

Report 2: Quarter Three Work Performance and Strategic Risk Register Update

1. Purpose of Report

To provide a progress update on the delivery of the Interim Work Programme and inform Members of management of strategic risk.

2. Recommendations

The Authority is recommended to:

- a. Note the delivery of the Interim Work Programme.
- b. Note the management of risk and revisions to the Strategic Risk Register.

3. Implications

- a. Financial: The financial implications to the Authority in delivering the Interim Work Programme are already included within the medium-term budget plan.
- b. Equalities: Delivery of the work programme will see opportunities for more and different people to engage with the national park and the work of the Authority.
- c. Link to Business Plan: This report provides detail of the Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) Forward Work Programme. Links to each Business Plan outcome are detailed below.

4. Background

- a. As reported at the March Authority meeting, there is currently an Interim (bridging) Operational Plan in place to guide our work programme until the launch of the new Business Plan.

5. Strategic Risk Register

- a. The Strategic Risk Register will be reviewed to account for the different priorities of the Authority once a new Business Plan for the Authority has been agreed. The development of the Strategic Risk Register is taking place in parallel with the Business Plan but will not be finalised until after the Business Plan is agreed. It is proposed that this process would benefit from member involvement in a specific session on strategic risk prior to preparing the report for the June Authority meeting.
- b. There has been no change to the status of the Strategic Risk Register during Quarter 3, but an overview can be found below.
- c. The current Risk Register has the following headline risks:
 1. The National Park Authority fails to respond to maintain business continuity during an emergency.

2. The National Park Authority is unable to adapt to policy changes from national government.
 3. The National Park is unable to deliver nature recovery and enhancements of our natural capital.
 4. The National Park Authority is unable to be an Excellent Organisation Fit for the Future.
 5. The National Park Authority is unable to manage our financial position.
 6. The National Park Authority fails to deliver the goal of National Parks for Everyone.
 7. The National Park Authority is unable to make demonstrable progress towards carbon neutrality.
- d. The most significant, currently evolving, risk to the organisation is Risk 5, maintaining our financial position. This is a key challenge due to high inflation especially regarding staff and utility costs and is exacerbated by an ongoing flat cash settlement. The Medium-Term Budget planning for the coming three years will require us to take costs out of the business, both from discretionary budgets as well as staffing budgets and is considered elsewhere on this agenda in Report 4.
- e. As previously reported to members, during the quarter the Authority had a test of risk 1 (Business Continuity Planning) when the Authority's IT systems experienced an incident. The organisation successfully responded through our BCP processes and actions to mitigate future risks have been taken and a learning lessons review held.

6. Interim Work Programme

- a. The 2022-23 Interim Work Programme has been based on the revised aims of the then draft National Park Management Plan. These are:
- 1) Nature Recovery,
 - 2) Climate Action,
 - 3) Valuing Place: Culture and Heritage,
 - 4) A Welcoming Park for All, and
 - 5) Thriving Communities.

These are complimented by a 6th aim in the 2016 - 2021 Business Plan which is:

- 6) Maintaining An Excellent Organisation That Is Fit For The Future.

7. Nature Recovery

- a. The RSPB Curlew Project continues. The project is led by RSPB but NNPA staff, Natural England, Forestry Commission and Tyne Rivers Trust are all involved in projects and are supported by volunteers. In 2022 there were 5,000 hectares

surveyed with 63 curlew territories identified. There were 18 broods with hatched chicks and 12 of these had broods that successfully fledged. The productivity of the curlew identified is estimated to be 0.38 which is currently below the 0.5 required to for a stable population.

- b. The Hadrian's Wall: Recovering Nature (HW:RN) project on our land at Greenlee has continued to deliver infrastructure and boundary improvements as part of our Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme. The capital works on this scheme have now concluded and delivered 1.5km of buried pipework, 800m of dry-stone wall repairs, 24 field gates, 2.6km of top netting and 2 years of hay meadow restoration. Through most of 2022 a consultancy called The Environment Partnership has been developing an interactive opportunity map of the issues negatively impacting on water quality and hydrological function in the project area around Greenlee National Nature Reserve. This mapping will identify opportunities for interventions to address these issues and quantify the positive impact of the interventions. The project Monitoring Officer has now been appointed and is starting a 2-year programme of work in January 2023.
- c. Our Farming team continue to support farmers and land managers, principally with their agri-environment schemes, but increasingly with training and knowledge sharing events supported by the Natural England project funded Facilitation Fund. These events focus on future changes through the new Sustainable Farm Incentive, woodland creation, and other land management changes. Two further applications have been submitted for groups in the North Tyne and Upper Coquet and Breamish.
- d. **Impact on the State of the Park** – Our work with farmers and land managers continues to be a priority for the Authority. Through our ongoing influence via the Facilitation Fund and stewardship applications we aim to support nature friendly farming in the National Park. We have maintained an impressive level of farmed land, known as Usable Agricultural Area (UAA), within the national park in stewardship agreements. Over 95% of the farmed area is in some form of agreement. The work with the RSBP and other partnerships aim to improve habitats and restore the numbers of our most iconic species. Finally, our monitoring programme being established as part of the HW:RN project will enable us to evidence the impact of land management changes to water quality, environmental tourism and education and, hopefully, improvements in biodiversity. Discussions are currently ongoing to expand this work to develop natural capital baseline and mapping for a wide area in the south of the National Park.

