

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

7<sup>th</sup> August 2006

**SPENDING PROPOSALS, OPPORTUNITIES FUND**

**Purpose of the Report**

To present spending proposals for which an allocation of monies from the Opportunities Fund is sought.

**Strategic Planning Framework**

The information contained in this report is consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

- ***Best Value Performance Plan***

"Plan and manage all aspects of the Authority's business so as to make the most effective use of our resources"

**The Proposals**

The Opportunities Fund held a current balance of £241k after year end 2005/06, to which can now be added the additional £110k from DEFRA (the eventual grant announcement was for an increase of £116k, but the 2006/07 budget included a £6k shortfall of 'savings to be made'). This gives a total balance of **£341k**. The total cost of the proposals covered by this paper (see below) is **£113.6k**.

Twelve proposals for additional spending are made in this paper, and are summarised in the table below. Please note that there are two classes of proposal:

- **Those where the activity is a carry-over activity from 2005/06.** Although the Authority had allocated budget for these activities in 2005/06, the process of arranging these activities had not reached a point at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 where the related budget could be reserved as a creditor in the accounts. However, some work had been undertaken to create a commitment, and the objectives of this work remain. As explained in the May 2006 report on the year-end results, the above effect is the result of a tightening of accounting practice within government accounting, and removes the ability of organisations to record as spent the budget allocation for an activity that hasn't taken place. It was therefore always the expectation that certain items from planned prior-year activity would need funding in the following year, because we were no longer permitted to count that activity as a creditor.
- **Those which represent new activity,** which wasn't planned at the time that the 2006/07 budget was agreed. This class includes some activity that was suggested at that time (but that was unaffordable based on the then financial position), but mostly comprises proposals that are new, in terms of the planned work for 2006/07.

Items shown as shaded entries in the table have potential 'added financial value' (either 'matched funding' or where they bring in, or relate to, some other monies).

	SUMMARY	Policy priority	£
	<b>Commitments from 2006/07</b>		
1	Juniper	A	1,000
2	Barden Fell Moor interpretation	C	8,000
3	Milestones project	C	5,000
	<b>New proposals</b>		
4	Digital aerial photography	A	40,000
5	Langcliffe Quarry	A	10,000
6	Stone Dykes improvements	A	8,500
7	Habitat Survey Data	A	7,000
8	Maps for publications / Websites	A	2,000
9	Digital images of species	A	2,000
10	Clapham Public Conveniences	D	17,000
11	Printing costs, 'Visitor' / 'Dales' (provisional)	D	3,500
12	Yorkshire Dales Apprenticeship Scheme	E	8,000
13	Media Training	-	1,600
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>113,600</b>

In terms of Policy Priorities, 63% of the value of the above proposals is for Priority A spending, 11% for Priority C, 18% for Priority D, 7% for Priority E and 1% for 'corporate support' activity

These proposals have been considered by the Senior Management Team, and are **recommended** to Members for their consideration and approval. Department Heads have confirmed that their staff will be able to manage the additional work that the proposals will bring, without effecting existing targets.

However, a cautionary note to the above recommendation: there may yet be additional costs in relation to the Northern Office project (see separate item on the agenda of this meeting), and the sale of Yorebridge House has (at the time of writing) yet to be completed. It is therefore **recommended** that approval of any of the spending proposals described in this paper is conditional on the successful completion of the sale of Yorebridge House, and that any proposals will not be confirmed until that event. Once the sale has been completed, there will be sufficient monies remaining in the Opportunities Fund (even after the spending proposed by this paper) to cover additional costs that may arise from the Northern Office project. Department Heads have confirmed that the likely delay this recommendation will cause will not have an impact on the ability to deliver the proposals detailed in the Appendix.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That Members:

1. Consider the proposals for spending a proportion of the current Opportunities Fund balance, and approve these proposals accordingly, but agree that...
2. the spending of any sums so allocated does not commence until such time as the sale of Yorebridge House has been completed.

