

Report 1: Third Quarter 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 with the draft 3-year Business Plan in March 2023. This was fully signed off in September 2023 and the 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 varying stakeholder priorities and capacity.
 - 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 highest residual risk. Table A below shows there are two risks in this category, Risk 6, Maintaining our Financial Position, and Risk 9, Progressing towards Net Zero.

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, 9 | |
| 3. Moderate | | | 3, 4, 8, 7 | 2 | |
| 2. Minor | | | | | |
| 1. Slight | | | | | |

- d. Risk 6, Maintaining our financial position has a residual likelihood of 4, likely, and an impact of 4, major. A revised set of budget assumptions have been included in the Medium-Term Budget Plan 2024/25 – 2026/27 (Report Year 3 on this Agenda) which show that while we have mitigating actions in place to recognise and manage risk, but the risk of pay award and core grant assumptions being incorrect will have a large impact. As a result, maintaining our financial position is finely balanced. As always this is closely monitored, and issues will be brought to the members of attention in our quarterly reporting if required.
- e. Members feedback when discussing the Quarter 2 Strategic Risk Register update (presented December 2023), has been taken into account when assessing the rating of Risk 9, Progressing towards Net Zero. Following mitigating actions this has been assessed as having a residual likelihood of 4, likely, and an impact of 4, major. Due to loss of staff capacity measuring our progress on Net Zero National Park Authority has been impacted. Progress to Net Zero National Park (the place) has seen good progress continues with tree planting, nature recovery and peatland initiatives.
- f. The only other change made as part of the Leadership Team quarterly review of risk rankings is to Risk 2, Failure to influence and respond to policy changes from National Government. Previously this was assessed to have a residual likelihood of 5, almost certain, and an impact of 3, moderate. On reflection we have reduced the likelihood to 4, likely. We continue to have influence with regard the Protected Landscapes

Partnership, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Nature Recovery initiatives being developed in Defra. We recognise we are less able to influence other government departments but on balance we have downgraded the likelihood.

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 CommunitiesThese 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.
- c. We are currently exploring how we can improve our reporting on our progress towards the delivery of the Business Plan. Section 7 includes key performance highlights of outcomes we deem as on target and sections 8 to 13 report by exception against each outcome where we are making progress but are behind target.

7. Key Performance Highlights (Year to Date)

- a. Hadrian's Wall : Recovering Nature successfully launched, a Natural Capital project is underway and habitat opportunities have been identified via the opportunity and constraints mapping work. Historic data is being analysed and partnership discussions being held with respect to identifying opportunities for including for specific species and for the historic environment.
- b. Our Landscape Recovery Pilot bid was successful and is now subject to gateway approval process to finalise details and funding amount.
- c. 22 Curlew chicks hatched and productivity increased from 0.38 to 0.4 over monitored broods, and 43 Hen Harrier chicks fledged compared to 26 in 2022.
- d. 91.77ha. of new broadleaved and native tree establishment has been approved on new sites and a further 4.84ha has been achieved through forest restructuring.
- e. 115 Farm Businesses supported, receiving a total of £596,350 of grant funding between them.
- f. Delivered just over 1 kilometres of footpath improvements on the iconic central section of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail between Cat Stairs and Hotbank Farm. Funded by the National Grids Landscape Enhancement Initiative.

- g. A celebration of 10th anniversary of International Dark Sky Park status took place in December. Including partnership celebration day with over 60 invited guests and opening of Noctalgia, a specially commissioned co-created art installation with Bethan Maddocks, exploring why Dark Skies matter which was co-created with a range of community groups including Wooler Middle school, Deaf Awareness North East, North East Sight Matters, Zig Zag, Wooler families and visitors to The Sill.
- h. Finalised the UK National Park Conference programme, secured the speakers and invitations to initial delegates have been issued.
- i. Three bids totalling £1.15m have been made to the RAMP funding pot which is the first element of the Rural Investment Plan. Healthy People, Healthy Park has been successful (£231,000) although the official grant offer is outstanding and Green Pathways to Employment and A Welcoming Park South are due to be assessed at the next funding panel in March 2024.
- j. The number of Sill Visitors has exceeded the target by 3%.
- k. Crisis communication response to the felling of Sycamore Gap.
- l. "The Black Nature in Residence Programme" launched in October. The programme aims to contribute to the changing narrative around who has a right to have a connection with nature and start adding more diverse voices to the climate crisis facing society today.
- m. In partnership with NE1 CAN - careers focussed day at The Sill took place with 60 young people and a Hadrian's Wall Focus Day "Dark Skies through Roman Eyes" was held online with participation from 550 students across the country.
- n. A Wellbeing Festival took place at the beginning of October 2023 with participation from multiple stall holders.
- o. Two Young Ranger placements (10 days each) were recruited (North and South of the park) and in place between September and November.
- p. 7 new houses approved in total up to end of December. (Target 8)
- q. Short-term staff sickness of 1.57 days per employee to the end of December (target 2.5 days).

