took centre stage. Thirlwall Castle, within a few metres of the new Hadrian's Wall and Pennine Way National Trails has been stabilised, the public have been given access for the first time and there is thought provoking interpretation. It is a universally applauded achievement that has received a commendation from the Civic Society it runs, one of the largest and most respected environmental design award schemes in Europe, which focuses not only on design excellence but also on the relationship between the environment and the community in which they are set.

Walltown: Improved accessibility for all has been achieved through partnership with Hadrian's Wall Tourism Partnership and Newcastle City Council and funding from the Countryside Agency. Improvements include easy access at the site, installation of CCTV, a new information leaflet and the establishment of a 'Green Transport' point.

Celebrating Biodiversity: Awareness of heather moorland, an internationally important habitat widespread within Northumberland National Park, was raised with events. These included guided walks and a heather weekend involving local bee keepers and children's activities and the chance to create a moorland soundscape.



Heather moorland event

The signing of the ANPA/ English Nature Joint Action Plan: Tony Laws, the EN Northumbria Team Manager and the National Park Chairman, John Riddle, are seen signing the Local Joint Action Plan, which commits both organisations to close working for the benefit of biodiversity.



New Native woodland: The final year of the Forestry Commission's New Native Woodland Scheme saw a record level of applications. Schemes for planting more than 200 hectares of new native woodland were approved and will be spread over the next 2 financial years.



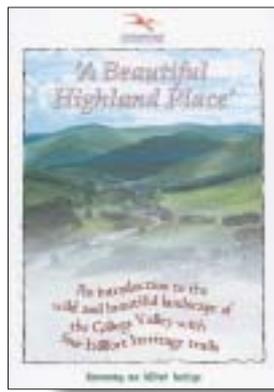
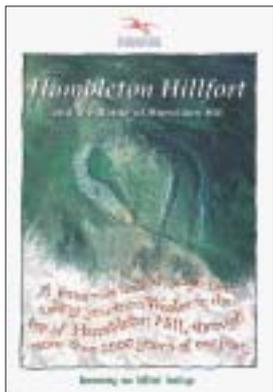
Signing the Local Joint Action Plan



Pond Dipping at Walltown



Men working at Walltown



Discovering Our Hillfort Heritage: The successful completion of phase I of the project included a wide ranging interpretive programme of panels, self guided trail publications and leaflets.

Sustainable Development Fund: £125,000 of grant aid has been available to business initiatives and community projects in keeping with the special qualities of the National Park. Participation has been excellent and communities have been committing to the opportunities. These include:



Art inspired by the National Park

- An exhibition of art inspired by the National Park in a local gallery, involving school children and artists;
- Assisting Tynedale Sports Council to underpin local sports clubs, for community health;
- A training programme on the importance of “green” tourism along Hadrian’s Wall.

Cheviot Valleys Habitat Improvements

Scheme: The National Park Authority, together with the Tweed Rivers Heritage Lottery Project, 8 participating landowners and many volunteers, has delivered huge benefits to a wide range of wetland habitats over the last three years.

- 15 km of fencing has enclosed 127ha of wet native woodland and riverside grassland benefiting Otter, Snipe and Ringlet Butterfly;
- Over 1.5 km of land drains have been blocked and 14 pools excavated to encourage amphibians and dragonflies;
- 6.5ha of Spruce trees were prematurely felled and 5600 native trees planted in streamside areas to aid Black Grouse.

Bats and the Planning Process: The National Park Authority has protected bats by giving advice on development or the timing of work to avoid certain seasons. As a result of raising the plight of bats in this way, a number of householders have encouraged bats to their homes.

Bridging the Border Education Project:

This enabled over 90 schools and the wider community to understand the rich natural and cultural heritage of the River Tweed and to share their experiences with each other across the Scottish border. The imaginative and high quality resources produced by the project were celebrated in February, including:

- A story sack for reading skills;
- A Roman pack for history;
- A video of Cheviot summit and a river habitat pack and video for geography.



Salmon Parr, from the River Habitat Pack
© Marcus Byron

Broadband: The National Park Authority, with ONE Northeast and Northumberland County Council, is at the forefront of rural broadband developments to help the many rural businesses that are threatened by its absence. Visitors and local communities can use:

- Satellite broadband services at the Once Brewed National Park Centre at Hadrian's Wall, nearby pub and businesses; and
- Interactive software to "explore" the National Park and broadband services at the National Park Centre, Rothbury.



Hareshaw Linn: TV personality, Loyd Grosman presented the Association of Heritage Interpretation award to local people and Northumberland National Park Authority for the innovative work done at Hareshaw Linn, Bellingham, at a ceremony in London in February 2003.

The Northumberland National Park Centre at Rothbury:

The Centre has been extensively refurbished providing captivating new displays whilst retaining the traditional warm welcome given by staff. It has been adapted to house community-related projects like the Market Towns Initiative and the Upper Coquetdale Project. The latter will bring nearly £0.25 million, enabling communities and businesses to gain support and funding for their initiatives.