RICHARD BURNETT  
HEAD OF FINANCE & RESOURCES

20<sup>th</sup> July 2006

**Detailed bids****1. Juniper (£1,000)**

Project carried over from last year, involving the propagation of juniper plants. The order was made on 26th March 2006 but did not form part of the 2005/06 outturn as a creditor as no work in relation to the order could be carried out in 2005/06.

**2. Barden Fell Moor interpretation (£8,000)**

Replacement of the 18 Barden Fell and Barden Moor Access Area boards. The originals are nearly 15 years old and are in disrepair. The proposal provides the opportunity to add in the new Open Access information and to present versions of the maps on which the Bolton Abbey Estate has been consulted on. Although the project commenced in July 2005, the boards will not be ready until this summer (2006), and this is therefore an item where a reallocation from the previous year's budget is now needed.

**3. Milestones Project (£5,000)**

This project, to restore a number of historic milestones (including five that are listed and 'at risk') has been 'carried-over' from 2005/06. The project has committed matched funding from North Yorkshire Highways of £5k. Due to difficulties in securing an appropriate contractor, the works did not start last year.

**4. Digital aerial photography (either c£40,000 one-off or £10,000 p/a)**

The Farm Conservation, Ecology and Archaeology teams are currently facing a large number of requests from farmers for Farm Environment Plans (FEPs) to support Environmental Stewardship applications (the projected income from FEPs this year is now £21,000 more than originally planned). In addition, there are a number of areas of the Park to which the Authority has been denied access during the Park-wide habitat surveys. Digital aerial photography (at the resolution now available) would enable the FEPs to be done more quickly and effectively, and allow the habitat survey to be completed for the whole Park. As well as supporting these two priority A areas of work, good aerial photographs would improve many of the Authority's other services notably planning applications and enforcement cases; planning and monitoring works to rights of way; designing, mapping and monitoring new native woodlands; archaeological work; definitive map cases; education projects; and, retail products. The £40k would give the Authority unlimited access to and use of the 2000 Millennium 'flyover' and a completely updated flyover in 2007 (i.e. no on-going costs until a potential update in c2014). Alternatively, the same data could be accessed through an annual license fee of around £10,000 but this does not offer the same value for money. **NB** officers are still exploring the range of cost options and providers, with a view to identifying the most cost-effective approach. However, it would be helpful to get an 'in principle' decision from Members before taking this work any further.

**5. Langcliffe Quarry (£10,000)**

As part of the Craven Integrated Rural Development project (involving the Authority, Yorkshire Forward and Craven District Council), a number of investigations have been carried out to look at the potential to re-develop the 'depot' area of the Langcliffe Quarry site to an economic use that will help to conserve and enhance the site. Members will be aware that the Authority leases a substantial area of land (including the Hoffmann Kiln) immediately adjacent to the depot area. Following a tendering procedure, Rural Solutions were appointed by Craven DC (and funded by Yorkshire Forward) to work up detailed proposals for an appropriate use of the depot area and to seek planning permission. As the entire site (including the depot area) is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, English Heritage has indicated that any application would need to be considered against a detailed 'Conservation Plan' for the site. The production of an integrated plan covering the whole of the land owned by Craven DC and the land leased by the Authority would be of benefit to both organisations in the future management of the site, irrespective of the outcome of any development

proposals. The Authority has, therefore, been asked to contribute half the costs of developing such a Conservation Plan.

#### **6. Stone Dykes improvements (£8,500)**

The Authority operates a workshop at Stone Dykes Barn, Stainforth, in support of the Ranger Service in the Malhamdale and Three Peaks area. The premises have been leased from a private individual by the Authority since 1989.

The site provides an office area for four members of staff when they are not out in the field, a workshop, storage for two trailers, Argocat ATV, a Quad Bike and a range of materials. The site also supports the Dales Volunteers in the South West.

The current office facility need has developed from the initial requirements of what was then a maintenance team. Since 1989, little improvement has been made to the office, which is now the permanent base for the Area Ranger for Ribblesdale as well as the Pennine Way Ranger and two Access Rangers.