8. Nature Recovery

- a. There are 17 outcomes listed in the Business Plan against Nature Recovery. 1 is completed, 12 are on target and 4 have seen progress but are behind target.
- b. Outcomes which have made progress but are deemed behind target are as follows:
 - i. Outcome: 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.

Update: A review of stewardship agreements that cover SSSIs in the National Park have yet to be undertaken but we are aware of some on the ground surveying having been done, e.g. Border Mires, Hadrian's Wall : Recovering Nature, and Northumberland Peatland Partnership (NPP) peatland surveys of The Wou and The Cheviot.

- ii. Outcome: 2,000 additional hectares of peatland habitat in the National Park will be under restoration by March 2026.

Update: 53 hectares of afforested peat has been approved for restoration but the removal of trees and restoration of peat at the 611ha Uswayford site has been delayed due to access negotiations. Peatland restoration continues at the Threestoneburn (627ha.) and a further 8 sites (2,585ha.) have been surveyed by Northumberland Peatland Partnership for peatland restoration, however landowners await clarity for future funding options in order to commit to restoration work.

- iii. Outcome: 1,000 ha of existing commercial coniferous forests will have been removed or restructured by March 2026.

Update: 57.71 ha. of afforested peat is under restoration this year. The removal of trees and restoration of peat at Uswayford has been delayed due to access negotiations and further details are awaited from Forestry England regards their wider estate.

- iv. Outcome: Red squirrel distribution will be conserved in key locations including Hareshaw Dene, the North Tyne, Simonside, Wark Forest and Coquetdale.

Update: Red Squirrel North East annual report identified that red squirrels are still to be found in the park but between 2022 and 2023, territory occupancy declined by 3.2% whilst grey squirrels increased by 5.3% across the project area.

9. Climate Action

- a. There are 6 outcomes listed in the Business Plan against Climate Action. 2 are on target and 4 have seen progress but are behind target.

- b. Outcomes which have made progress but are deemed behind target are as follows:

- i. Outcome: Reduce our scope 1 and 2 emissions as a National Park Authority to 52 tCO₂e by March 2026 and initiate a carbon offsetting programme by March 2025. Seeking to achieve an average carbon sequestration target of 63 tCO₂e/pa by March 2030.

Update: we have lost capacity in this area and there has been a gap due to recruitment and notice period for the new Data and Performance Analyst who will pick this area up. The new postholder starts work for the Authority in April.

- ii. Outcome: Seek opportunities to influence a net reduction of 14,600 tCO₂e* per annum.

Update: Small World Consultancy contracted for 2024 to undertake a repeat analysis of the NNP carbon footprint, taking onboard emission savings from peatland work and sequestration from tree establishment work. Further work required to be better sighted of and influence activities associated with the wider NNP carbon fluxes.

- iii. Outcome: A minimum of 20 EV charging points in place at NNPA sites in key visitor locations by March 2026.

Update: BMW Recharge in Nature initiative delayed due to difficulties with the National Power Grid and costs of new electricity line provision. Quotes explored to upgrade existing infrastructure on other Authority sites and work included in Rural Asset Multiplier Pilot (RAMP). The outcome of the bid is expected early March.

- iv. Outcome: Net Zero Sill project underway by March 2026

Update: Detailed mapping of our sites and the opportunities have taken place in order to create a view on prioritisation and value for money as well as inform the search for viable improvements and technologies. Contact has been made with potential funders and opportunities have been identified. Responsibility for this project is moving to the Director of Finance and Resources.

10. Valuing Place: Culture and Heritage

- a. There are 5 outcomes listed in the Business Plan against Valuing Place. 3 are on target and 2 have seen progress but are behind target.

- b. Outcomes which have made progress but are deemed behind target are as follows:

- i. Outcome: Less than 21 (5%) of scheduled monuments are considered at risk by March 2026 from baseline of 33 (7%) in 2023.

Update: There are currently 32 considered at risk and work is ongoing with the Heritage at Risk volunteers to reduce this further.

- ii. Outcome: Northumberland International (Gold Tier) Dark Sky Park status maintained, and the National Park independently verified the most tranquil part of England.

Update: Celebration of 10th anniversary of International Dark Sky park status took place in December. Including partnership celebration day with over 60 invited guests and opening of Noctalgia, a specially commissioned co-created art installation made with communities across the National Park and beyond, exploring why Dark Skies matter for people, place and nature and to promote the importance of the dark skies status. Ongoing monitoring and survey work included upgrade of TESS photometers to measure sky quality. Ongoing work on best practice guide for outdoor lighting with Northumberland County Council. This is marked as behind target although a lot of work has taken place because an independent report on tranquillity is not yet commissioned.

11. A Welcoming Park for All

- a. There are 12 outcomes listed in the Business Plan against A Welcoming Park for All. 8 are on target and 4 have seen progress but are behind target.

