

Northumberland National Park Authority

Business Plan 2023 to 2026

Introduction

The National Park Authority's Business Plan represents a clear link between the shared vision set out in the National Park Management Plan and the individual workplans of our staff. The Business Plan sets out our medium term aims of the Authority and ensures we maintain our focus on agreed priorities.

National Park Statutory Purposes and Duty

The statutory purposes of English National Parks are set out in Section 61 of the Environment Act 1995. These are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park; and
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public.

In pursuing these purposes, the Authority also has a duty to foster the economic and social well-being of communities within its boundaries.

Our Mission and approach

Northumberland National Park Authority aims to deliver its role as a strategic leader, co-ordinator, and enabler in contributing to the ambitions of the National Park Management Plan. We will demonstrate clear, evidence based and where necessary brave leadership in addressing the current and future challenges which face the National Park and its special qualities.

Our culture – we will be known as an organisation that is:

- **Open and Connected:** with the residents, businesses, visitors, and partners we work with and serve.
- **Smart:** A professional and expert organisation which engages the right skills, is evidence led, and employs smart systems which enable us to work effectively and efficiently.
- **A Leader:** willing to deliver brave and inspirational leadership on the things that count for the National Park.
- **Listening and Learning:** actively listening to others, and willing to learn by supporting personal and organisational review, learning and development.
- **Welcoming and caring:** a truly welcoming organisation that cares for people in an open, inclusive, and respectful way.
- **Trusted:** to deliver what we say we will do as a collaborative and supportive partner.
- **Achieving:** delivering outcomes for nature, climate, people, and place.

Our values:

- Customer focussed and outcome driven.
- Safeguarding our natural and cultural heritage.
- Equality and inclusion.

- Integrity and openness.
- Innovative and enterprising.

A message from the Chair and Chief Executive

Welcome to the Business Plan for Northumberland National Park Authority. This Plan will guide the work of the Authority for the next three years. The Authority has prepared this Plan at a time of significant change both in national economy and in the policy environment within which our national parks work.

The rich natural and cultural resources which Northumberland National Park possesses are now, more than ever, important to the well-being of people, communities, and rural economies. The pandemic has shown us this, people want, indeed need, connection with the natural world, and national parks are best placed to provide this. The Authority will continue its important role in helping create a National Park for everyone, a journey we started in planning The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre which opened in 2017 and which has continued to influence well beyond its walls.

National Parks are well placed to showcase and give people a stake in the action we all need to take to address the global climate crisis. Allied to this we must recover nature and reverse the decline in species and habitat loss. In Northumberland National Park we see Climate, People and Place as our central mission.

Like all rural areas, National Parks are currently facing unprecedented challenges for nature resilience, ranging from declining biodiversity, the impacts of climate change on the landscape and land management with fundamental shifts in Environmental and Agricultural Policy on the horizon.

As we write this Business Plan the National Park Authority is also working closely with a wide range of partners in bringing forward a 'Stewardship and Growth Plan' for Northumberland which will see the natural and cultural assets of the National Park and other rural parts of the county secure social, economic, and environmental wellbeing. This will be a key focus of this Business Plan for the next three years.

All our actions in this Business Plan will be backed and supported by a modern organisation with good governance and brave leadership, steeped in innovation and ambition. We look forward to working with you to deliver this Business Plan and to secure a positive future for one of England's finest landscapes.

Jean Davidson, Chair and Tony Gates, Chief Executive

Northumberland National Park Management Plan 2022

In October 2022 Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) adopted our most recent National Park Management Plan.

The Management Plan which sets a long-term vision and ambition for the future of one of England's finest landscapes to 2045, was developed through close working with all partners and stakeholders who have an interest in the future of the National Park. As such it blends national and local priorities.