Over the last year significant improvements have been made to office facilities at Yoredale, Grassington (Cottage Development) and Brunt Acres (Waiting Room Office). It is likely in the short term that we are going to continue to have a workshop and Area Ranger presence at Stainforth and as such we should consider improvements to bring the facility up to a more acceptable standard. It is therefore proposed to carry out some minor improvements within the office area, including plastering the current stone wall and creating a ceiling on the current open mezzanine floor. This work is estimated at £8.5k.

#### **7. Habitat Survey data (£7,000)**

Due to time constraints and some difficulties in relation to IT, the data collected as part of last year's survey of BAP habitats in Richmondshire has not been transferred into the Authority's databases. It had been intended that YDNPA officers would do it this year but the pressure of work on Farm Environment Plans (see elsewhere) and Limestone Country mean that the work has not yet started. The Authority are currently employing consultants to complete the second half of the survey of Richmondshire, and they will be inputting that data for us later this year. An additional £7,000 would pay for last year's survey data to be put transferred at the same time – ensuring that all the data is complete in time to meet the Authority's objective of December 2006.

#### **8. Maps for publications / websites (£2,000)**

The Authority frequently needs attractive, user-friendly maps of the National Park, for example to publish within leaflets, The Visitor newspaper, displays and websites, but we do not have the ability to produce these in-house to the standard required. At present, therefore, we have to have the maps redrawn each time we need them for a different purpose, depending on what we want to include on that map at the time.

By producing an all-purpose stylised map of the area, we can then ask our designers to amend as required by adding or removing various layers, such as those containing roads, rivers, other physical features, National Park Centres, railways and so on. Creation of the map (which the Authority would then own) would cost £2000, and it would be available full-colour, two colour, single colour and in web format.

The Area Tourism Partnership is also in the process of sourcing a similar map for the whole of the Yorkshire Dales Tourism area and it has been suggested that it might make sense to link up with them. That project would be slightly more costly for the whole map (in the region of £3,000) because it would be slightly more complicated (would cover the National Park and the Area Tourism Partnership area, which includes Harrogate) but if relevant partners were to pay for it jointly, the costs should go down, to around £1,500 each. The suggestion has been met with approval at officer level but will not be considered by the Area Tourism Partnership Executive until August so it cannot yet be confirmed whether the costs will be reduced.

## **9. Digital images of species (£2,000)**

As part of the development of the Authority's website, we have created a major new biodiversity section to promote understanding of the wildlife and habitats of the Park. The final stage is to populate the site with appropriate images. However, there are a number of species for which the Authority has no useable images. Purchase of digital images would provide a resource both for the website and a range of future publications.

## **10. Clapham Public Conveniences (£17,000)**

The Authority provides twelve public car parks (Dent now being managed by the Parish Council) with associated public conveniences. Charges for car parking are £2 for two hours or £3 all day and this revenue nets the Authority approximately £500k per annum. There is no doubt that our customers' perception of this charge is that they are paying not only for car parking but for the provision of public lavatories, and there is also no doubt that our customers expect/deserve a reasonable standard of facility.

Clapham is the subject of many complaints at the moment and is also a target for bouts of vandalism which are costly in terms of repair. Lack of investment has now brought this facility below an acceptable standard and attracts regular comments such as:

'the toilets are disgusting and what are you doing with the car park money?',  
'they are the worst toilets I have ever been into in a national park.'  
'they must be a health hazard,'  
'does the National Park not care about the public?'

To replace the cubicle doors (in-house), replace existing lavatories and urinals, box in all pipe-work, fit easy to clean floor, replace doors and windows (in-house), fit new vandal resistant lighting to increase illumination, re-plaster and decorate all walls & ceilings will cost approximately £17k.

## **11. Printing costs for 'The Visitor' and 'Dales' newspapers (£3,500)**

The Authority has committed (in the Best Value Performance Plan) to produce one edition of 'The Visitor', and two editions of 'Dales', each year.

