Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Item 7

Finance and Resources Committee

20 May 2025

Action Plan 2025/26

Purpose of the report

1. To seek Members' approval for the programme of activity that the Authority plans to undertake in 2025/26 to achieve the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan.

Recommendation

2. That Members:
   (i) approve the attached Action Plan as the basis for managing the Authority's day-to-day work in 2025/26; and
   (ii) if Members approve the plans to spend the additional Defra capital funding for 2025/26 (see item 5), agree to officers including additional actions in the Action Plan 2025/26 to implement this expenditure.

Strategic Planning Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:
   - Corporate Plan Objective 28
     Plan and manage the Authority's work to make the most effective use of our resources, including generating sufficient income to maintain expenditure at the same level as 2014/15 in real terms across the extended National Park.

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 2025-26. Members will recall that most of the objectives were rolled forward from the 2024-25 Corporate Plan, given that the Authority's core funding for 2025-26 was unknown when objectives were agreed and the new National Park Management Plan for 2025-30 will not be adopted until June 2025.

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 for 2025/26

6. The initial Action Plan for 2025/26 is set out in the Annex. The objectives relating to the Authority's eight priority 'sub-programmes' are highlighted (in green). Any actions postponed from 2024-25 are marked with a red (p). Those that have been outstanding for longer than a year are marked as (pp).

7. The Authority is committed to an ambitious programme of work in 2025/26, with an initial budget of £13.1m, which includes the late additional Access for All and Capital Grant from Defra, and a further £549k of works carried over from last year (see item 5 on this agenda). The initial budget is, therefore, broadly similar to the starting budget for 2024/25, and is likely to increase further.

8. The funding will support a packed programme of work in 2025/26. Members' attention is drawn to the following priority programmes:
    a. **Education** – We will scale up Youth Voice activities, develop a new curriculum, resource pack and educational and outdoor learning activities for schools; train teachers in outdoor learning delivery; recruit and support a Youth Engagement Trainee; and engage young people with the Dales Countryside Museum (DCM).
    b. **Farm conservation** – We will provide farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grants of at least £1.25m to local projects that support nature, climate, people and place; and develop proposals for a new integrated advisory service to support farmers with regenerative farming practices and agri-environment schemes.
    c. **Outreach** – We will inspire and engage communities and visitors through the 'Nature Calling' and 'Creatively Connected' arts projects; and an extensive exhibition programme at the Dales Countryside Museum.
    d. **Planning** – We will continue to provide a high-quality service, including exceeding all the Government's performance targets; and improving the speed of decision-making. We will review the Planning Code of Good Practice and the Planning Enforcement Policy, run a training event for Parish Councils and recruit a Planning Ecologist
    e. **Recreation and health** – With partner organisations, we will provide activities for underserved groups and develop a new sensory trail. We will offer training and establish a forum for providers, to build their confidence and skills. We will raise awareness through a public communications programme; and initiate delivery of the Authority's future actions in response to the National Parks Statement of Belonging.
    f. **Rights of way** – We will carry out an extensive programme of maintenance, repair and enhancements. We will improve and develop new 'Miles without Stiles' routes; complete major accessibility projects at Cautley and Smardale; and promote accessible routes and facilities.
    g. **Wildlife** – We will complete year 5 of the Tees-Swale Naturally Connected projects; support grassland restoration works; and support local environmental enhancements around Dry Rigg and Swinden Quarries. We will help the unitary authorities to complete their Local Nature Recovery Strategies; produce an annual monitoring and evidence report for birds of

prey; and work with partners and local communities to conserve local bird populations.

h. **Woodland** – We will support creation of a final 25 ha of native woodland to complete the Grow Back Greener project; support the development of a further programme of funding through the White Rose Forest; and complete a light-touch review of the Dales Woodland Strategy.

9. Members should be aware of three other factors influencing the scale and breadth of this year's Plan:
    a. The continuing move towards becoming a more 'project-based' organisation, with more direction from central government and other funders.
    b. The need to focus on generating significant external income for new projects to start in 2026/27, to replace projects ending this year. The Plan includes several projects that are in development, including to:
        i. support take up of regenerative farming techniques to improve farm business viability;
        ii. restore species-rich grasslands through farming across the National Park ('Jewels of the Dales');
        iii. restore nature along the Coast-to-Coast national trail;
        iv. support nature recovery and access to nature in the 'Three Counties' area.
    c. The production of an updated National Park Management Plan, which will set the direction of travel for the next 5 years and include nationally set targets that local partners will be expected to work together to achieve.

10. Members will discern from the above, that this is likely to be an intensive year of activity, with a high degree of volatility in the timing and nature of some of the actions. As a result, it is highly likely that significant adjustments to the Plan will be necessary as the year progresses.

11. There are some additional actions that we plan to do during the year, using the capital funding from Defra for 2025/26, subject to approval by Members. These are set out in item 5 on this agenda.

Financial Implications

12. Commitments within the Action Plan are based on the budget for 2025/26, which was approved by Members in March.

Any projects that require significant additional expenditure – or which were not included in the original budget – will be brought back to Members for approval during the year. The only exception will be Actions to implement the 2025/26 Defra capital funding, which will be added to the Action Plan if Members approve the spending plans at the same Finance and Resources Committee meeting.

Legal Implications

13. None.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

14. 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.

Conclusion

15. The Action Plan for 2025-26 represents another ambitious programme of investment into the National Park, including through Farming in Protected Landscapes, ‘Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected’, ‘Grow Back Greener’ and a myriad of externally funded projects to engage new audiences and improve physical access to locations across the National Park.

16. The scale of the work programme, together with the need to spend the £1.5m of capital before the year end, and the continuing uncertainty about future funding means that some planned actions may have to be changed, delayed or even cancelled altogether. These will be reported to Members, as appropriate, during the year.

Gary Smith

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