Management Plan Vision

**Northumberland National Park will be a place where people and nature can thrive.
As a living working landscape the National Park will lead the way on climate action, with resilient communities, enabling an accessible and welcoming park for all.**

The Management Plan sets out five key long-term strategic themes:

- 1 Nature Recovery
- 2 Climate Action
- 3 Valuing Place: Culture and Heritage
- 4 A Welcoming Park for All
- 5 Thriving Communities

It is a plan for the National Park as a whole and not just for the National Park Authority. However, it sets the framework to guide the work of the Authority as well as the many organisations, businesses and communities that have an interest in the National Park.

Northumberland National Park Authority Business Plan 2023 to 2026

Our Business Plan 2023 – 2026 sets out how the NNPA will play our part in delivering the ambition and priorities set out in the Management Plan 2022.

The strategic themes of the Management Plan have been used as the basis for the Business Plan outcomes, with an additional corporate outcome: 6 'An Authority Fit for the Future'.

This Business Plan is for three years, recognising the time of change and uncertainty, particularly regarding the policy context and resources for national parks and land management more generally. This Business Plan will therefore be revised in 2026 ahead of the next review of the Management Plan in 2027.

Northumberland National Park Authority is a small public body, with less than 100 employees and core government grant of just over £2.6m per annum and an annual revenue budget of circa £5m. We are nevertheless ambitious, and we have a strong track record of delivery.

We will continue to strive towards being an excellent organisation, investing well beyond the resources provided by government, through raising our own commercial income and generating programme and project funds from a wide variety of sources.

Whilst ambitious, this Business Plan is grounded in realism. It will see the Authority do less or lose areas of work as we adjust to real terms cuts in our Defra funding. Where possible, however, we will aim to grow and expand our work over the course of the Business Plan as new resources become available.

As the National Park Authority owns just 0.23% of the overall land area of the National Park, it is important that we work in partnership with farmers, land managers, landowners, and other stakeholders to achieve our shared ambitions. Partnership working is important beyond land use, and we will continue to work closely with a wider range of local, regional, and national partners.

Our Corporate priorities:

- **Nature Recovery** (Putting nature first and seeking to work at a landscape scale to recover nature and implement nature led action on climate change).
- **A National Park for All** (Engagement of more and different people with the National Park).
- **Landscape enhancement and woodland creation** (to retain the distinctive sense of place and tranquillity of the National Park).
- **Safeguarding the historic environment** (taking a cultural capital approach).
- **Raising self-generated income and embedding our use of volunteers** (to help us achieve more for the National Park).

Our Key outcomes by March 2026:

- Increase visitors to Northumberland National Park to 1.85m per annum (STEAM and visitor survey data).
- People from underserved groups visiting or engaging with the National Park will increase by 10% from the baseline developed in 2023.
- Develop four new gateway hubs to the National Park.
- Reduce the number of scheduled monuments at risk to 21 (5%).
- Retain International Dark Sky Park (IDSP) status and Northumberland National Park to remain the most tranquil part of England.
- Deliver advice to at least 150 farm businesses, and at least 50 farm businesses will have received direct business support.
- 2,000 additional hectares of peatland habitat in the National Park under restoration and 300 hectares of new broadleaved and native woodland created.
- National Park Authority CO2 emissions reduced to 52 tCO2e and offset a maximum of 63 tCO2e by March 2026.
- Grow annual total self-generated income to over £1.7m by March 2026.

Outcome 1: Nature Recovery

Management Plan Aim: 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.

