Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 6**

Finance and Resources Committee

19 May 2026

Action Plan 2026/27

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Members' approval for the programme of activity that the Authority plans to undertake in 2026/27 to achieve the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan.

Recommendation

2. That Members: approve the attached Action Plan as the basis for managing the Authority's day-to-day work to achieve Corporate Plan objectives in 2026/27.

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and support the strategic planning framework:

    - Corporate Plan Objective 30:
      Plan and manage the Authority's work to make the most effective use of its resources, including generating sufficient income to maintain expenditure at the same level as 2014/15 in real terms.

Background

4. The specific objectives that the Authority is trying to achieve were agreed at the Authority meeting in December and were subsequently set out in the published Corporate Plan 2026-27. The Corporate Plan is now directly aligned with the ambitions and objectives of the new National Park Management Plan 2025-2030.

5. The Action Plan sets out in more detail what we are planning to do, and by when, to make progress on those objectives this year. It is a 'public' document, but it is not written with the public as its primary audience. It is an operational document that is used by managers to plan and manage day-to-day, and it is updated during the year.

Action Plan 2026/27

6. The initial Action Plan for 2026/27 is set out in the **Annex**. The objectives relating to the Authority's eight priority areas of work are marked 'priority'. Any actions postponed from 2025/26 are marked with a (p). Those that have been outstanding for longer than a year are marked (pp).

7. Total gross expenditure is now projected at £13.6m (see Item 7), significantly above the starting budget for 2025/26 (£11.9m). It includes
    a. £1.75m for the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme;
    b. £1.30m of additional capital projects (see Item 7)
    c. £0.96m through the Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund (see Item 7)

8. The funding will support an ambitious programme of work in 2026/27. Members' attention is drawn to the following priority programmes:
    a. **Education** – we will provide outdoor learning and skills-based activities for 2,300 young people; support schools to embed outdoor learning and environmental education in their curriculum; and, run heritage-based activities for 700 young people at the Dales Countryside Museum (Objective 10);
    b. **Farm Conservation** – we will work with partners to submit a bid for an upland farm advice 'Pathfinder'; and establish a programme to support take up of regenerative farming practices (6, 20);
    c. **Outreach** – we will co-design activity days, support and training for at least 23 new community groups through partnerships and externally-funded projects; and create virtual reality experiences (9);
    d. **Planning** – we will determine at least 65% of minor and 80% of other planning applications within eight weeks or an agreed extension; and publish a new Design Guide (19);
    e. **Recreation & Health** – we will run a programme of green social prescribing activities for adults; run guided, accessible walks, as part of scaling up the Natural Health Service for North Yorkshire pilot; and create significant new accessible routes at Smardale and Cautley (8, 11, 21);
    f. **Rights of way** – we will repair four footbridges and keep 90% of routes in a condition where they are easy to use (7);
    g. **Wildlife** – we will support famers to create new wildlife-rich habitat, through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme; fund a number of more strategic projects using the new Wildlife-Rich Habitat Fund; and develop at least six bespoke species recovery plans (1, 2, 3);
    h. **Woodland** – we will support creation of at least 30 ha of native woodland and restoration of 2,500m of hedgerows; and, submit a bid for an ancient woodland revival project (5, 15);
    i. **Corporate Services –** we will design and create a new Authority website to provide a significantly improved user experience (36).

9. Members should be aware of the following factors influencing the scale and breadth of this year's Action Plan:
    a. The continuing move towards becoming a more 'project-based' organisation, with more direction from central government and other funders. Over £4 million (30% of gross expenditure) is ring-fenced for particular purposes.
    b. The ongoing need to identify opportunities to generate significant long-term external income for new projects to start towards the end of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Plan includes several potentially significant projects that are in development, including: 'Jewels of the Dales'; 'Coast to Coast nature trail', 'Three Counties, One River', and 'Our Natural Futures'.
    c. The Authority's objectives now reflect those in the National Park Management Plan 2025-2030. These align directly with the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, enabling us to demonstrate the contribution we are making towards achieving Defra's national environment targets.
    d. The scale of the work programme – when combined with the further capital projects identified in Item 7 – will require some additional staff resource. Members can take reassurance from the fact that current projected staff costs – even for 2028-29 – are below 50% of gross income.

10. Members will discern from the above, that this will be another year of intense activity, much of which is having to be developed late in the day. This underlines the commitment and dedication of staff right across the Authority. The scale of the ambition, and the volatility in the timing and nature of some of the actions, means that some significant adjustments to the Plan may be necessary as the year progresses.

11. As part of efforts to streamline some of our performance reporting (agreed with the Chair of Audit and Review) actions have been aggregated to reduce the total number and focus on those that directly contribute to achieving our objectives. The 'critical actions' – those that involve significant resources and are part of priority programmes – have been identified with a 'C' in the table.

12. Members should note that there are some significant additional actions that we plan to do during the year, using the capital funding from Defra for 2026/27 (see item 7). These have not yet been included in the Action Plan – as they are still subject to approval by Members.

Financial Implications

13. Commitments within the draft Action Plan – and the additional capital projects proposed at item 7 – are based on the overall budget for 2026/27 that was approved by Members in March. Any projects that require significant additional expenditure – or which are not included here or under Item 7 – will be brought back to Members for approval during the year.

Legal Implications

14. None.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

15. The Action Plan objectives include many projects and actions that are particularly positive towards equality groups and are aimed at widening access to the National Park and to the services provided by the National Park Authority.

Climate Change Implications

16. The Action Plan will support positive action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, primarily from land management, through Farming in Protected Landscapes, the Wildlife-Rich Habitat Fund, woodland and hedgerow creation, and support for regenerative farming. Reductions in emissions from other sources will be supported through policies in the new Local Plan and through funding from the Sustainable Development Fund.

17. The Authority will continue to reduce its own emissions, including by exploring the installation of a PV panel ground array at the Yoredale office and reviewing electricity supply options, including a green tariff.

Conclusion

18. The Action Plan for 2026-27 sets out another ambitious programme of investment into the National Park, including through Farming in Protected Landscapes (£1.76m), the new Wildlife-Rich Habitat Fund (£958k), and a suite of externally funded projects to engage new audiences and improve physical access across the National Park.

19. The scale of the work programme – and thus its volatility – means that some planned actions will almost certainly have to be changed, delayed or even cancelled altogether. These will be reported to Members, as appropriate, during the year.

Gary Smith
Acting Chief Executive