Electricity for Enterprise: Drawing in many partners and nearly £1 million of European funding this helped the surprising number of businesses without mains electricity. Working with Northern Energy Associates, we awarded 113 grants to rural businesses creating:

- 33 new jobs;
- 27 new workspaces;
- 65 mains electricity connections; and
- 40 renewable energy schemes.

The Department for Trade and Industry has recognised the project as a nationwide example of best practice.

Finance

Gross expenditure was slightly lower than the previous year due to the fact that significant new initiatives were begun and, whilst all the funding is committed, the spending will be completed in 2003/04.

Large amounts of external funding were attracted and income from car parking and sales through visitor centres has fully recovered from the effects of Foot and Mouth Disease.

Significant expenditure changes were:

- Major improvements to the Hadrian's Wall bus services financed by the Countryside Agency and ONE North East;
- Higher spending on the natural environment resulting from the large amount of work

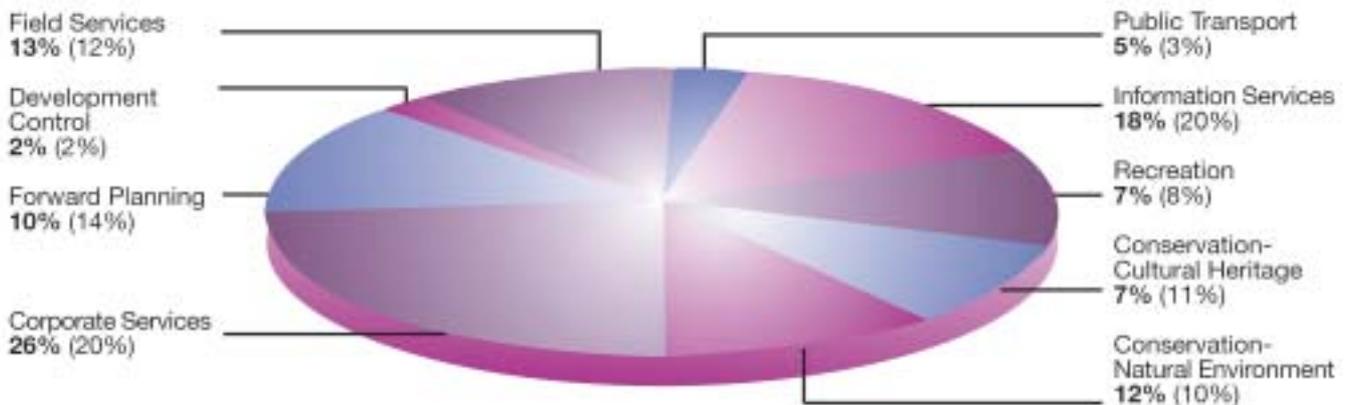
completed as part of the Black Grouse and Cheviot Valleys Heritage Lottery funded projects; and

- An increase in Corporate Services due to the hosting of the Annual Conference of National Park Authorities, the costs of which were offset by delegate fees.

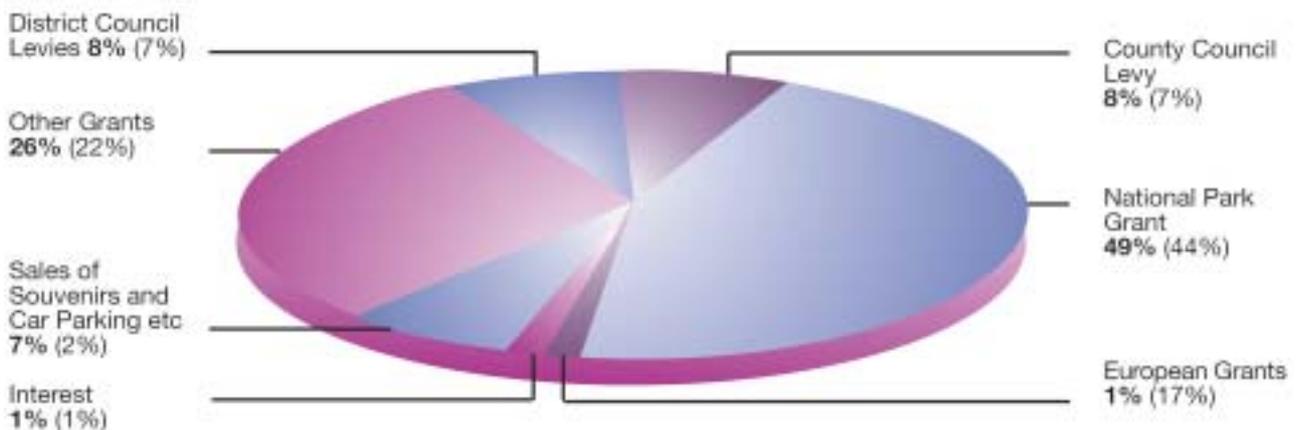
The very welcome increase in core funds in 2002/03 has enabled the Authority to progress with:

- A much improved web site;
- Preparations for open access;
- Financing £125,000 to establish the Sustainable Development Fund; and
- Establishing local action areas which enable local communities to identify and prioritise £100,000 of annual core funding.