Business Plan target	What we will do:	NNPA Lead	Outcomes
<p>Collect baseline information and data as a sound basis for future action and for monitoring progress on key habitats and species.</p>	<p>We will work alongside partners to collect and share habitat and species data which will enable us to engage the land management community and influence management through various funding mechanisms such as landscape recovery, countryside stewardship plus and sustainable farming incentive.</p> <p>We will also extend the HWRN baselining workstream beyond the immediate project boundary.</p>	<p>Head of Conservation</p>	<p>Monitoring Framework from the Natural Environment Vision (NEV) is recorded and reported, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 Hay meadow per year and review quality scores. • Carryout at least 5 Waxcap surveys per year and update quality scoring. • Survey waders on sites to support positive land management. <p>Continue to work with RSPB through Curlew LIFE on at least 20 farms in HW area (survey and habitat enhancement) and develop a successor project.</p> <p>Monitor and influence ways in which the SSSI condition of the National Park will be improved by 2026. From a baseline of 79% of SSSI land in 'favourable' condition in 'recovering' condition in 2022.</p>
<p>Map and restore priority peatland habitat within the National Park to mitigate the climate crisis, enhance water quality and management and aid overall ecological</p>	<p>We will work through Northumberland Peatland Partnership to identify opportunities and draw up specifications for peatland restoration in the National Park and will bring forward projects with landowners and land managers, linking</p>	<p>Head of Conservation</p>	<p>2,000 additional hectares of peatland habitat in the National Park will be under restoration by March 2026.</p>

Business Plan target	What we will do:	NNPA Lead	Outcomes
recovery within the National Park.	them with external finance through initiatives such as the Great North Bog initiative, as well as through Countryside Stewardship/ELM initiatives.		
Increase woodland cover and the proportion of native and broadleaf woodland in the National Park to enhance the landscape and important wildlife habitat.	We will work in partnership with the Great Northumberland Forest and others to identify and bring forward opportunities for small and medium scale initiatives across the National Park.	Head of Conservation	300 hectares of new broadleaved and native woodland will have been created in the National Park by March 2026 (100 ha per year). Work in at least 10 woodlands to bring them into positive management including wood pasture.
Remove or restructure existing commercial coniferous forests to enhance the landscape and biodiversity.	Work as a consultee and partner to encourage and enable the removal or restoration of some large tracts of commercial forestry in the National Park.	Head of Conservation	1,000 ha of existing commercial coniferous forests will have been removed or restructured by March 2026.
Develop and support projects to protect and enhance the abundance and distributions of iconic species in the National Park.	The Authority will lead or support partnership projects for the delivery of habitat and species recovery projects as appropriate.	Head of Conservation	Red squirrel distribution will be conserved in key locations including Hareshaw Dene, the North Tyne, Simonside, Wark Forest and Coquetdale. All Curlew occupied areas in the National Park will be maintained and Curlew productivity increased in Hadrian's Wall area by March 2026. Breeding pairs of Hen Harriers will have further increased in Northumberland by March 2026. In addition to HWRN, support at least 2 landscape –scale projects in the

Business Plan target	What we will do:	NNPA Lead	Outcomes
			National Park to enhance and link habitats.
Continue to lead the Hadrian's Wall Recovering Nature project to deliver a nature first approach to restoring a functioning wetland ecosystem at a landscape scale.	Continue as lead partner to deliver the Hadrian's Wall Recovering Nature project, securing funding, establishing baseline data, and securing the support of partners and landowners.	Head of Conservation	Project formally launched in Autumn 2023. Methodology, baseline data and a monitoring framework for hydrology, species recording, and natural capital fully in place by 2026. Key nature recovery actions implemented from 2023 onwards.
To inspire and enable action by others on nature recovery.	Engage communities, businesses, and volunteers to inspire them to embed and lead nature recovery.	Head of Engagement and Head of Marketing Development	All audiences will have a greater understanding of what nature recovery is and have access to information and opportunities to help them to take action. Nature recovery will be embedded within our engagement programme and the Authority's communications plan, utilising projects within Northumberland National Park such as Hadrian's Wall: Recovering Nature to engage different audiences.

Outcome 2: Climate Action

Management Plan Aim: 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.

