**Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority** **Item 5**

**17 December 2024**

# National Park Authority Objectives for 2025-26

## Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval for some minor amendments to the Authority's objectives for 2025-26.

## Recommendation

2. That Members approve revisions to the Authority's objectives, as set out in the **Annex**.

## 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 all aspects of the Authority's business so as to make the most effective use of our resources…"

## Background

4. The Authority's objectives are published each year in the Corporate Plan and direct the activity of the organisation for the coming financial year. 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'. There are a few further objectives that relate to specific aspects of the Authority's own organisation and governance.

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

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

    b. 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;

    c. the importance of being able to demonstrate our contribution to the achievement of the NPMP objectives (the 'golden thread') but not taking responsibility for issues that are largely for other bodies.

6. Updating the objectives is a standard part of the Authority's performance management. However, there are a number of additional complications for objective-setting this year, namely:
    a. the Authority and its local partners are developing a new National Park Management Plan, to be adopted in June 2025;
    b. Members approved a new set of priorities for the Authority in September; and
    c. We don't yet know what our core grant from Defra is going to be.

## Consideration

7. The new National Park Management Plan may lead to a significant overhaul of the Authority's objectives. However, the Plan won't be adopted until June next year – too late for setting the Authority's work programme and budget for 2025/26.

8. The Authority is also still waiting to hear what its core grant will be for 2025/26, and the longer term picture will not become clear until the completion of the Government's Spending Review (well into next financial year). We have been warned to prepare for a cut in core funding – and we may not be in a position to expand or enhance services next year. We may know more before the Finance and Resources Committee meets in February to discuss the budget for 2025/26 but, at this stage, it seems appropriate to take a cautious approach to setting objectives.

9. It is, therefore, proposed that we do no more than roll forward most of the current objectives for a further year. All the current objectives and the proposed changes for 2025/26 are set out in the **Annex**, together with an explanation for each amendment.

## Financial Implications

10. As has become the norm in recent years, the Authority is having to set objectives without knowing what resources it will have to achieve them. The objectives provide a good indication of where we expect to direct the Authority's resources in 2025/26 but final decisions on expenditure will be taken as part of setting the Authority's budget in March 2025.

## Legal, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

11. None

## Conclusion

12. 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.

13. The proposed objectives for 2025/26 are intended to provide a practical approach before the adoption of a new National Park Management Plan in June next year. This will be followed by a comprehensive refresh of the Authority's own objectives – to take account of both the new Management Plan and the reality of the Authority's financial position.

Gary Smith
Deputy Chief Executive

**Annex**

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

1. **Support farmers and landowners to continue to deliver a range of public benefits through national agri-environment scheme agreements, green finance, and similar initiatives.**[1]

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. Secure funding each year to repair, restore, and, where appropriate, find adaptive new uses for traditional field barns, particularly those in Swaledale, Arkengarthdale and Littondale.[2]

4. 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 2025[3]

5. 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 2025.[4]

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

6. **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'.**

7. **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.**

8. **Increase and promote opportunities for people with a disability to access the National Park so that by 2026, 15% of visitors using the 'Miles without**

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1 Revised to reflect the end of the FiPL grants programme in March 2025. Defra is providing further funding to retain some FiPL staff to take on a more general role supporting local uptake of national agri-environment schemes.

2 Interim - pending agreement to a new objective as part of the National Park Management Plan 2025-2030.

3 Extended by one year

4 Historic England is currently undertaking phase 2 of the surveys of the area that came into the National Park in 2016. However, it is very unlikely that the results will be incorporated into the HER until next year.

**Stiles' routes self-Identify as having a disability or long-term health condition.**

9. By 2025 provide 6,000 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.[5]

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

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

14. 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.

15. 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 2026.

## Home to the finest variety of wildlife in England

**16.**[6]

**17. Work with farmers, landowners and partner organisations to restore or create 500 ha of species-rich grassland habitats by March 2027**

**18. Deliver a co-ordinated 5-year programme of investment to support nature recovery through the *Tees-Swale: naturally connected* programme and support other potential landscape-scale 'nature recovery areas'.**

[5] Extended by one year.
[6] Objective achieved.

19. **Work with farmers and landowners to improve the condition of the Aire, Eden, Lune, Ribble, Swale, Ure and Wharfe so that 70% of all rivers achieve 'good ecological status' by 2025.**

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. .[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, including identifying measures to reduce the proportion of under-occupied properties.**

24. 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

25. **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.**

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[7] In September, Members determined this would become a 'limited' Authority programme for the next 3 years. The Authority will continue to provide a small amount of support to the OuseWem flood management programme but this can be picked up under one of the other land management objectives.

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

27. Develop and promote 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.

28. 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.

29. 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.

## 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

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.

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.

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

33. 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.

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 high standards of health, safety and wellbeing.

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

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