

## **Report 3: First Quarter Performance and Strategic Risk Register Update**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

To present a progress update on the delivery of year 1 of the Authority's work programme and inform Members of any updates to the Strategic Risk Register.

### **2. Recommendations**

#### **The Authority is recommended to:**

- a. Note the delivery of the Authority Work Programme.
- b. Note the status of the Strategic Risk Register.

### **3. Implications**

- a. Financial: The financial implications to the Authority in delivering the 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 details of our delivery of each area of the Business Plan.

### **4. Background**

- a. The Authority was presented the initial draft of the Three-Year Business Plan in March 2023. Subject to minor alterations, the objectives of the Plan have been embedded into the organisational work programme. (Tabled elsewhere on today's agenda for formal approval).
- b. Following the presentation of the Business Plan, a new Strategic Risk Register was developed through a series of staff and member workshops. The overview was presented to the Authority in June 2023.

### **5. Strategic Risk Register**

- a. The Strategic Risk Register is a live document which is reviewed by Leadership Team on a quarterly basis. Any additional impacts or mitigations that are identified during these sessions are recorded in the register and is available to members on request.
- b. The current Register has the following headline risks:
  1. Failure to respond to changing circumstances and enable business continuity.
  2. Failure to influence and respond to policy changes from National Government.
  3. Maintaining thriving communities in a changing policy environment.

4. Failure to effectively manage organisational change.
5. The ability to recruit, retain or contract people with the right skills.
6. Maintaining a financial position which supports our Business Plan.
7. Attracting new audiences and maintaining existing audiences while meeting and understanding their expectations.
8. Failure to progress work programmes due to stakeholder polarisation.
9. The National Park Authority is unable to make demonstrable progress towards its Net Zero outcomes.

b. Members of the Authority are kept informed of the strategic risks which, after appropriate mitigations are considered, continue to pose the most serious residual risk. There are currently two risks which are in this category, Risk 6, Maintaining our Financial Position, and Risk 9, Progressing towards Net Zero. A summary of risks to be considered is in Table A.

**Table A. Residual Risk to delivery of the NNPA Business Plan**

Residual Risk	Likelihood				
	1. Rare	2. Unlikely	3. Possible	4. Likely	5. Almost Certain
5. Catastrophic					
4. Major			1, 5	6	9
3. Moderate			3, 4, 8, 7		2
2. Minor					
1. Slight					

- c. Risk 9, Progressing towards Net Zero outcomes, has a residual likelihood of 5, almost certain, and impact of 4, major. This indicates that despite mitigating actions, there is a significant risk of failure to meet the organisations objectives and potential for reputational damage.
- d. Risk 6, Maintaining our financial position has a residual likelihood of 4, likely, and an impact of 4, major. Our Medium-Term Budget Plan 2023/24 – 2025/26 included plans and actions to maintain our financial position against a backdrop of a real term cuts in Defra core grant at a time of high inflation. Year 3 of the plan assumes there will be an inflationary increase in core grant aligned with an assumed inflationary increase in costs. Achieving an increase in core grant is a risk and there is current early engagement with Defra alongside other Protected Landscapes ahead of the next government spending review. The other key risks in our current budget plan are any increase against our assumptions for pay which we cannot directly influence and our ability to generate the significantly increased self-generated income targets. To mitigate over the medium term, we hold an additional £150,000 in general reserves and we continually monitor our income generation performance and take actions swiftly to keep this on track.

## 6. Work Programme

- a. The Business Plan 2023 outcomes are based on the on the strategic themes of the new 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 sixth outcome in the Business Plan which is:

- 6) An Authority Fit for the Future

Our work programmes for the next 3 years follow these outcomes.

