Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority

Public Rights of Way
Delegated Highway Authority

Annual Report 2025/26

April 2026

Introduction

1. For the period of this report, April 2025 to March 2026, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (the Authority) held the delegated Highway Authority responsibilities for maintenance of the 2,642km of public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways, byways open to all traffic, and restricted byways) within the National Park area.

2. The public rights of way Delegation Agreements are for: North Yorkshire Council (NYC) 1924km and Westmorland & Furness Council (W&F) 711 km and Lancashire County Council (LCC) 16km.

3. The Delegation Agreements cover a broad range of functions that allow for the management of public paths on the ground. These functions can be summarised as:

    - Signposting of public paths
    - The maintenance and improvement of public paths
    - The maintenance of river crossings
    - Traffic Regulation Orders and Temporary Closure Orders
    - Enforcement and protection of public rights.

4. The Authority has taken on these responsibilities because it recognises that a well-maintained rights of way network is fundamental to the achievement of its statutory purposes, particularly its second purpose - promoting the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park. By holding these responsibilities directly, the Authority is able to undertake maintenance and improvement works in a proactive and coordinated manner, ensuring that the network is managed effectively and in the interests of all users.

About this Report

5. This report identifies the key achievements for the year 2025/26. It considers the Authority's corporate actions, targets and progress relating to the following areas:

    - General maintenance
    - River crossings
    - Major projects
    - Path Orders and Definitive Map
    - Management of the Pennine National Trails Partnership
    - Development of the Coast to Coast Path as a National Trail
    - Unclassified Unsurfaced Roads (North Yorkshire)

Key Achievements 2025/26

Public Rights of Way Maintenance

6. During 2025/26 the following maintenance work was undertaken:

- 688 improvements to rights of way infrastructure: stiles, gates and signposts;
- 34 river crossings maintained or replaced;
- 2.4km of new engineered paths constructed;
- 920m of engineered paths repaired.

7. A total of **£874,998** of external funding and in-kind contributions were secured for rights of way projects in the National Park. The breakdown is as follows:

Value	Description
£ 38,200	Westmorland and Furness Council contribution;
£ 50,000	North Yorkshire Council contribution;
£ 20,000	National Trust, Cross Keys Bridge, Cautley;
£ 3,083	YDMT & Ramblers Assoc, Cross Keys Bridge, Cautley;
£ 101,156	National Trails Partnership Manager (inc. £16,519 as Lead Partner);
£ 37,305	Pennine Way Ranger;
£ 3,500	Pennine Way, maintenance;
£ 43,743	Pennine Way, Malham Cove, Black Hole Bridge (Access for All, NT);
£ 22,591	Pennine Bridleway Officer;
£ 2,100	Pennine Bridleway, maintenance;
£ 6,169	Pennine Bridleway, The Highway (Access for All, NT);
£ 5,206	Pennine Bridleway, Arten Gill (Access for All, NT);
£ 30,810	Three Peaks Project (£30,810towards staff costs);
£ 17,009	Freeholders Wood, Aysgarth, accessibility improvements;
£ 361,586	Coast to Coast Path initial implementation of route;
£ 73,710	Coast to Coast Path (Access for All);
£ 4,217	Path Orders;
£ 32,192	Works to Unsurfaced Unclassified Roads (NYC inc. £2,281 staff);
£ 12,190	Malham path (FiPL);
£ 3,800	Production of signs from workshop;
£ 2,431	Donations towards various for projects across the park.
£ 870,998	**Total**

Contribution in kind:

£ 4,000	Brackenbottom stone pitching, Heidelberg (Stone blocks)
£ 874,998	**Grand Total**

Pennine Way

8. Total funding secured for the Pennine Way, for 2025/26, was £84,548:

£ 37,305	Pennine Way Ranger;
£ 3,500	Pennine Way, maintenance;
£ 43,743	Pennine Way, Malham Cove and Black Hole Bridge (access enhancements).

Pennine Bridleway

9. Total funding secured for the Pennine Bridleway, for 2025/26, was £36,066:

£ 22,591	Pennine Bridleway Officer;
£ 2,100	Pennine Bridleway, maintenance;
£ 6,169	The Highway accessibility enhancements;
£ 5,206	Arten Gill, accessibility enhancements.

Pennine National Trails Partnership

10. During 2025/26, the Authority continued in its role as the lead partner and accountable body for the Pennine National Trails partnership. It is anticipated that the Authority will continue performing this role for the foreseeable future.

