Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 11**

National Park Authority

25 June 2024

Progress on Authority Objectives 2023/24

Purpose of the report

1. To assess the Authority's performance in achieving our objectives in 2023/24.

Recommendation

2. That Members note the progress made in 2023/24 towards achieving the Authority's objectives.

Strategic Framework

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

   - ***Corporate Plan objective***
     30. Plan and manage the Authority's work so as 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 across the extended National Park area

Background

4. Each year, the Authority produces a Corporate Plan setting out our objectives - the major things we want to achieve over the next few years. Many of these are taken directly from the National Park Management Plan 2019-24 – see item earlier on this agenda – and typically cover a period of 3-5 years. In each case, the Plan includes an indication of the progress that we hope to have made by the end of that particular financial year.

Summary of overall performance

5. The **Annex** gives a brief assessment of progress on each of the objectives, including an explanation for any that were not achieved. Those objectives that relate to the Authority's priority programmes are shown in **bold**.

6. Of the 35 objectives, 24 (69%) were achieved or remained on-course. Key organisational objectives where good progress was made include:
    - Almost £1.4 million was provided to local farm businesses through the Defra-funded Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, supporting 59 new agreements [1];
    - The 5-year Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership programme was completed. Projects in the final year included completion of repairs to Smardale Lime Kilns [3];
    - 4 barns were restored through the NPA using a legacy grant with contributions from YDMT. 4 were converted through FIPL funding (including 2 to alternative uses). A further 28 barns were converted into dwellings. [4];
    - The Authority and its local partners have now provided over 7,000 activity days for people from under-represented groups over the last 5 years [10]
    - Delivered educational and skills-based activities to over 3,200 school children from in and around the National Park [11];
    - Over £27,000 was raised during the year to support repairs to the Three Peaks route, along with a further 150m of stone pitching at Brackenbottom [13];
    - The Coast-to-Coast National Trail has commenced with £5.6 million committed to the project. Legal works involving 4 creation agreements and a number of diversion orders are progressing. [15];
    - Completed year 3 of the *Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected* programme, including restoring 10 ha of hay-meadow and creating a further 5 ha of new native woodland [18];
    - Through the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme, advice and assistance was provided to more than 160 farmers to help reduce diffuse pollution from agriculture [19];
    - With funding from the Woodland Trust, White Rose Forest and others, we facilitated and supported the creation of 47 ha of new native woodland; [22];
    - Granted planning permission for 98 new dwellings, taking the average over the last 5 years to 93 [23];
    - Supported 21 local community and business projects, with grants of just under £100,000, through the Sustainable Development Fund [25];
    - Determined 89% of ‘minor’ and 92% of ‘other’ planning applications within Government target times [26];
    - Generated external income to support gross expenditure of over £11.5 million [30], almost £2.5 million more than our objective;
    - Retained the ‘Customer Service Excellence’ Award for the 14th year [31];

7. Of the objectives that related to priority programmes, there were 3 ‘near misses’:
    - 89% of rights of way were ‘easy to use’ in 2023/24 narrowly missing the target of 90%. However, the average over the past 5 years is still 90% [7];
    - Increasingly positive news on the nesting/breeding of Hen Harriers but still cases of illegal persecution of birds of prey being reported [20];

- the publication stage of the Local Plan has again been had to be pushed back because of additional work to try to identify suitable housing sites for allocation [27].

8. There is one priority objective where no progress is being made. The condition of rivers [19] has declined over the last 3 years from 62% in good ecological status to 51%.

Financial Implications

9. None

Legal Implications

10. None.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

11. None.

Conclusion

12. The scale of the Authority's impact continued to rise – with an increase of £1.5m in expenditure compared to 2022/23. This resulted in a number of significant and tangible achievements. However, there was also a notable rise in the number of objectives where progress is being made but not quite enough (the 'near misses').