## 7. Nature Recovery

- a. Monitoring: A specific new objective to improve our knowledge of habitat and species distribution in the National Park has been added to the Business Plan. While this information exists within teams and with our partners, it needs to be consolidated and validated as an up to date asset for everyone in the organisation. During this quarter, an assessment of where this data exists and where there are gaps was initiated. The report was commissioned through the HW:RN Project will support this, see c, below.
- b. The RSPB Curlew Project (2021 – 2024) continues. The project is led by RSPB, but NNPA staff, Natural England, Forestry Commission and Tyne Rivers Trust are all involved in working schemes and are supported by volunteers. In Q1 of each year surveying takes place with project partners with results reported in the autumn.
- c. The Hadrian's Wall: Recovering Nature (HW:RN) project (2021 – 2025) has delivered the infrastructure and boundary improvements, as part of the associated Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme in 2022-23. The project now moves into its long-term land use change and monitoring phase. Project Officers are currently working with the Engagement Team on the upcoming launch and exhibition which will be taking place at The Sill in early October.
- d. Improvements to the condition and distribution of our peatlands and native woodlands continues to be a priority for the organisation and we work with our partners in the Northumberland Peat Partnership and Great Northumberland Forest to identify opportunities for restoration and recovery. During this quarter we had some staffing changes within the team and new officers are being recruited.
- e. Inspiring our audiences to support nature recovery is a key outcome for the new Business Plan. Encouraging participation through exhibitions, learning, events and volunteering will give audiences a greater understanding of what nature recovery is. The targets which support this outcome are being determined.

- f. Impact on the State of the Park: The Management Plan Aim for Nature Recovery is to: Restore, conserve and enhance nature and its resilience at a landscape scale through a proactive nature-first led approach to sustainable land management and partnership working. Work through existing projects which actively support nature enhancement. Through monitoring improvements engagement, all audiences will have a greater understanding of what nature recovery is and have access to information and opportunities to help them take action.

## **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. Our monitoring framework now provides comprehensive data of our Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions. However, our Scope 3 emissions (upstream and downstream emissions from goods and services) are harder to accurately determine and may contribute more than 50% of our overall emissions. There is an ongoing risk to our delivery of this objective, as reported in the Strategic Risk Register.
- b. Net Zero Sill: we remain committed to ensuring that The Sill building meets our net zero obligations. This work requires a retrofit assessment data. Funding streams have been identified; applications will be submitted once the project costs are known.
- c. Net Zero National Park: Having received a baseline for National Park Emissions for 2019, we will be working with Northumberland County Council, our communities and visitors to address the greatest sources of emissions and aim to be net zero by 2030. There is no current timeframe for the update report, however it is clear a large part of delivering this objective is through peatland restoration and the electrification of heating and travel.
- d. To support this objective the National Parks Partnership have secured a commitment from BMW, through the Recharge in Nature project, to install electric charging points across key car parks in the National Park. Work has been ongoing to identify the best sites and the required infrastructure for this.
- e. Impact on the State of the Park: The Management Plan Aim for Climate Action is to: Empower, enable and inspire climate action to work towards a net zero National Park by 2030. Beyond 2030 we will be working towards the National Park being a carbon sink. The Authority remains committed to ensuring the National Park can be working as a carbon sink beyond 2030 by supporting electrification, carbon sequestration and reducing fuel use.

## **9. Valuing Place: Culture and Heritage**

- a. A renewed emphasis has been put on the conservation of the National Park's historic monuments through the Business Plan. The existing network of volunteers who survey and report on the condition of these monuments had not operated since the onset of Covid-19. During the quarter, this network was revived, with experienced members partnered with new enthusiasts. These

groups can now continue to support condition improvements on an ongoing basis.

- b. The existing 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. During the quarter a new objective, to continue to support restoration, was set and additional funding streams are being sought.
- c. The National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative 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 this was started during the quarter. The NNPA portion of the works requires the closure of the national trail and will therefore commence in November.
- 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, which will explore wider public activities. The ongoing monitoring of the condition of NIDSP has begun, with a series of light meters connected across the National Park.
- e. Impact on the State of the Park: The Management Plan Aim for Culture and Heritage is to: Conserve, enhance and celebrate our historic environment and rich cultural heritage by connecting people and place. The Authority continues to survey and preserve our historic monuments with significant support from our community of volunteers. Projects such as the TFB pilot and Landscape Enhancement Initiative support cultural heritage by conserving and enhancing National Park assets for future generations.