8. Climate Action

- a. Net Zero Authority: The Authority continues to work towards the objective, set out in 2019, to be net zero by 2030. Since 2015-16 our average annual Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions have been 150t CO₂e peaking with the opening of The Sill. After establishing our baseline, our sites require retrofit assessments to determine the best way to limit our emissions and try to secure funding to

support this. Contractors for this work are currently in high demand so we are currently awaiting confirmation for a start date.

- b. Net Zero Sill: Our objective for the year was to develop a plan to set a path towards a net zero Sill. This work requires a retrofit assessment as mentioned above and will now be delivered as part of a holistic approach for the organisation.
- c. The Northumberland Peat Partnership is our primary delivery partner for identifying and improving peat throughout Northumberland. The Authority, in co-ordination with the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership and separately through the National Parks Partnership, have received two studies which indicate peat in NNP is the primary CO₂e emitter from our landscape.
- d. During the quarter the Northumberland Peat Partnership have been continuing their work in mapping peat restoration opportunities within the National Park. To date 4 sites have been fully surveyed for restoration, 4 more are in progress and a further 2 are being worked up. In total this represents roughly 5,050 hectares of degraded peat identified to be restored (the target in the new Management Plan is to have 5,000 ha of peatland under restoration by 2030). NPP is one of the six founding members of the Great North Bog (GNB) coalition, and the partnership has recently signed off the GNB Strategic Plan and drafted a future Funding Prospectus which is being tested with potential green finance investors.
- e. **Impact on the State of the Park** – Having not previously had an objective relating to emissions, there has not been any previous reporting on emissions within the State of the National Park. However, our objectives to identify and restore habitats continues through our desire to limit our emissions from peat erosion and degradation. We will add indicators to future iterations of the SoTP in line with the targets in the Management Plan and the Northumberland Net Zero Plan.

9. Valuing Place: Culture and Heritage

- a. The Traditional Farm Buildings (TFB) Pilot Scheme formally closed at the end of December 2022. A project evaluation is currently underway with the University of Gloucester and any outstanding grant claims are being processed.
- b. The Revitalising Redesdale Landscape Partnership programme of physical works came to an end on 30th September 2022. The project evaluation was completed in December 2022. All of the projects within the partnership programme have made a positive contribution to the State of the National Park. The report can be found at: <https://www.revitalisingredesdale.org.uk/pro/>
- c. A grant offer to improve sections of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail has been received from the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative. This was applied for in 2019 but subsequently delayed initially because of Covid and then due to the impact of Storm Arwen. Our partner The National Trust has secured two walling contractors for their portion of the work and, within NNPA, the schedule of works has been completed and is out to tender.

- d. For the 10-year anniversary of the designation of Northumberland International Dark Sky Park (NIDSP) we have begun the planning process for an exhibition at The Sill over the winter of 2023-24. As part of the anniversary we are exploring, with our partners, a range of wider public activities. The programme is being planned in co-ordination with (Northumberland international Dark Sky Park (NIDSP) Steering Group.
- e. **Impact on the State of the Park** – The five-year Revitalising Redesdale project legacy is one of significant investment in our habitats, heritage and communities of Northumberland National Park. The Redesdale community archaeology group has now been set up to continue to explore the heritage of the landscape, more detail is available in the evaluation (link above). The Traditional Farm Buildings Pilot and National Trail Enhancement contribute to our heritage and ensure future generations can continue enjoy being part of the place. Similarly, our dark sky status has been shown to be a draw for visitors in the off-season and maintaining these dark skies is increasing in importance nationally.