Gary Smith
Director of Conservation and Community

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A distinctive living, working cultural landscape that tells the story of generations of people interacting with their environment

Objective	Target by March 2024	Progress	Status
1. During Brexit transition, support farmers and landowners to continue to deliver a range of public benefits through national agri-environment scheme agreements and similar initiatives, including the FiPL programme.	£1 million in FiPL grants	Final grant spend through FiPL was almost £1.4 million. 59 new agreements were supported, including 37 schemes to help restore nature and 36 schemes to help tackle climate change.	✓
2. Maintain the National Park as a place where a true sense of tranquillity, remoteness and solitude can be found, and retain 'Dark Skies Reserve' status.	Retain Dark Sky Reserve status	2023 Annual report was submitted to Dark Sky International in January 2024. Dark Sky reserve status retained.	☑
3. Deliver co-ordinated programmes of activity that enhance the distinctive landscape, geology and cultural heritage of the 'Westmorland Dales' by end of 2023.	Complete Westmorland Dales programme	The five-year programme was completed in February 2024. Information on all the projects funded can be found on the WDLP website and in the summary document.	☑
4. By 2024, secure significant funding to repair, restore, and, where appropriate, find adaptive new uses for traditional field barns, particularly those in Swaledale, Arkengarthdale and Littondale.	10 barns restored or re-used	4 barns restored using a legacy grant and contributions from YDMT. 4 converted with FIPL funding (including 2 to alternative uses). A further 28 barns were converted into dwellings.	✓
5. Help local people to restore, repair and - where possible - bring back into use nationally-important historical sites, buildings and structures so that fewer than 4% of scheduled monuments and listed buildings are 'at risk' by 2024.	12 SM at risk 80 LB at risk	10 Scheduled Monuments and 72 Listed Buildings are currently at risk. Smardale Lime Kilns will be taken off the Heritage at Risk register for 2024/25.	✓
6. Use DCM and HER to help local heritage groups to research, record and promote the stories of the National Park area, including completing the enhancement of the HER for the new area of the National Park by 2024.	Initial HER enhancement completed	Phase 1 of the HER enhancement (172 km^2 mapped using LIDAR data) has been completed. Historic England will be funding a survey of the rest of the area over the next 2 years.	≈

A friendly open and welcoming place with outstanding opportunities to enjoy its special qualities

Objective	Target by March 2024	Progress	Status
7. Benefit a wide variety of users by raising the standard of all public rights of way so that 90% are 'easy to use' by 2023.	90%	89% of routes were easy to use in March 2024. The average over the period of 2019–2024 is 90%.	≈
8. Run a cohesive programme of inspirational, participatory activities that attract at least 4,000 people each year to find out more about the National Park's special qualities.	4,000 people	Over 7,000 people attended inspirational, participatory activities in 2023/24 which informed them about the National Park's special qualities.	☑
9. Carry out works to improve access on appropriate public rights of way and established permissive routes so that 262km (10%) are suitable for users of all ages and abilities by 2024.	262km (10%)	A further 18km of routes have been identified as accessible in 2023/24, taking the current total to 266km (10.1%) that are suitable for users of all ages and abilities.	☑
10. By 2024 provide 5,000 people from under-represented groups with activity days that enable them to access the special qualities of the National Park, and so increase their understanding, enjoyment, health and well-being.	5,000 people [cumulative]	The NPA provided activity days for more than 1,300 people from under-represented groups in 2023/24. Together with local partners this brings the cumulative total to 7,110.	☑
11. Through educational and skills-based activities, inspire 1,500 young people from in and around the National Park to explore and enhance their environment each year.	1,500 young people	The Authority delivered activities in the National Park to over 3,200 school children.	☑
12. Give people from all backgrounds an opportunity to enjoy and contribute to the National Park by providing at least 7,000 volunteer days per year, with 15% coming from under-represented groups.	7,000 volunteer days	6,879 days of volunteering have been undertaken in 2023/24 with 19% coming from under-represented groups.	≈
13. Work with organisers of large-scale events to ensure they are well run, benefit local businesses, and contribute to the maintenance of the National Park's natural capital, for example funding the cost of maintaining the Three Peaks	Raise £25,000 for 3 Peaks	Through donations, merchandise and Friends Membership a total of £27,282 has been raised to help maintain the 3 Peaks route.	☑
14. Maintain 'green lanes' and, where appropriate, manage use by recreational motor vehicles, including enforcing any restrictions imposed by Traffic Regulation Orders.	90% compliance with TROs	95% compliance in calendar year 2023.	☑

