

Report 5: Annual State of the National Park Report

1. Purpose of Report

This report introduces Members to changes to the State of the National Park to 2022. The State of the National Park Report provides an overall picture of the 'health' of the National Park and measures progress against the outcomes set out in the Northumberland National Park Management Plan 2016-2021.

2. Recommendations

The Authority is recommended to:

- a. Note contents of the State of the National Park Report 2022;
- b. Authorise the publication of the State of the National Park Report 2022 on the Northumberland National Park website; and
- c. Note the upcoming changes which are occurring as a consequence of our revised Management Plan themes, and also the development of a national reporting framework for government's 25-Year Environment Plan.

3. Implications

- a. Financial: There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- b. Equalities: There are no equality implications to this report as it is a monitoring report only. The State of the National Park Report includes aggregated statistics on the age profile of National Park residents, and we collect diversity statistics of our visitors.
- c. Link to Business Plan: The links to the Authority Business Plan and Management Plan Outcomes is the focus of this report. The State of the National Park Report monitors Authority work programmes and their positive or negative impacts on Northumberland National Park.

4. Background

- a. The State of the National Park is presented in 3 documents:
 - i. The State of the National Park Report (Appendix 1) – This contains the introduction, a selection of Key Performance Indicators and measures progress against the outcomes set out in the Northumberland National Park Management Plan 2016-2021. It is intended that the 'Report' will attempt to summarise the information which is available in the 'NNPA Performance Update' and wider 'Facts and Figures' documents. This report captures wider information than the Authority's internal performance management reporting. It captures all actions taking place across the national park partnership which impact on the State of the Park.

- ii. The Quarterly Performance Update – Details the work programmes underway across Northumberland National Park Authority which support the delivery of desired outcomes set out in the Northumberland National Park Management Plan 2016-2021. This is reported in detail in Report 2 on this agenda.
 - iii. The State of the National Park, Facts and Figures – Contains more detailed information about Northumberland National Park broken down into Management Plan Aims 1 to 5. This is an evidence document so is not included with the report but is available on request.
- b. The Covid 19 pandemic resulted work programmes across the Authority, and the work of our partners, being postponed, delayed or extended during 2020-21. As a result, the delivery and monitoring of the Management Plan has been extended to maintain the targets through 2021-22.

5. Future Reporting

- c. Future reporting for the State of the National Park will be based on the revised aims of the National Park Management Plan. These are:
- i. Nature Recovery
 - ii. Climate Action,
 - iii. Valuing Place: Culture and Heritage
 - iv. A Welcoming Park for All, and
 - v. Thriving Communities
- d. Many of the datasets which we use to determine our performance are currently under review as part of the government monitoring of the 25-Year Environment Plan. As such it is likely that there will, at some stage in the coming years, be a disconnect between our current reporting metrics and the new ones developed as part of the Defra *Outcomes Indicator Framework (OIF)*.
- e. The OIF plan is also to work towards delivering strategic themes, these are:
- i. Using and managing land sustainably,
 - ii. Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes,
 - iii. Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing,
 - iv. Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste,
 - v. Securing clean, healthy, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans, and
 - vi. Protecting and improving our global environment
- f. It is evident from the list of strategic themes that some of the OIF themes will have different weights and relevance to Northumberland National Park, but as

we continue our annual monitoring, it is likely that we will be required to increasingly align our reporting to the national system.

6. **Key Messages from the State of the National Park Report**

- a. **A Welcoming Park** - The desired outcomes for Aim 1 focus on improving the number of visitors to Northumberland National Park, improving their knowledge of the special qualities of the National Park and improving the experience of all those who use the National Park.

The Park is achieving 'good' performance though its provision of facilities and provision of activities and 'acceptable' performance in the diversity of our audience. The Covid lockdowns concluded in July 2021 which impacted our ability for us or our partners to deliver events. Despite this, Generation Green, The Culture Recovery Fund project and Revitalising Redesdale all ensured we were able to support people who wished to return to the National Park.

Our performance trend for Aim 1 is improving in all areas as the improvements to our sites, facilities and public awareness campaigns will help ensure Northumberland National Park is more widely recognised for its special qualities and as a destination.