'The Visitor' and 'Dales' newspapers are key tools in promoting understanding and enjoyment of the National Park to our visitors and residents. 'The Visitor' is distributed in and around the Park to information centres and points, accommodation providers and businesses, and further a field through a national distribution scheme. 'Dales' reaches directly into the homes our residents twice a year. It keeps them informed about the work of the Authority and its partners, is used to carry out surveys and consultations, and allows the Authority a regular point of contact with the 12,000 households in the National Park.

In recent years we have been able to keep the Authority's contribution to the production of the two newspapers to a minimum by agreeing to the production company keeping the advertising revenue generated. Last year the Authority contributed £5,000 and for this we received 220,000 copies of 'The Visitor' and 12,000 copies of 'Dales', both printed in full colour.

The production contract is now up for renewal and the costs have unexpectedly increased. While officers are investigating every means possible to reduce costs (including introduction of a cover price, reduction in quality, reduction in print run – the subject of a separate paper on the agenda of this meeting) a bid of £3,500 would keep production at the current levels this year.

If members agree, this would give time to investigate other production options, alter delivery dates, pilot the introduction of a cover price for 'The Visitor' and explore the possibility of electronic delivery. Please note the latter would not replace the printed version - although we may subsequently decide to reduce the print run - but would exist alongside it.

For background information, when we went out to tender in 2002 the figure proposed by the next nearest contractor was some £13,000 more than our current production company's estimate. When we went out to tender in 2004, no other company expressed an interest in fulfilling the contract. During the last four years there has been no increase in costs.

The implications of this money not being made available are that we must significantly decrease the print run of both the residents' and visitors' newspapers and cut back in quality. Feedback from survey forms contained within the last two editions of 'The Visitor' have been very positive regarding the improvements in quality instigated two years ago.

## **12. Yorkshire Dales Apprenticeship Scheme (£8,000)**

The Dales Apprenticeship Scheme (DAS) was developed by the YDMT in conjunction with Craven College, Tyro Training, and previously the learning Skills Council and other interested parties including the YDNPA and offers opportunities for training and work experience placements linked to the Government's Modern Apprenticeships. Successful applicants are offered an apprenticeship of 18 months, during which time, as well as formal classroom training, they are placed alongside skilled practitioners. This has allowed candidates to put training into practice, and gain valuable knowledge, experience and more importantly life skills, at the same time as undertaking an NVQ Level II in Landscape and Ecosystems.

Between 2003 and March 2006, the Authority has provided seven placement opportunities for young people aged between 16 and 24 (four of whom have moved into countryside-related employment) and another five other placements have been created by the scheme with other partners ( English Nature, National Trust, Bolton Abbey Estate, Field Studies Council and NYCC/ Nidderdale AONB jointly). Of the Authority's placements, these have been provided within the Area Ranger teams, with each individual being assigned a mentor (named Area Ranger). Whilst on the scheme individuals receive an allowance of £100 per week.

Following the budget setting process for 2006/07, it was decided to end the Authority's participation in the scheme, because other external funding was not then available and the priority rating of this work did not merit greater funding. However, YDMT have now submitted a new but similar scheme to the European Social Fund (ESF) and £30K already has already been secured from various funding sources to match the European Social Funding. As one of the major partners we feel it appropriate to be seen not only to be making an in-kind contribution but also a financial contribution, recommended to be of £8k, as part of the ESF application. This would indicate our commitment and may act as leverage to other funding opportunities.

## **13. Media Training (£1,600)**

It is now several years since officers and Members received any media training and it is now time to review this and begin a new round of training.

The training would focus on:

- how to get key messages across whether in a formal interview or in a less formal chat with a newspaper journalist
- interview techniques for radio and TV
- how to deal with difficult/controversial issues

A sum of £1,600 would enable us to train 12 people in small groups using an experienced media professional. This would hopefully be the start of a rolling programme of media training as required each year.