15. Maintain and promote the Pennine Trails and other recognised long-distance routes, and campaign for the Coast-to-Coast footpath to become a National Trail by 2025.	3 legal Orders	The C2C Path Project Team has been established. Legal works involving 4 creation agreements and a number of diversion orders to secure the route as a Public Right of Way are progressing.	✓
16. Promote and encourage responsible cycling, enabling the development of two 'cycle hubs', & work with local Highway Authorities & other partners to undertake the work necessary to develop one further family-friendly cycling route by 2024.	2 cycle hubs	2 'cycle hubs' developed (Reeth and Settle). Consultation completed on possible multi-user route between Hawes and Garsdale. Consultation with landowners to determine next steps completed.	✓

Home to the finest variety of wildlife in England

Objective	Target by March 2024	Progress	Status
17. Support farmers and landowners to restore and manage landscape-scale mosaics of priority habitats, and support stable or increasing populations of priority species.	Publish new Nature Recovery Plan	The Nature Recovery Plan was endorsed by the Authority in September, and was published in December.	✓
18. Deliver a co-ordinated 5-year programme of investment to support nature recovery through the Tees-Swale: naturally connected programme, and identify other potential landscape-scale 'nature recovery areas'.	Complete year 3 of Tees-Swale programme	Year 3 of Tees-Swale programme completed. Two more landscape recovery pilot projects have been approved in the YDNP – 'Ure Dales' led by the YWT & 'Heart of the Dales' led by the National Trust.	✓
19. Work with farmers and landowners to improve the condition of the Aire, Eden, Lune, Ribble, Swale, Ure and Wharfe so that at least 90% of all rivers achieve 'good ecological status' by 2027.	67%	51% of rivers are in good ecological status (down from 62%). Through the CSF programme, advice & assistance was provided to more than 160 farmers to help reduce diffuse pollution from agriculture.	X
20. Work with moorland managers and other stakeholders to end illegal persecution of raptors, including independent and scientifically robust monitoring, and co-ordinated hen harrier nest and roost site protection.	Local coordination of nest and roost protection	15 hen harrier nesting attempts across the Yorkshire Dales and Nidderdale in 2023 - the highest number of nesting attempts recorded in the area. There were also six confirmed persecution incidents	≈

Resilient and responsive to the impacts of climate change, storing more carbon each year than it produces

Objective	Target by March 2024	Progress	Status
21. Work with farmers and landowners to deliver landscape-scale natural flood management projects in the Aire, Eden, Ribble, Lune, Swale, Ure and Wharfe catchments.	York Flood Innovation project underway	The Ouse Wem project is now in the process of delivering its first pilot NFM schemes with one in the YDNP in Wensleydale led by YDRT & supported by the YDNPA.	✓
22. Through Grow Back Greener and other local programmes, support farmers and landowners to create at least a further 225 ha of native broadleaved and mixed woodland that enhances the National Park's landscape by 2025.	170 ha	47 ha of native broadleaved and mixed have been planted over the 2023/24 planting season, bringing the cumulative total over the last 3 years to 186 ha.	✓

Home to strong, self-reliant and balanced communities with good access to the services they need

