YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY	**ITEM 5**
Date:	**12 December 2023**
Report:	**YDNPA OBJECTIVES FOR 2024-25**

Purpose of the report

1. To seek approval from Members for some amendments to the Authority's objectives for 2024-25.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That Members confirm the intention to continue with the current set of objectives but with the amendments set out in the **Annex.**

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 objectives

   Objective 34: Plan and manage all aspects of the Authority's business so as to make the most effective use of our resources...

Background

4. The Most of the Authority's objectives are taken directly from the National Park Management Plan 2019-24 (NPMP), and are grouped under the NPMP's six 'ambitions for 2040'. In addition, there are a few objectives that relate to specific aspects of the Authority's own organisation and governance.

5. In light of the significant pressures on the Authority's budgets, Members agreed a number of amendments to our objectives last year – including reducing the total number from 39 to 35. Members will be aware that those budget pressures remain. We are currently projecting a budget shortfall in each of the next three years. At the moment this is estimated to be £440,000 in 2024-25 rising to over £900,000 in the following year.

6. In considering any amendments to the Authority's objectives, there are a number of contextual factors that should be borne in mind:

   - the importance of providing consistency in what we say we are trying to achieve;

- for some areas of work (priorities) the objectives will be seeking to drive high performance, whereas in others they will be about retaining an 'acceptable' level of performance;
- the importance of being able to demonstrate our contribution to the achievement of the NPMP objectives (the 'golden thread') but not 'carrying the can' for things that are largely the responsibility of other bodies.

Consideration

7. Putting aside the overall financial constraints, the objectives have also been assessed in light of:
    - ***Objectives already completed.*** Four of the objectives (3, 7, 9 and 24) will have been completed by March 2024.
    - ***Objectives that are now unachievable.*** There are currently 7 objectives that are not 'on course' (16, 19, 20, 27, 32, 34, 35), although only three of these are considered unachievable by the target date.
    - ***Significant new areas of work.*** 3 new objectives are proposed to cover areas already approved by the Authority - National Park Management Plan, and Nature Recovery. Note that, for the latter, the Authority agreed an 'interim' objective last year pending the completion of the Nature Recovery Plan for the National Park. That Plan was adopted in September. It is now proposed to include new objectives for species and for restoring species-rich grassland. However, the target for the latter is still being worked out, and will be reported to Members as part of the budget in March.

8. All the current objectives and the proposed changes are set out in the **Annex**, together with an explanation for each amendment.

Conclusion

9. Setting meaningful objectives is a critical part of the Authority's corporate management. The Authority's success in securing new funding has meant that we have been able to hold on to most of our objectives despite a sustained period of significant real-term cuts to our core funding.

10. It is evident that a number of the objectives (mostly taken from the National Park Management Plan) are becoming increasingly challenging to achieve. The proposals in the paper seek to strike a sensible balance between retaining ambition and consistency, and the reality of the Authority's financial situation.

Gary Smith
Deputy Chief Executive

24 November 2023

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

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 *Farming in Protected Landscapes* programme.**

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.

3. ~~Deliver co-ordinated programmes of activity that enhance the distinctive landscape, geology and cultural heritage of the 'Westmorland Dales' by the end of 2023.~~[1]

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.

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

6. Use DCM and the Historic Environment Record 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.

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

7. **Benefit a wide variety of users by raising the standard of all public rights of way so that, on average, 90% are 'easy to use' ~~by 2023~~.**[2]

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.**

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~~. Increase and promote opportunity for people with a disability to access the National Park so that by 2026, 15% of visitors using the**

[1] All programme spend through the Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership has been completed and final financial sign off will be at the end of December.

[2] Original objective has been achieved (91% in 2022). Given the priority of Rights of Way work it is proposed to roll the objective forward (based on an average of the last 3 years – to allow for the vagaries of sampling a small proportion of routes). However, the level of ambition will be dependent on securing appropriate funding contributions from North Yorkshire Council and Westmorland & Furness Council for statutory rights of way work.

Miles without Stiles routes self-Identify as having a disability or long term health condition[3]

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 increase their understanding, enjoyment, health and well-being.

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.

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.

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' route.

14. Maintain 'green lanes' and, where appropriate, manage use by recreational motor vehicles, including enforcing any restrictions imposed by Traffic Regulation Orders.

