

Report 2: Half Year Performance and Strategic Risk Register Update

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to present a progress update on the delivery 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 3-year Business Plan in March 2023. There have been subsequent minor alterations following June and September meetings, nevertheless the main objectives of the plan have been embedded into the organisational work programme.
- 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 reviewed by Leadership Team on a quarterly basis. Any additional impacts or mitigations that are identified are recorded in the register and this 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 Net Zero.
- c. Members of the Authority are kept informed of the strategic risks which continue to pose the most serious residual risk. There have previously been two risks which are in this category, Risk 6, Maintaining our Financial Position, and Risk 9, Progressing towards Net Zero.
- d. Risk 9, Progressing towards Net Zero has been amended. The risk now has a residual likelihood of 5, almost certain, and reduced impact of 3, moderate. This indicates despite mitigating actions, there is a remains a risk of failure to meet the organisations objectives, due to uncertainty around our ability to reduce emissions. However, the proposed change of focus to the wider National Park, rather than the Authority’s organisational emissions, has the potential to realise more significant emissions reductions for the resources available. The resulting reputational impact on the organisation is potentially lower given the change of focus, in fact if successful a significant upside enhancement of the reputation of the Authority and standing of the National Park might be realised. Further discussion on mitigating actions and prioritisation of resources is presented for the attention of members in Report 5 of this meeting. Other risks to be considered are in Table A.

Table A. Residual Risks to delivery of the NNPA Business Plan delivery

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

- e. Risk 6, Maintaining our financial position has a residual likelihood of 4, likely, and an impact of 4, major. Year 3 of the Medium-Term Budget 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. 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 meet the significantly increased self-generated income targets. As per the third quarter report these risks are being adequately managed in the

current year, and all efforts are being made to secure favourable future grant settlements.

6. Work Programme

- a. The Business Plan 2023 is based on the aims 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 6th aim in the Business Plan which is:

6. Maintaining An Excellent Organisation That Is Fit for the Future.

- b. Our work programmes for the next 3 years are the same as those set out in the Business Plan.

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. The initial assessment has found many existing and, often, overlapping datasets. It is believed that the Defra Outcomes Indicator Framework, which uses a Natural Capital approach, will help to frame this objective. The first formal review of the framework is due in 2024, prior to this much of the information is contained in experimental statistics.
- b. The RSPB Curlew Project (2021 – 2024) continues. The project is led by RSPB, with support from NNPA staff, Natural England, Forestry Commission and Tyne Rivers Trust. In Q1 of each year surveying takes place with project partners. This year's survey has indicated that Curlew productivity remains around 0.4 chicks per adult pair, similar to 2022. It indicates the population is not yet stable, as a rate of 0.5 chicks per adult pair is required.
- c. The Hadrian's Wall: Recovering Nature (HW:RN) project (2021 – 2025) was launched in October 2023. A presentation will be made to members ahead of the formal opening of the Authority meeting on 13 December.
- 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.

- e. Inspiring our audiences to support nature recovery is a key outcome for the new Business Plan. At the end of reporting period, late September, the felling of the Sycamore at Sycamore Gap led to a surge in interest in our website and digital communications. Website Unique Visits rose from 1,100 on the 27th of September to over 150,000 over the 28th and 29th. This tragic act is already providing opportunities for the Authority and its partners to engage people on the importance of place and of nature loss.
- 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; HWRN and with the RSPB are actively supporting nature enhancement.

8. Climate Action

- a. Our Objectives for Climate Action are:
 - Net Zero Authority – To be net zero by 2030 (a reduction of 100t CO2e per annum)
 - To deliver a Net Zero Sill – through sourcing funding to retrofit our buildings
 - Net Zero National Park – To influence a net reduction of 14,600t CO2e per annum
 - Influence improvements to active travel and public transport
- b. These objectives are a point for discussion in Report 5 on today's agenda.
- c. Active discussions are taking place on possible funding to support active travel initiatives in the English National Parks.
- d. 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.