Objective	Target by March 2024	Progress	Status
23. Encourage and facilitate high quality proposals for new housing in a range of tenures, sizes, types and prices, such that around 85 new dwellings are approved each year.	85 dwellings approved	98 dwellings were approved during 2023/24, including 6 affordable, 4 principal residences, 26 for local occupancy, and 6 for rural workers.	☑
24. Undertake a 5-year programme of measures to promote the National Park as a place to live for younger, working age households (18-44) including identifying measures to reduce the proportion of under-occupied properties.	Complete 5-year programme	Local Plan will include a 'permanent residency' condition to prevent new housing becoming second homes/holiday lets. NYC and W&F Councils are introducing a Council Tax Premium in April 2025.	≈
25. Use the Sustainable Development Fund and other funding sources, to support 15 new local projects each year that bring economic, social and environmental benefits to the National Park.	15 new projects funded	21 new projects were supported with nearly £100k of grants in 2023/24, including electric vehicle charging, reducing light-pollution, improvements to community facilities and supporting local produce.	☑

Providing an outstanding range of benefits for the nation based on its natural resources, landscape and cultural heritage, which underpin a flourishing local economy

Objective	Target by March 2024	Progress	Status
26. Provide an efficient development management service, including ensuring that 65% of minor and 80% of 'other' planning applications are being determined within eight weeks and at least 80% of applicants are satisfied.	65%/80% of applications determined on time.	89% of 'minor' applications and 92% of 'other' were determined within 8 weeks or an agreed extension of time.	☑
27. Work with neighbouring authorities to produce a single, updated Local Plan for the whole of the National Park by 2024, which will help achieve the vision and objectives in the National Park Management Plan.	Publish final draft Local Plan	Publication of full draft plan delayed by additional work being undertaken by the Local Plan Advisory Group to consider detailed options for future housing sites.	≈
28. Develop and promote new events, festivals and attractions based on the National Park's special qualities and local distinctiveness so that at least 10% of visitors each year are coming for the first time.	10% first time visitors	The 2022 YDNPA Visitor survey found that 15% of visitors interviewed were visiting the National Park for the first time.	☑
29. Improve the quality, variety and marketing of the tourism 'offer' to encourage more overnight stays and more visitors in the quieter months, by 2024.	5% more overnight stays	2022 figures showed staying visitors increased by 20% from 2021. However, overall staying visitors were still 1% below 2017 levels. Awaiting STEAM report for 2023.	≈

An effective organisation, providing high quality services

Objective	Target by March 2024	Progress	Status
30. Plan and manage the Authority's work so as 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 across the extended National Park area.	Expenditure of £9m.	Approved budget for 2023-24 included sufficient income to support gross expenditure of £10.8m. Latest working projection is that actual expenditure was £11.5m.	☑
31. Provide high quality, efficient and effective services and communications to the public and other stakeholders, and so maintain the Customer Service Excellence standard every year.	CSE standard retained	CSE assessment was carried out during the summer, and accreditation has been maintained.	☑
32. Operate governance arrangements that are fit for purpose, as reported through the Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Governance Report.	Unqualified External Audit opinion	Annual Governance Statement and Governance Report completed to schedule. National delays in the public sector audit regime mean there are delays in External Audit.	≈
33. Ensure that we have HR policies, procedures, terms and conditions to attract the right people with the right skills to deliver the Authority's work effectively, as evidenced by accreditation under the Investors in People standard.	Maintain IIP accreditation	HR policy/procedure reviews undertaken and IIP 24-month review undertaken in Nov 2023 with accreditation maintained.	☑
34. Provide facilities and IT systems that are fit for purpose and support the effective delivery of our services, as evidenced by the external auditor's annual 'value for money' opinion and internal audit's reporting on relevant systems.	Unqualified VfM opinion	Internal audit completed (received 'substantial assurance'). External audit for 2021/22 has been finished but is awaiting final sign off from auditors. The 2022/23 audit will not be a full audit.	≈
35. By 2030, reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our operations by at least 95% compared to 2005/06, and achieve annual carbon savings from woodland planting of at least 30 times our residual annual emissions.	Emissions -76%	By March 2024 emissions had been reduced by 74% since 2005/06. Work is underway to procure a fleet of electric vehicles in 2024.	≈