Business Plan targets	What we will do	Lead	Outcomes
Work towards a net zero National Park Authority by 2030.	Significantly reduce emission from our estate and corporate travel. We will work with Northumberland County Council, local communities, land managers, businesses and visitors to work towards a net zero National Park by 2030.	Head of Conservation Head of Conservation	Reduce our scope 1 and 2 emissions as a National Park Authority to 52 tCO ₂ e by March 2026 and initiate a carbon offsetting programme by March 2025. Seeking to achieve an average carbon sequestration target of 63 tCO ₂ e/pa by March 2030. Seek opportunities to influence a net reduction of 14,600 tCO ₂ e* per annum. *Figures taken from 2019 baseline survey, Small World Consultancy 2022.
Deliver zero emission vehicle charging points across all our key visitor and access sites.	Work in partnership to initiate a network of vehicle charging points across the National Park.	Head of Conservation	A minimum of 20 EV charging points in place at NNPA sites in key visitor locations by March 2026.
Deliver a programme of active travel and net zero visitor experiences within the National Park	We will develop a number of active travel and net zero visitor experiences linked to gateway hubs across the National Park.	Head of Engagement	5 new active travel visitor experiences in place by March 2026
Deliver a net zero Sill project to act as an exemplar zero carbon visitor facility within rural Northeast England	Work with partners and funders to design and deliver a net zero Sill project.	Head of Conservation	Net Zero Sill project underway by March 2026
Lead the way and inspire climate action by others.	Demonstrate action and inspire climate action through projects, engagement,	Head of Engagement and Head of Marketing & Development	All audiences will have a greater understanding of what climate action is and have access to information and opportunities to help them to make changes.

	exhibitions and partnership working.		
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Outcome 3: Valuing Place: Culture and Heritage

Management Plan Aim: To conserve, enhance and celebrate our historic environment and rich cultural heritage by connecting people and place.

Business Plan targets	What we will do	Lead	Outcomes
Rich historic and cultural heritage of the Park is valued, cared for and enhanced.	Safeguard historic and cultural heritage through the planning system. We will implement a Heritage at Risk programme to safeguard heritage.	Head of Planning and Policy Head of Conservation	Less than 21 (5%) of scheduled monuments are considered at risk by March 2026 from baseline of 33 (7%) in 2023.
Seek further opportunities to continue the restoration of traditional farm buildings as a key part of our upland farmed landscape.	Implement a further phase of Traditional Farm Building Scheme.	Head of Conservation	3 further traditional farm buildings restored by March 2025.
Support initiatives which celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the National Park and its communities, and support engagement with the National Park with new and diverse audiences.	Work with communities and partners to develop programmes to interpret, enjoy, celebrate, and enhance access to and engagement with the rich cultural heritage of the Park.	Head of Engagement	Three projects which enhance access to and engagement with the cultural heritage of the National Park completed each year to March 2026.
Maintain the unique levels of tranquillity and pristine dark skies in the National Park.	We will continue to map tranquillity levels and dark sky pollution to inform future development.	Head of Planning and Policy and Visitor Development and Tourism Officer	Northumberland International (Gold Tier) Dark Sky Park status maintained, and the National Park independently verified the most tranquil part of England.

Outcome 4: A Welcoming Park for All

Management Plan Aim: To be a welcoming place, offering enjoyment and exploration of one of our finest landscapes and to support wellbeing.

Business Plan targets	What we will do	Lead	Outcomes
Develop a more accessible National Park for All, engaging and empowering diverse audiences to connect to the special qualities of the National Park on their own terms.	We will work with Northumberland County Council to maintain the rights of way network within the National Park.	Head of Conservation	80% of the rights of ways within the National Park consistently (annually) assessed as easy to use.
	Maintain the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail.	Head of Conservation	Maintain the surface and waymarking of the route and promote the route as agreed with the HWNT Partnership.
	We will implement a Visitor Development Strategy to establish a network of fully accessible visitor hubs across the National Park.	Head of Engagement	Four visitor hubs (Wooler and the Cheviots, Rothbury and Coquetdale, Bellingham and North Tyne, The Sill and Hadrian's Wall), in place by March 2026.
	Deliver a programme to enhance access and facilities for people of all physical abilities across the National Park.	Head of Conservation	Deliver at least 25 km of new 'accessible to all' routes and a minimum of three additional changing place facilities for visitors to the National Park by March 2026.
Use the National Park and our expertise to deliver opportunities to enrich education and engagement.	In Year 1 of the Plan explore the potential to develop Walltown Country Park and an exemplar @Park for everyone' destination.	Head of Engagement	Business case prepared for the Borderland Inclusive growth Deal by March 2024.
	We will continue to develop our education programme in and beyond the Park.	Head of Engagement	Deliver an annual programme of learning engagements reaching 27,000 participants by 2026.
	We will continue to develop and expand our engagement programme for new audiences, including	Head of Engagement	Deliver an annual programme of public engagement activity reaching 6,000 participants by 2026.