#### **10. A Welcoming Park for All**

- a. To develop a more accessible National Park, improvements are ongoing to our rights of way furniture, surveys to determine the ease of use happen every 6-months. Additionally, it is the intention to improve 25km of routes by making them 'accessible to all' by removing stiles in favour of gates. Finally, an outline business case is also being devised to develop Walltown Country Park as an exemplar destination which will be accessible to everyone.
- b. The engagement team continue to develop work with partners and stakeholders to grow new audiences and develop visitor experiences. Strategic themes for this financial year include Health and Wellbeing, Nature Recovery and Dark Skies. Our targeted outreach programme continues to work to remove barriers to access, with a particular focus on understanding what this means in the context of Equality Diversity and Inclusion policy. Our Formal Learning team is focussing on maintaining our existing high quality school programme, developing new partnerships and resources for green careers and devising new content and offers in carbon literacy, climate action, SEN and transition. Our delivery targets

for the next 3 years are 9,000 learners and 2,000 event participants per annum. From April to June, we had 2,390 learners and 290 event participants.

- c. Through ongoing improvements and regular exhibitions and events we aim to attract 120,000 visitors to The Sill this year. So far, we have received 35,800 against a year-to-date target of 35,400.
- d. Our Visitor Development Strategy was presented to the Authority on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 and each of the four priority areas are currently being reviewed and destination plans are being written. The current focus is on the North of the National Park around Wooler and Ad-Gefrin.
- e. Ambitious targets to expand our social media audience by 2% per month and website users and email audience database until 2026. At the end of this quarter the organisation is slightly behind these targets for both social media and web users however with the new communications and marketing officer coming into post in October 2023 following a gap in recruitment, there will be capacity to focus on a social media audit and plan to balance this out before the year end.
- f. Impact on the State of the Park: The Management Plan Aim for a Welcoming Park is to be a welcoming place, offering enjoyment and exploration of one of our finest landscapes and to support wellbeing. 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. By ensuring the visitor offer is consistent and our service is reliable, we can give visitors the confidence to return.

## **11. Thriving Communities**

- a. The most recent, 2021, census data indicates the population of Northumberland National Park has fallen 10% to 1,800 residents and 800 households from 2,000 residents and 870 households in 2011. To support our communities, we aim to approve up to eight new houses per year during the length of the local plan and continue to provide a high performing planning service.
- b. 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. The North Tyne and Upper Coquet and Breamish groups were given additional funding during the quarter and are in operation alongside the Hadrian's Wall group.
- c. The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme is now in its third year and has been extended for an additional year to March 2025. The intention is to support 50 farm business projects which support delivery of both the grant aims and Management Plan aims. To date, £1,070,000 of funding is available, £497,000 has been claimed.

- d. A new farm business support programme is being developed through the North of Tyne Rural Investment Plan. The pilot will see £500k invested, this pilot will be led through the National Park Authority. The final documentation is expected soon.
- e. Impact on the State of the Park: The Management Plan Aim for Thriving Communities is to: have engaged, resilient and balanced communities in a unique living, working landscape. Externally funded programmes are helping communities transition to new ways of working, enter land management schemes and secure funding. These programmes are increasing the influence protected landscapes have, across the country.

## **12. An Authority Fit for the Future**

- a. The Authority approved proposals for a Business Review in June 2023. Following staff consultation these proposals have now moved forward to implementation. The Business Review not only ensures the Authority is operating within available resources but also helps support the Authority in aligning its human resources with the new Business Plan and new ways of working.
- b. The Authority also approved the outline of the next Organisational Development Strategy 2023-25 in June 2023. Following on from this, the organisation will establish ways to embed hybrid working and a 364 day organisational culture.
- c. A review of our built estate will be initiated to ensure our assets are aligned with the needs of the organisation.
- d. The Authority will continue to strive to grow our self-generated income in the coming year. Traditional revenue streams of car parking and retail have been strong with income exceeding targets for the quarter. Similarly, the café continues to perform well with income 112% of target so far. Our fundraising income, through the Northumberland National Park Foundation, is becoming increasingly important. Year to date we have received confirmation of grants from seven organisations for £47,000 with applications submitted to another 9 organisations for £143,000.

## **13. Conclusions**

- a. The current work programme frames our objectives as set out in the Business Plan. Subject to minor amendments the plan, as approved in March, and presented as a final draft on report 4 of this Agenda.
- b. The report sets out how we are progressing and how our work impacts 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 revising the Strategic Risk Register.

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