Total Spending 2002/03: £3,133,000 (2001/02: £3,214,000)



Income Sources 2002/03: £3,499,000 (2001/02: £3,270,000)



Performance Review

Performance Review is a key tool for Northumberland National Park Authority to change the way it works and deliver a new agenda. It tells our public, stakeholders and ourselves how well we are doing, what works and what need further improvement.

During 2002/03 we received 20 audits and reviews; a high number for an organisation with only 57 full-time equivalent staff. In order to make sense of the complexities we will:

- Measure longer-term targets;
- Monitor annual key targets; and
- Review all main services by 2005.

We have completed two Best Value Reviews: Planning

A three year improvement plan was set and key improvements have been made including: new arrangements for receipt of applications; an improved delegation scheme and updated planning application forms and guidance notes. Verdict: On target

Visitor Centres

Despite customer surveys showing 96% satisfaction ratings the inspectors gave the service a 'fair' rating. As we rely upon significant partnership funding to deliver the improvement plan they concluded that substantive future improvement is 'uncertain'.

The Authority has fully funded the first two years of the plan producing substantial progress. There are new welcome panels and interactive interpretive displays at Rothbury National Park Centre. There is internet access at the National Park Centres, branding and marketing activity has begun and the tourism forum has been established. All other actions identified in the plan are underway

except the development of the Once Brewed National Park Centre at Hadrian's Wall.

Verdict: Ahead of target

Longer Term targets

We have set ambitious targets to indicate how well the Authority is delivering on its new vision. By 2012 we aim to have:

- 90% of farm holdings in an agri-environmental scheme;
- 1,800ha of new native woodland;
- 100% of the important nature conservation sites in favourable or improving condition;
- 12 new initiatives based on local culture and traditions;
- 100% of community settlements with a detailed historic record;
- 14 promoted cycle routes;
- 400,000 additional visitors;
- 8 active urban/rural exchange programmes established;
- 100 opportunities developed for currently unengaged audiences;
- 90% of the local population aware of the National Park;
- 8% of the national population aware of the National Park;
- 75 businesses delivering new sustainable tourism initiatives;
- 90% of local consultees feeling actively engaged with the Local Plan;
- 40 community groups actively assisted in sustainable development initiatives.

The achievement of these targets depends on effective working with our partners. The most resource intensive targets will only be achieved if government implements a fairer allocation of funding to Northumberland National Park than has been experienced for the past 25 years.

Best Value

Key Targets Target met ■ Target not met ■ (to greater or lesser degree)	2001/02 Performance	2002/03 Target	2002/03 Performance	2003/04 Target	5 year Target
Area of land brought into 'good management' during the year	not measured	not set	not measured	not set	not set
Area of new woodland ■■	96ha	60ha	83ha	100ha	1,000ha
% of Biodiversity Action Plans completed ■■■	48%	84%	48%	84%	100%
Area of archaeological landscape surveyed ■■■	28ha	200ha	50ha	1,700ha	2,500ha
No. of historic sites newly opened to the public with site interpretation ■	0	10	10	2	10
% of rights of way which are easy to use ■■■	83%	73%	58%	70%	90%
Visitor Centre effectiveness rating ■	83%	86%	85%	86%	90%
User satisfaction with Interpretive & Visitor Services ■■	94%	95%	98%	95%	95%
No. of passengers using Hadrian's Wall Bus ■■■■	7,215	12,000	17,075	18,700	20,000
No. of volunteer days supported	458	not set	690	700	2,000
Average time to determine Planning Applications ■	8 weeks	9 weeks	9 weeks	8.5 weeks	8 weeks
Planning score against best practice ■■	30%	66%	40%	60%	not set
% of invoices paid within 30 days ■	89%	95%	91%	100%	100%
No. of working days lost due to sickness ■	3.4 days	3.5days	4.6 days	3 days	2.5 days
Average time to answer letters from the public ■■	3.8 days	2 days	7.6 days	3 days	2 days

Membership of Northumberland

Chairman



John Riddle

Deputy Chairman



Peter Forrester

Local Authority Appointees: Northumberland County Council



*Robert Arkless
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*

National Park Authority 2002-2003

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

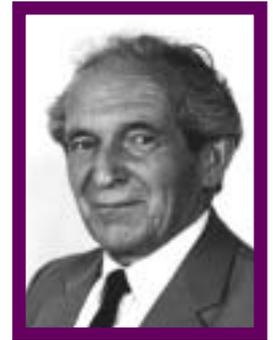


Scott Weightman

**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**



Gordon Hay



Rachel Penn

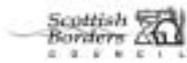


Frances Rowe



John Vaughan

Support and external funding from the following organisations for the projects illustrated is gratefully acknowledged:



and also to:
Lilburn Estate



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.



Published by © Northumberland National Park Authority
Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 1BS

Designed by The Drawing Room
Front Cover Photograph: © Allan Potts, Loft Hill, Blindburn
Filler photograph © Allan Potts
Printed on enviro-friendly paper