Business Plan targets	What we will do	Lead	Outcomes
	<p>people who access the National Park for their health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Engage young people with the work of the Authority through a series of training and placement opportunities.</p>	Head of Engagement	Deliver a minimum of 10 training or placement opportunities for young people each year.
Continue to operate The Sill and curate a programme of events, activities, and exhibitions to engage more and different people with the National Park.	<p>Operate The Sill as a flagship Landscape Discovery Centre attracting over 100,000 visitors each year.</p> <p>Tell the story of the National Park Authority through The Sill, our engagement programme and our corporate communications.</p>	<p>Head of Engagement</p> <p>Head of Engagement</p>	Attract 120,000 visitors to The Sill in year one, 125,000 in year two and 127,500 by year three, with over 25,000 engaging annually with our exhibition programme.
Actively communicate as a Welcoming Park.	Help a wide range of audiences to understand and appreciate Northumberland National Park.	Head of Marketing and Development	Grow social media audience by 2% a month, increase unique users to the website by 20% each year and grow the number of people signed up for our communications by 20% each year to March 2026.

Outcomes 5: Thriving Communities

Management Plan Aim: To have engaged, resilient and balanced communities in a unique living, working landscape.

Business Plan target	What we will do	Lead	Outcome
Encourage more working families to live in the National Park	Deliver a positive and proactive planning service which supports appropriate sustainable development, enables the development and retention of essential community infrastructure and enhances the connectivity of the Park. In 2025 we will begin a review of the Local Plan for the National Park.	Head of Planning and Policy Head of Planning & Policy	Maintain high performance levels for our development management service and approve up to 8 new houses per year to meet the Local Plan housing target. New Local Plan for the National Park developed to public consultation stage.
Support farmers and land managers in the National Park in pursuit of thriving communities and the delivery of park purposes.	Deliver and broaden the Authority's farming and rural enterprise service include land management and stewardship advice, business advice, natural capital assessment and green and business investment support. Delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscape Grants Scheme until March 2025, delivering Defra outcomes and the priorities in this Business Plan.	Head of Conservation Head of Conservation	Business advice to at least 150 farm businesses and proving direct business support to at least 50 farm businesses by March 2026. 50 farm business projects supported, and £1,069,400 capital grant delivered through the FiPL programme by March 2025.
Work with partners on the delivery of a stewardship and growth focussed Rural Investment Plan for Northumberland.	Support the delivery of an area based rural growth initiatives in the National Park.	Director of Business Development	An integrated area-based pilot approach to rural development in part of the National Park delivered with capital investment of over £500K invested.

Outcome 6: An Authority Fit for the Future

Aim: To continue to be an effective and efficient organisation, fit for the future.