11. Functions of the lead partner include to:

- Accept the grant offer from Natural England (NE) and claim and receive payments;
- Have an oversight of delivery and report to NE about how our financial support has been used by the partnership and what has been; achieved;
- Ensure that partners have the opportunity to participate in the management and development of the maintenance of the trails.

12. Over the last year, the Partnership has met on two occasions once by video conference and once in-person. Through the Partnership, the Authority has:

- Received from NE an initial grant of £398,763
- Distributed 24 grants to 12 different partners;
- Received addition one-off grant for accessibility enhancements of £339,713;
- Distributed a further 17 grants to 8 different partners:
- Total expenditure on the Pennine National Trails in 2025/26 was £781,646 with use from additional reserves.

13. The Authority received £101,156 (100%) grant for the Partnership Manager post including £16,519 income for hosting of the Partnership Manager and its role as lead partner.

Coast to Coast Path National Trail

14. On 12 August 2022, it was announced by the Secretary of State that the Coast to Coast Path stretching from St Bees in Cumbria to Robin Hoods Bay in the North York Moors National Park passing through the Yorkshire Dales National Park would become a new National Trail. The official opening of the route took place on 26 March 2026 at Reeth.

15. Natural England continued to work alongside partners to improve the popular route, with £5.6 million committed to upgrade the 194-mile path. The announcement, which delivered on a Government commitment to develop the route, will also ensure long-term support for the National Trail. The Authority is seeking to become the lead partner for the new partnership to be established in 2026/27.

16. The necessary legal and establishment work has been undertaken by the YDNPA to ensure that the path is fully open through the Dales, available for public use, and meets the National Trail Quality Standards. To date, 12 Path Orders and 7 creation agreements have been completed. Only one section remains that has yet to be dedicated as a public right of way. However, this section passes through Crosby Ravensworth Fell, which is dedicated as 'Open Access' land. The Authority will continue to work to secure this section as a public right of way.

17. During 2025/26, work on flagging the route over White Mossy Hill to access Nine Standards Rigg was completed. In addition, the Project Team consisting of a Project Manager, Senior Rights of Way Officer and an Administration Support Officer have implemented a series of enhancement projects, including signing of various sections of the National Trail through the park.

18. During the whole project (from 2024 to 2026), the following has been achieved:

- c.£1.4million investment in the PRoW network;
- 5,503m (of which 1,063m bridleway) of PRoW has been designated as Public Rights of Way;
- An additional 3.2km of PRoW that is step/stile free and a minimum of 900mm wide;
- 2,998m of additional flagged/pitched path to support access and manage surface erosion;
- 5 new bridges, maintenance works on a further three bridges:
- 169m of aggregate path;
- 100m of board walk installed/repaired.
- 12 Diversion Orders completed
- 7 Creation Agreements completed

Three Peaks

19. During 2025/26 implementation of the Three Peaks Project has continued, with a focus on carrying out repairs to 200m of public footpath at Brackenbottom, Horton in Ribblesdale.

20. The Three Peaks Project raised £33,284 towards the cost of the Three Peaks Ranger. The main streams of income are through Donations £16,841, App sales £5,178 and merchandise generating another £8,102.

Path Orders and Definitive Map

21. During 2025/26 progress has continued on Public Path Orders. The following Orders were completed by the Authority:

Public Path Orders

North Yorkshire Council	**Order Process**
Reeth Bottoms, Diversion, Coast to Coast Path	Confirmed
Steps Wood, Diversion, Coast to Coast Path	Confirmed
Otterington Plantation, Diversion, Coast to Coast Path	Confirmed
Cringley Bottom, Diversion, Coast to Coast Path	Confirmed
Nun Cote Nook, Diversion, Coast to Coast Path	Confirmed
Blackthwaite Diversion, Coast to Coast Path	Confirmed
Creation Agreements	
White Mossy Hill, Coast to Coast Path	Completed
Variation Order	
Bunton Hush/High Gorton, Coast to Coast Path	Approved
Westmorland & Furness Council	
Foxhole Rigg, Sedbergh. Diversion, Town & Country Planning Act 1990	Confirmed
Smardale Cottage, Coast to Coast Path	Confirmed
Creation agreements	
Ravenstonedale Moor, Coast to Coast Path	Completed
Crosby Garrett Fell (1), Coast to Coast Path	Completed
Crosby Garrett Fell (2), Coast to Coast Path	Completed
Crosby Garrett Fell (3) Coast to Coast Path,	Completed
Smardale Bridge, Coast to Coast Path	Completed
Creation Order	
Tarn Moor, Coast to Coast Path	Confirmed