10. A Welcoming Park for All

- a. The Lost Spells exhibition launched in Q2 and 19,500 people had seen it by the end of December. This has generated sales of more than 630 books and 20 prints, through The Sill shop. Feedback from visitors has been extremely positive. The next phase of the exhibit is now being planned, it will provide a touring package of the materials which can be purchased by other organisations.
- b. Our targeted outreach and learning teams continue to work with communities most affected by the Covid pandemic and non-traditional audiences, as well as providing resources to schools and hosting visits to learn about our National Park. Our delivery targets for the year to date have been exceeded with more than 10,000 participants so far this year against a post covid target of only 2,000 indicating a stronger than anticipated recovery in demand.
- c. During the quarter staff, volunteers and members of NNPA had the opportunity to visit the site of Ad Gefrin in the north of the park. Plans are being drawn up for NNPA and the Ad Gefrin Trust to work in partnership to develop an improved visitor offer for the site which will involve the creation of a more appropriate car parking area.
- d. Our Visitor Development Strategy was presented to the Authority on the 22nd of June 2022 and each of the four priority areas are currently being reviewed and destination plans are being written. Rolling out the delivery of the strategy is a priority in the new Business Plan. The first plan is for The Cheviots and Wooler with the first of two stakeholder workshops being planned for early 2023.
- e. **Impact on the State of the Park** – Through our work to attract visitors to specific sites or by developing a park wide visitor development strategy, we are working to attract new audiences to our established and lesser-known areas, giving visitors the confidence to return. Visitors to our facilities and programmes have now largely returned to pre-pandemic levels with some areas seeing consistently high levels of visitors with the season extending over the winter months.

11. Thriving Communities

- a. The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme has continued into its second (2022-23) of three (2023-24) years. Year 2 of the FiPL programme started at the beginning of April with new projects receiving funding as well as work on multi-year projects. There is £350,000 allocated for delivery this year, of which over £336,000 has been allocated and £148,000 claimed on completed work. In February 2023, at the time of writing this report, Defra have announced a 1-year extension to the FiPL programme, with the budget yet to be confirmed.
- b. The Farm Networking project held an overview of the Sustainable Farming Incentive – Moorland Standard at the Twice Brewed for members of the Hadrian’s Wall Farming Group (HWFG), in October 2022. The event was to learn more about the standard and the level of support we, as a National Park, would be offering to farmers. On the back of this event, the Farming Team were successful in a bid for funding for the ‘Understanding Uplands Project’, which means we will take our support and guidance material out onto a series of farms within the National Park for practical sessions and show land managers how they can survey their moorland for the requirements of the standard.
- c. The development of the next iteration of the Management Plan was a key objective for the Authority this year. The plan was approved by members in October and will be designed and published by February 2023.
- d. Our planning team continue to operate with the new Local Plan in 2022-23. Development management performance continues to meet targets, with two major applications being approved. This has significantly boosted income from application fees, which in general tends to be small with the nature of our applications.
- e. Training and Employment opportunities are being developed through our projects and new business areas. We are exploring funded apprenticeship and professional development opportunities and providing management training for those who are new and emerging managers.
- f. **Impact on the State of the Park** – Our internally and externally funded programmes are helping the communities of the National Park to transition to new ways of working. Either through direct payments or advice and guidance on planning, land management schemes or funding, NNPA is actively supporting our rural communities and those who wish to visit.

12. An Authority Fit for the Future

- a. The Authority continues to undergo a major IT reorganisation with the intention to be digitally enabled and evidence led. A new digital strategy being implemented which brings together government guidance and legislation to ensure we have the correct tools to facilitate our work. This will continue our new ways of working in the new Business Plan.
- b. The Authority is in the process of creating the framework for the next Organisational Development Strategy 2023-2025. The strategy will address

upcoming challenges for the organisation by reviewing future ways of working, focusing on equality, diversity and inclusion, and ensuring the staff and volunteer resource is fit for the future in terms of delivering our new Business Plan. The updated Organisational Development Strategy will be tabled for members consideration at the annual meeting in June 2023.

- c. We continue to be successful in growing our self-generated income and expect to meet our stretch target for the year. More traditional revenue streams of car parking and retail were strong during the busy holiday season. Our fundraising and commercial income is becoming increasingly important, and during the quarter we have secured funding for the National Park's education programme from a new funder called the John Horseman Charitable Trust. The Trust will be donating £10,000 per year for three years. We have also been informed that the Authority will be receiving a legacy of £78,914.

13. Conclusions

- a. The Interim Work Programme was developed to frame our objectives during the period of transition from the existing Business Plan to a new plan by March 2023.
- b. The report sets out how we are progressing and how our work is impacting on the State of the National Park.
- c. Members are asked to note the progress of the work programmes underway and note the current progress in managing Strategic Risk.

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