- b. Outcomes which have made progress but are deemed behind target are as follows:

- i. Outcome: People from underserved groups visiting or engaging with the National Park will increase by 10% from the baseline developed in 2023.

Update: The development of the baseline is behind target. Moving the visitor survey forward has been impacted by the vacant Data and Performance Analyst post. We have made good progress in terms of engaging with underserved groups. The Black Nature in Residence programme launched in October. We have worked with a Conversation Group record welcomes in 6 different languages for Walltown, Sill and Cawfields, installation is planned this quarter ready for the coming visitor season. We have also undergone development work with local farmer (Moss Peteral) through Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) to develop an offer to engage diverse groups with "Beef, Bogs and Biodiversity" on site. Sessions have been trialled and tested with NNPA volunteers and organised groups.

- ii. Outcome: 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.

Update: We have bids for funding to deliver additional accessible to all routes through the North of Tyne, Rural Asset Multiplier Programme (RAMP) and are currently awaiting confirmation of success. The bid also includes for staff resource to undertake a baseline assessment of the Public Rights of Way network and the fit with the Miles without Stiles definition. There is also Defra Accessible funding due in 2024/25 which can support this.

- iii. Outcome: Business case prepared for the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal by March 2024.

Update: There has been ongoing development work including work with the Borderlands team. Logic models have been completed and information shared to develop programme level business case. The NNPA specific business case cannot be developed further until outcomes of RAMP bids are confirmed. A decision on funding is expected by early March.

- iv. Outcome: 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.

Update: Social media growth is on target. Generating unique website users is more of a challenge and is behind target presently. Initiatives to address this such as improved website navigation implemented and the development of a newsletter.

12. Thriving Communities

- a. There are 5 outcomes listed in the Business Plan against Thriving Communities. 4 are on target and 1 has seen progress but is behind target.
- b. Outcomes which have made progress but are deemed behind target are as follows:
 - i. Outcome: Rural Investment Plan for Northumberland. An integrated area-based pilot approach to rural development in part of the National Park delivered with capital investment of over £500K invested.
 - ii. Update: Three bids have been made to the RAMP funding pot which is the first element of the Rural Investment Plan. Healthy People Healthy Park has been successful although the official grant offer is outstanding and Green Pathways to Employment and A Welcoming Park South are due to be assessed at the next funding panel in March. This is deemed behind target as the external process to award funding has taken longer than anticipated, impacting delivery timetables for any successful bids. This is outside our control.

13. An Authority Fit for the Future

- a. There are 13 outcomes listed in the Business Plan against An Authority Fit for the Future. 8 are on target and 5 have seen progress but are behind target.
- b. Outcomes which have made progress but are deemed behind target are as follows:
 - i. Outcome: New ways of working and work patterns established by March 2024, to embed hybrid working and provide 364 day working.

Update: We are currently mid review, staff have been consulted for their views on how the trial we have been operating meets the business needs, via staff and manager surveys.
 - ii. Outcome: We will meet annual fundraising targets and provide more opportunities for individual giving.

Update: Good progress has been made developing bids to fund core elements of our work but we are behind target exploring lower level individual giving opportunities. Progress has been impacted by the significant resource required to focus on the 3 RAMP bids as well as the Head of Department (whose remit includes communications) capacity being impacted by the felling of Sycamore Gap.
 - iii. Outcome: We will create and circulate a new business management dashboard to be used by all staff to monitor impact and performance.

Update: Some good progress made for specific projects such as FiPL and Climate Change, however we are behind where we would like to be due to staff turnover. This will be a priority in the coming year.
 - iv. Outcome: 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.

Update: Visitor Survey packaged as a project and pitched to rural catalyst for support to develop an innovative solution. Moving this forward has been impacted by the vacant Data and Performance Analyst post.

- v. Outcome: 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.

Update: Other priorities and structural change have impacted the delivery of this target. A lot of pre-tender research has been ongoing and demonstrations from a number of systems have been taken place. This has enabled us to be clear what the criteria is we require from a new system. Aim for procurement during 2024/25 and implementation in time for the 2025/26 financial year.

14. Conclusions

- a. There are 58 outcomes we aim to achieve by March 2026, and we cannot report progress on all each quarter. We have captured a selection of key highlights for the year to date for members information, but the detail is mainly based on exception i.e. those we have deemed behind target. By its nature it does not therefore list everything we are achieving against the Business Plan. The report demonstrates in many cases although we are behind where we would like to be against 20 of the outcomes, good progress is being made to lay the foundations for delivery in this the first year of the Business Plan.
- b. Members are asked to note the progress of the work programmes underway and note the current progress revising the Strategic Risk Register.

Contact Officer: Hazel Fitzsimmons, Director of Finance and Resources, 01434 611504 or email: hazel.fitzsimmons@nnpa.org.uk