- b. **A Distinctive Place** – contains objectives which contribute to the first purpose of National Parks, namely to 'Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage'. The four desired outcomes focus on the restoration of habitats, improving biodiversity, restoration and conservation of historic monuments and cultural heritage and the preservation of the National Parks landscape and special qualities.

As part of the core work of the National Park these outcomes are generally performing well with a wide range of externally funded projects ongoing. The exception is the first desired outcome which has 'acceptable' performance. Storm Arwen, in November 2021, had a significant impact on the tranquillity and sense of place as around one thousand hectares of forestry fell in the National Park in one night, this has left a lasting impact on the landscape and our public rights of way.

There remains more to do to improve the management of key habitats and key species as set out in the Authority's Vision for the National Environment (2017). However, some key progress was made during the year with the formation of the Northumberland Peat Partnership and a curlew recovery project led by the RSPB.

- c. **A Living, Working Landscape for Now and the Future** – seeks to support economic wellbeing by supporting landowners, tenants and businesses while ensuring that they use sustainable land management and business practices to help achieve the first purpose and second purpose.

In general, Northumberland National Park is doing well with actions to support land management through its involvement in Countryside Stewardship, ELMs Test and Trials, farming facilitation and Farming in Protected Landscapes schemes. We are working with our partner organisations on these initiatives and

to deliver a vision for Nature First approach through our Hadrian's Wall: Recovering Nature project.

The Authorities drive to become carbon net zero in its business operations by 2030 and to work towards a net zero park support this ambition to utilise nature-based solutions. Our aims align well with ambitions for the County as a whole and we are building close links with Northumberland CC in this respect. Aspirations relating to improving growth of traditional industries and skills are more difficult to achieve, but there are now key funding streams for rural development through the North of Tyne and Borderlands Initiative. Improvements in the provision of broadband in the National Park driven by the county council and societal changes being driven by people's desire for more outdoor space are supporting the delivery of Aim 3 – A living, working landscape.

- d. **Thriving Communities** - is primarily concerned with the socio-economic 'duty' and relates to the sustainability of rural communities and the rural economy. Compared to the other areas of the Management Plan this is the aim which in previous years was underperforming compared to our aspirations. Targets to provide improvements in housing, infrastructure, rural services and renewable generation rely on significant investment from a range of disparate sources.

Changes reported in 2020 have increased scope for delivery in this area. The adoption of the Authority's Local Plan in July that year, provided policies which support the provision of new housing for new residents. The intention is for these policies to make providing housing in the park much easier, support new infrastructure and protect our community facilities.

In 2021 we began development of the new Management Plan with consultation with partners and the general public and we continue to provide £20,000 of grant funding to projects in the National Park which support our aims.

- e. **A Valued Asset** – has three outcomes which focus on the National Parks contribution to local, regional and national outcomes. The Park is now making a greater economic contribution to the region, particularly through growth in the visitor economy.

Northumberland National Park contributes to a wide range of landscape scale projects which are improving the natural environment, from the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership to Revitalising Redesdale. These partnership projects help to join up wider networks and improve collaboration. In 2021 we supported the regional Local Nature Recovery Strategy Pilot, the findings of which will support the roll out of the programme following the signing of the Environment Act.

The Park has influence through a number of key networks in the region and, in working closely with Nature North, NE Local Enterprise Partnership, and the North of the Tyne and Borderlands growth deals, is a driver for positive change. For example, the piloting of the Border Uplands Demonstrator Initiative, hosted by the Park was a fore runner of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal. Further initiatives in the Park, such as the ELMS Tests and Trials, Farming in Protected

Landscapes, and the Traditional Farm Buildings national pilot, demonstrate how the Park is shaping and helping deliver key national and regional priorities.

Northumberland National Park achieves good progress in meeting these objectives, and it is important that these shared objectives and successes continue to be widely communicated and celebrated.

7. Conclusions

- a. After the 2020 State of the National Park report showed a lower level of overall performance than previous years, it is reassuring to note that in 2021 performance is improving and the trend continues to improve as well. At the end of the Covid pandemic there has been a desire for people to get back to nature and, Northumberland National Park is well placed to deliver positive change for people and nature recovery.
- b. More detail on each of these outcomes is available in appendix 1 to this report.

Contact Officer: For further information contact: Ben Rogers, Performance and Intelligence Officer at ben.rogers@nnpa.org.uk