Temporary and Emergency Closure Orders

North Yorkshire	**Order Process**
Aysgarth Falls Hotel, to allow for development	On-going
Hazel Gill, Mallerstang, to allow for replacement of private access bridge	Completed
Malham, to allow for tree felling Gordale Scar	Completed
Stainforth , to allow for replacement of footbridge	Completed

Resources

22. In 2025/26, there were 8.2 full time equivalent (FTE) members of staff working on rights of way maintenance, and 1 Rights of Way Officer (job share) undertaking Path Orders. The Authority's rights of way maintenance budget was £161k.

23. In addition, there were a further 3.6 FTE externally funded posts. These were:

Pennine Way Ranger (1.0 FTE)
The Authority received 63% funding from Natural England for the Pennine Way Ranger.

Pennine Bridleway Project Officer (0.6 FTE)
The Authority received 63% funding for their maintenance role.

Three Peaks Ranger (0.8 FTE)
During 2025/26, the Three Peaks Ranger post, collected £30,810 through the Friends and corporate members, merchandise and event donations to fully cover costs for the coming year 2026/27.

Coast to Coast Path National Trail
The Authority received 100% funding from Natural England for the Coast to Coast Path Project Team.

Coast to Coast Path, Project Manager (0.6 FTE)

Coast to Coast Path, Senior Rights of Way Officer (0.6 FTE to Sept 2025)

Coast to Coast Path, Administration Support Officer (0.6 FTE to Sept 2025)

24. The Authority is also supported by the Dales Volunteers and other volunteers from partner organisations. In total, during 2025/26, 1,000days of practical work, and 430 days of surveying, were undertaken on the rights of way network by volunteers. This equates to approximately 6.5 full time staff equivalents. The surveying of all the rights of way in the National Park is a significant achievement, and means the Authority is in an excellent place to ascertain exactly the work required for the coming year.

Corporate Plan 2025/26

25. The National Park Authority's Corporate Plan, 2025/26, sets out a programme of works and measures to assist in achieving the aims of the National Park Management Plan.

Specific performance indicators identified for 2025/26:

Performance Indicators	21/22 Actual	22/23 Actual	23/24 Actual	24/25 Actual	**25/26 Target**	**25/26 Actual**
% of public rights of way that are signposted where they leave a metalled road	(98%)	(99%)	(99%)	(96%)	**98%**	**98%**
% of rights of way that are easy to use but may not follow the definitive line	(90%)	(91%)	(89%)	(92%)	**88%**	**88%**

26. Specific Corporate Plan actions for 2025/26 were:

Action	NYC In the park	W&F In the park	LCC In the park	Total	Achieved
Conduct repair works across the National Park so that on average 88% of routes are 'easy to use'	**86%**	**93%**	**0***	**88%**	Yes
Maintain existing roadside signs so that the number of places where a right of way is signposted from a metalled road remains at 96%	**99%**	**97%**	**93%**	**98%**	Yes
Carry out engineering works to 500m of public rights of way, with projects at Cawden (Malham) and Brackenbottom (Horton)	**500**			**500**	Yes
Cross Keys/Cautley project by carrying out works to improve 640m of bridleway.		640		640	Yes
Repair 120m of previously engineered route at Buckden Pike	120				Yes
Implement phase 2 of the Coast-to-Coast Path White Mossy Hill Project		2100			Yes
Replace Gammersgill stepping stones in Coverdale	Postponed to 26/27 to allow for installation within window for licence to work in river.				No
Secure £30,000 towards the cost of maintaining the Three Peaks route.					Yes
In conjunction with NYC, continue to implement a programme of improvements to unsurfaced unclassified roads.					Yes
Continue legal works to establish the Coast-to-Coast Path through the National Park					Yes
Install the remainder of the Coast-to-Coast Path National Trail branded signs					Yes

*No routes were randomly selected in the Lancashire area of the park

Performance Indicators by area

27. The table below breaks down the performance indicators further. The individual county figures are given in relation to the network of rights of way within each individual area. (Results are taken from the Yorkshire Dales Access Recording Database, rather than field survey, and for the whole National Park area unless stated).