15. Maintain and promote the Pennine Trails and other recognised long-distance routes, and implement the Coast-to-Coast path as a National Trail through the National Park by 2025.

16. Promote and encourage responsible cycling, enabling the development of two 'cycle hubs', and working with local Highway Authorities and other partners to undertake the work necessary to develop at least one further family-friendly cycling route by ~~2024~~ 2026.[4]

Home to the finest variety of wildlife in England

~~**17. Support farmers and landowners to restore and manage landscape-scale mosaics of priority habitats, and support stable or increasing populations of priority species**~~ **By 2025 draw up and adopt a plan for monitoring species that are sensitive to landscape-scale changes in habitat[5]**

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'.

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3 The current objective will have been achieved by March 2024. The recent 'major project review' of 'Miles without Stiles' (Audit and Review Committee, 14 November) revealed that – whilst significant improvements have been made to access – this has not had any impact on the number of people with disabilities visiting the National Park (10%).

4 Development (legal) work now underway on the Hawes-Garsdale route but likely to take 3 years to complete

5 Objective taken from the Nature Recovery Plan adopted by the Authority in September. A further objective is being developed for restoring species rich grassland.

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~~70% of all rivers achieve 'good ecological status' by 20~~27~~25.[6]**

20. **Work with moorland managers and other key stakeholders to end illegal persecution of raptors, including independent and scientifically robust monitoring, and co-ordinated hen harrier nest and roost site protection.**

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

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~~.[7]**

22. Through Grow Back Greener and other local funding programmes, support farmers and landowners to create at least a further 225 hectares of native broadleaved and mixed woodland that enhances the National Park's landscape by 2025.

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

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.**

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.[8]**

25. Use the Sustainable Development Fund and other funding sources, to support at least 15 new local projects each year that bring economic, social and environmental benefits to the National Park.

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

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6 Government recently announced that the next update on national water quality will not be completed until 2025. The current (NPMP) objective is clearly unachievable (2019 figure was 61%), and a new objective will need to be developed as part of updating the Management Plan.

7 This comes from the National Park Management Plan. Work on NFM is currently a relatively small part of the Authority's work, and other partners are leading work in some of the catchments.

8 The five-year programme will be completed at the end of March 2024. It is proposed to retain the reference to under-occupied properties and add it to objective 23.

26. **Provide an efficient development management service that supports appropriate opportunities for economic and community development whilst helping to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the National Park, 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 with the service provided.**

27. **Work with neighbouring authorities to produce a single, updated Local Plan for the whole of the National Park by ~~2024~~2025, which will help achieve the vision and objectives in the National Park Management Plan.[9]**

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.

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~~. Increase opportunities for visitors to understand and enjoy the National Park, so that by 2026 over 60% of total visitors to the 4 National Park 'Visitor Hubs' go into the Visitor Centre.[10]

30. In partnership with key organisations, and in consultation with local communities and visitors, update the National Park Management Plan (NPMP) by 2025, giving priority to tackling the climate and nature emergencies.[11]

To be a highly effective organisation that delivers quality services and is widely recognised for its expertise in National Park policy, practice and partnership-working

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. Operate governance arrangements that are fit for purpose, as reported through the Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Governance Report.

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9 Local Plan has been delayed by issues relating to the allocated housing sites. We expect to adopt the final draft version of the Plan in March 2024 but it is highly unlikely that the subsequent Public Inquiry will be completed in time for adoption of the final Plan before 2025.

10 YDNPA direct contribution to increasing the value of tourism is limited, and covered primarily by work on events etc (Objective 28). The recent performance review of Visitor Services (Audit and Review Committee, 14 November) highlighted the decline in number of visitors going into our visitor centres, and the wide disparity between centres (e.g. 87% of visitors at Aysgarth Falls but only 38% at Malham). The current average is 58%.

11 In September Members approved an outline timetable for updating the NPMP by March 2025, and attaching priority to the ambitions for climate change and nature recovery.

34. Ensure that we have HR policies, procedures, terms and conditions to attract and support the right people with the right skills to deliver the Authority's work effectively, as evidenced by accreditation under the Investors in People standard.

35. Provide facilities and IT systems~~, including blended working,~~ 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~~ high standards of health, safety and wellbeing.[12]

36. 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 that we have funded of at least 30 times our residual annual emissions.

[12] We wish to raise the corporate recognition and importance of health, safety and wellbeing.

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