Business Plan targets	What we will do	Lead	Outcomes
Continue to develop and support our staff, members, and volunteers.	We will continue to develop and refresh our Organisational Development Strategy to support the training and development of staff, members, and volunteers.	Head of Business Support	New OD Strategy developed in 2023. Short-term staff sickness to remain below 2.5 days per annum throughout the Business Plan period.
Work to enhance the diversity of our staff and governance.	We will amend recruitment and training practices to offer opportunities to a wider demographic and refresh our governance framework to enable involvement of young people and more diverse voices in the Authority.	Head of Business Support and Head of Engagement	At least five opportunities will be offered in each year of the Plan which enhance diversity in our staff and governance. Grow our NNPA led volunteer days 10% from the 2022 baseline figure of 1,700.
Implement new ways of working to support hybrid, remote, and 364 day working as a flexible and modern organisation.	We will implement new ways of working to embed hybrid working and to provide for 364 day working as a customer facing business, employing systems which support new and efficient ways of working and which enhance our business resilience.	Head of Business Support	New ways of working and work patterns established by March 2024, to embed hybrid working and provide 364 day working.
Review our Authority owned land and built estate to ensure it remains relevant and efficient in its delivery of our corporate priorities.	We will take a strategic approach to land purchase and property disposal in line with the priorities in this Business Plan.	Director of Park Management	Property portfolio changed in line with business needs. (Acquisitions and disposals).

Business Plan targets	What we will do	Lead	Outcomes
Continue our journey in growing self-generated income.	We will continue to grow our self-generated income and develop strategies which enhance the financial resilience of the Authority to help resource our priorities.	Head of Business Support	We will grow annual self-generated income (excluding project funding) to over £1.7m by March 2026.
	We will continue to fundraise to support core and priority projects as outlined in this Plan.	Head of Marketing and Development	We will meet annual fundraising targets and provide more opportunities for individual giving.
We will continue to research, understand, and communicate our value and impact.	Develop digital and data and smart systems to establish baseline information, measure our impact and demonstrate our value.	Head of Business Support	We will create and circulate a new business management dashboard to be used by all staff to monitor impact and performance.
		Head of Engagement	We will launch and run a new visitor survey which will provide key data to measure various elements of the business plan and Defra KPIs.
	Create a systems approach which shapes our digital transition ensuring that we embed digital tools and skills across all our areas of work.	Head of Business Support	We will roll out a new digital staff training programme to ensure staff are able to use digital innovation to record and capture useful data and achievement of projects and objectives.
	Adopting a cloud first approach to make processes more efficient, improve access and secure our digital assets.	Head of Business Support	We will continue to assess our systems, and when appropriate move to cloud based systems to improve our resilience and further enable hybrid working. A key new system required in this period is the Finance system to enable us to be fit for the future and incorporate our new income streams.

Delivering and Resourcing the Business Plan

Supporting and overseeing delivery

In each of the three years of this Business Plan we will prepare an Operational Plan setting out more detail of our activities in that particular year, and we will publish an Annual Review on what we have done at the end of each year and its impact on the State of the National Park.

The actions set out in this Business Plan are underpinned by a range of statutory and supporting functions. In addition to our role as the planning and open access authority for the National Park, the Authority also has a number of core support services such as Finance, Corporate Support, HR, Digital and Data, Estates, Fundraising and Communications which are critical to the day-to-day operation of the Authority and the delivery of all aspects of this Business Plan.

Financial resources

The table below sets out the agreed budget for the first year of the implementation of the Business Plan. Only confirmed funding has been included in this table, and it is anticipated additional resources will be identified during the first and future years of the Business Plan.

Strategic Aim	Expenditure	Income	Net Cost
Nature Recovery	(£626,500)	£540,500	(£86,000)
Climate Action	(£254,000)	£2,800	(£251,200)
Valuing Place: Culture and Heritage	(£507,800)	£9,200	(£498,600)
A Welcoming Park for All	(£2,252,700)	£1,363,800	(£888,900)
Thriving Communities	(£798,300)	£366,400	(£431,900)
An Authority Fit for the Future	(£589,700)	£73,400	(£516,300)
Total (*net total funded by National Park Core Grant)	(£5,029,000)	£2,356,100	(£2,672,900)

Key measures of Success:

Note to members an infographic of the key outcomes to be achieved by 2026 listed earlier will be completed when BP approved.