Performance Indicator	Target	NYC In the park	W&F In the park	LCC In the park	YDNPA
% of Rights of Way that are Easy to Use by members of the public (but may not follow the definitive line) Field Survey	88%	86%	93%	0%*	88%
% of Rights of Way that are signposted where they leave a road	96%	99%	97%	93%	98%
% of infrastructure - stiles gates and signs in 'condition 1'	95%	93%	92%	90%	93%

*No routes were randomly selected in the Lancashire area of the park

Ease of Use results

28. The Authority's 2025/26 objective for rights of way maintenance is based on the National Park Management Plan 2025 - 2030. However, the objective for 2025/26 was set at 88%, recognising the resources being allocated to major projects during 2025/26:

Target *Manage and maintain the standard of all public rights of way, so that, on average, 90% remain 'easy to use', and create five new 'miles without stiles' routes that are suitable for a diverse range of ages and abilities.*

29. In 2013, the English National Park Authorities Joint Improvement Group (JIG) agreed to collect one indicator, across all the English National Parks. The indicator for 'Ease of Use' for the English National Parks is:

- % Percentage of rights of way that are 'Easy to Use' but may not follow the exact definitive line.

30. Each year's survey selects, randomly, a number of paths making up a minimum of 5% of the overall network. In total, approximately 127km were surveyed (102km NYC, 25km W&FC & 0km LCC) in the National Park in 2025. The 'Ease of Use' figure is then calculated from the length of routes which pass the 'Ease of Use' definitions as agreed by the English National Parks Joint Improvement Group.

2025 Ease of Use Results	NYC In the Park	W&F In the Park	LCC In the park	YDNPA
% Percentage of rights of way that are 'Easy to Use' but may not follow the exact definitive line in the National Park	88	93	0	**88%**

Signing

Target *Maintain at 98% the proportion of public rights of way that are signposted where they leave a metalled road in 2025/26.*

31. The Authority's 2025/26 objective for 'signing' was based on the whole of the National Park and Corporate Action Plan targets. The calculations below give a accurate picture of the situation across the National Park.

32. The Access Recording System indicates that there were 2,316 places in the National Park requiring a signpost at the roadside. There were (98%) in-situ with 40 (2%) missing. During 2025/26, 84 directional signs were replaced or repaired where they leave metalled roads, indicating designation (footpath/bridleway), distance and destination. In addition, 60 signposts have been replaced or repaired, indicating direction, distance or status along public rights of way in the National Park.

33. Signposts from a Metalled Road based on the Yorkshire Dales National Park Access Recording System:

	Total	Present	Missing	% in situ
YDNPA	2316	2277	40	**98%**
NYC	1475	1461	14	99%
W&F	813	789	24	97%
LCC	28	26	2	93%

General Maintenance

34. The following section provides a brief breakdown of the main areas of works carried out during 2025/26, in relation to the maintenance of stiles, gates and signage along the rights of way network. Maintenance tasks conducted (688) have decreased by 13% during 2025/26, as against (794) in 2024/25.

Infrastructure

Type	**Total improved 2025/26**
Ladder Stile	13
Timber Step Stile	53
Stone Step Stile	94
Stone Squeeze Stile	95
Fieldgate > 5ft	113
Handgate < 5ft	94
Kissing Gate	3
Boardwalk	18
Signpost (directional on route)	60
Waymarker post	33
Information Sign	1
Roadside Signpost Present	84
Steps	9
Culvert	6
Cross drains	12
Total	688

River Crossings (includes bridges and stepping stones)

TYPE	**W&F**	**NYC**	**YDNPA**	
	repair/replaced/ erected	repair/replaced/ erected	Total improved	Total in Park
Bridges	5	29	34	915
Stepping Stones	0	0	0	34
Total				949

Miles without Stiles

35. ‘Miles Without Stiles’ is a term that’s been adopted by UK National Parks for stile-free routes, meaning that they are suitable for those with limited mobility. Wherever an existing right of way is being maintained, the opportunity to replace potential barriers to access with more accessible features will always be considered, e.g. replacing a ladder stile with a gap or gate. The less remote a route is, the more stringently this criterion will be applied.

36. The Authority also continue to measure two ‘access for all’ indicators against strict criteria as laid out by The Sensory Trust in its document ‘By All Reasonable Means’. The first was originally based on the Countryside Agency ‘Zone A’ national standard (equivalent to BT Access for All Standard 3), that is routes designed for wheelchair users. The second was more challenging routes capable of being used by wheelchair users with someone strong assisting.

37. The length of rights of way that are accessible for people with limited mobility is 266km. Physical barriers along rights of way continue to be reduced by removing stiles and replacing with gates.