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 Heritage at Risk volunteers who survey and report on the condition of these monuments had not operated since the onset of Covid-19. This network has been revived, with experienced members partnered with new enthusiasts. 49 Heritage volunteer activities have taken place in the past 6 months, more than in the preceding 2 years.
- b. The existing Traditional Farm Buildings (TFB) Pilot Scheme formally closed at the end of December 2022. An additional £4mv funding for a further phase of the scheme involving all English will be administered through the existing Farming In Protected Landscapes (FiPL) framework. The Authority is looking at our potential to bid given we have been a significant recipient to date.

- c. Project funding from the National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative was secured in 2019 but was delayed due to Covid. Work on the ground began in November 2023.
- d. In December we will celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the designation of Northumberland International Dark Sky Park (NIDSP) with a new exhibition and supporting programme titled "Dark Skies Matter" at The Sill from the 9th of December 2023 until March 2024. The ongoing monitoring of the condition of NIDSP has begun with a series of light meters installed 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 a significant support from our community of volunteers. Projects such as the TFB pilot and Landscape Enhancement Initiative support cultural heritage.

10. A Welcoming Park for All

- a. To develop a more accessible National Park, improvements are ongoing to our rights of way, surveys to determine the ease of use happen every 6-months. The plan to deliver 25km of 'Miles without Styles' are progressing. The plan to make Walltown site 'Accessible to All' is progressing with Borderlands funding plans in progress We are also looking to make access improvements to sites at Hareshaw Linn and Ad Gefrin with grant application from the NoT Rural Investment Plan submitted in December.
- 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 next 3 years are 9,000 learners and 2,000 event participants per annum. From April to September 2023, we had 4,750 learners and 550 event participants. Key partnerships to deliver this work have included Useful Vision, Sight Matters, Deaf Association North East, JET, ID on Tyne and Chrysalis Club and more.
- 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 79,900 against a year to date target of 78,000.
- 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. A presentation on the current progress of the strategy is due to be presented to Members at the beginning of the December meeting.
- e. Ambitious targets to expand our social media audience by 2% per month and website users and mailing distribution by 20% per years have been set until 2026. The tragic felling at Sycamore Gap has significantly increased the profile of NNP nationally and the number of web and social media followers is currently on target.
- f. Impact on the State of the Park – The Management Plan Aim for Welcoming Park is to: Be a welcoming place, offering enjoyment and exploration of one of our finest landscapes and to support wellbeing. At this stage, it is not known how much of an

impact the loss of the Sycamore at Sycamore Gap will have on visitor numbers, however, through our work to attract visitors to specific sites and by developing a park wide visitor development strategy, we are working to attract new audiences to both our established and lesser-known areas in the Park.

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 at least 8 new houses per year during the length of the local plan and continue to provide a high performing planning service. 3 new houses have been approved to the end of September YTD. With a further 3 approved outside the reporting period.
- 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. Across the three groups there are 41 members.
- c. The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme is now in its 3rd 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, of £1,700,000 funding available, £940,000 has been committed and £619,000 has been claimed.
- d. A new Farm Business Support programme is being developed through the North of Tyne Rural Investment Plan and Advance Northumberland. The pilot will see £500k invested and led through the National Park Authority. The programme has been formally launched and staff recruitment process is underway.
- 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. The Authority is currently demonstrating positive influence with several programmes supporting land-based businesses across the county. Externally funded programmes are helping the communities of the National Park to transition to meet challenges and, either through direct payments or advice and guidance on planning, land management schemes or funding, NNPA is actively supporting our rural communities.

12. An Authority Fit for the Future

- a. The Authority approved the outline of the next Organisational Development Strategy 2023-25 in June 2023. Key actions have already begun including creation of a detailed EDI action plan, engaging wellbeing programme including women's health champions, digitisation of new starter process and designing a hybrid working review.

- b. The Authority is continuing to grow our self-generated income in the coming year. Traditional revenue streams of car parking and retail have been strong with income in line with targets for the year. Similarly, The Sill café continues to perform well with income 109% 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 9 organisations for £141,000 with applications submitted to another 10 organisations for £149,000. These support our work through grants for exhibitions, our Learning Team, electric parking infrastructure and access improvements, among others.

13. Conclusions

- a. The current work programme frames our objectives as set in the Business Plan. Subject to minor amendments the Business Plan, as approved in March, continues to guide the organisation.
- 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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