Major Projects

38. Under the delegation agreements, the Authority has responsibility for the surface condition of rights of way. Each year projects are identified by Rangers, for specific works which either improve ‘Ease of Use’, or enhance a route. The projects listed below are those with a capital expenditure greater than £1,000 (and in most cases significantly more).

Route	**Works Undertaken**
North Yorkshire Council	**Maintain Previously Engineered Routes**
Brackenbottom, Horton in Ribblesdale (3 Peaks route)	200m
Buckden Pike	120m
Westmorland and Furness Council	
Cautley Spout Bridleway	640m
TOTAL	**920m**
North Yorkshire Council	**New Engineered Routes**
Cawden, Malham	300m
White Mossy Hill, Coast to Coast Path	2,100m
TOTAL	**2,400m**

Unsurfaced Unclassified Roads

39. In the National Park there is a significant network of unsurfaced unclassified roads (UUR). These routes often provide connections into and within the existing network of footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs). This network consists of over 120km of routes that are available to a wide range of users. These are not recorded on the Definitive Map and are therefore not part of the delegation agreements with NYC or W&FC. They are, however, recorded on the 'list of streets' which these highway authorities have responsibility for maintaining.

40. Over the years, the Authority has worked in an opportunistic manner (primarily with NYC) on improving the condition of a number of these routes due to their significance within the rights of way network. In 2021, a more formal working arrangement was established with the appointment of a UUR Officer at NYC. This has led to the Authority receiving funding for works to help maintain these routes on an annual basis.

41. During 2025/26 the following projects, funded by NYC, have taken place in the National Park at a total cost of **£32,192**:

UUR Code	UUR Name	Location	Description or work
Craven			
U1946/60	Hunter Bark	Long Preston/ Settle	Surfacing and drainage
U808/80	Mastilles Lane	Kilnsey	Surfacing and drainage
U2279/80 & U2281/30	Black Hill/Forest Road	Appletreewick	Surfacing
U232/1/40	Stake Road	Buckden	Surfacing
Richmondshire			
U228/9/30	Cam High Road BOAT (Roman Road) Surfacing & Drainage	full length	Surfacing and drainage
U230/9/70	Busk Lane Marsett	Marsett	Surface
U232/1/40	Stake Road	Stalling Busk	Drainage

Conclusion

42. Rights of way maintenance remains a 'priority programme' for the Authority and an area of work where it makes a clear and visible difference to the National Park. The Authority helps farmers and landowners maintain their stiles and gates, whilst users of the network (both visitors and residents) have certainty about where they can access the countryside, as well as an enjoyable experience of the area. Businesses benefit

with people's access to the National Park's special qualities, via the rights of way network, underpinning much of the local tourism economy.

43. We continue to seek external income to help resource this priority work programme. During 2025/26 we were successful in securing a total of £875k additional external income and in-kind contributions to support rights of way work across the National Park. In addition, the work with Dales Volunteers and other volunteers goes from strength to strength, with all the rights of way in the National Park once again being surveyed by volunteers.

Looking ahead to 2026/27

44. The new Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan for 2025-30 seeks to achieve the following objectives for public rights of way and green lanes to:

    3.1. Manage and maintain the standard of all public rights of way, so that, on average, 90% remain 'easy to use' and create 5 new 'miles without stiles' routes that are suitable for a diverse range of ages and abilities.

    3.2. Manage and promote the Pennine Way, Pennine Bridleway and Coast-to-Coast National Trails and other established long-distance routes, and improve linkages from the Coast-to-Coast route to 5 nearby settlements by 2030.

    3.6. Enhance at least five 'green lanes' by 2030 and manage use by recreational motor vehicles and motorcycles - encouraging and supporting responsible use and enforcing restrictions where necessary.

1. The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority continues to manage the entire network of 2,642km of rights of way in the National Park and will continue to receive funding from W&F and NYC during 2026/27 (part of 3-year and 5-year agreements respectively) which will aid delivery. The 'ease of use' figure over the period of the previous National Park Management Plan has averaged 90%, which is very pleasing and we will continue to seek to maintain this level for the next management plan period to 2030.

45. The confirmation of the Coast to Coast path to join the family of National Trails by the Secretary of State, comes with financial resources for implementation and future maintenance as well as for 'wider benefit' opportunities. We look forward to continuing to manage the route through the Yorkshire Dales over the coming year, and to preparing for the Authority's role as lead partner in the establishment of the Coast to Coast National Trail Partnership.

Further Information

Further information regarding the report is available from:

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