Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 6**

Finance and Resources Committee

28 May 2024

Action Plan 2024/25

Purpose of the report

1. To seek Members' approval for the programme of activity that the Authority plans to undertake in 2024/25 to achieve the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan.

Recommendation

2. That Members approve the attached Action Plan as the basis for managing the Authority's day-to-day work in 2024/25.

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 30
     Plan and manage the Authority's work so as 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 2024-25. Members will recall that most of the objectives are taken directly from the National Park Management Plan 2019-24.

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 2024/25

6. The initial Action Plan for 2024/25 is set out in the **Annex**. The objectives relating to the Authority's six priority programmes are highlighted (in green). Any actions postponed from 2023-24 are marked with a red (p). Those that have been outstanding for longer than a year are marked accordingly.

7. The Authority is committed to a huge programme of work in 2024/25, with an initial budget of over £13m, and a further £370,000 of works carried over from last year. Members' attention is drawn to the following priority programmes:

    a. **Farm conservation** – directly supporting high nature value farming, including: providing at least £1.8m in grants through the national Farming in Protected Landscapes programme; and running the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme to help reduce pollution from agriculture;

    b. **Planning** – continuing to provide a high-quality service, including exceeding all the Government's performance targets; and improving the speed of decision-making.

    c. **Planning policy** – making final decisions on new allocated housing sites to support more affordable housing provision, and submitting the full final draft Local Plan and associated documents to the Planning Inspectorate.

    d. **Recreation and health** – a range of measures to broaden the opportunities for people to access the Park including a programme of engagement events through the 'Tees-Swale: naturally connected' and 'Championing National Parks for Everyone' projects, and significant accessibility improvements at Smardale, Aysgarth Falls and Cautley.

    e. **Rights of way** – an extensive programme of works to maintain and improve the opportunities for physical access within the National Park, including significant repairs to key routes at Buckden Pike and at Horton-in-Ribblesdale.

    f. **Wildlife** – supporting the new unitary councils to produce their statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategies; and, investing directly in habitat restoration through the 'Tees-Swale: naturally connected' programme, and the two quarry Natural Environment Funds.

8. 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 2025/26, to replace projects ending this year. The Plan includes a number of projects that are in development, including potential projects to:

        i. support take up of regenerative farming techniques to improve farm business viability;
        ii. restore species-rich grasslands across the National Park;
        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 specific nationally-set targets that local partners will be expected to work together to achieve.

9. Members will discern from the above, that this is likely to be a particularly 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.

Financial Implications

10. Commitments within the Action Plan are based on the budget for 2024/25, 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 course of the year.

Legal Implications

11. None

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

12. The Action Plan (notably 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

13. The Action Plan for 2024-25 represents an 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 individual externally-funded projects to engage new audiences and improve physical access to locations across the National Park.

14. When combined with the need to complete both the new Local Plan, and an updated National Park Management Plan, it will inevitably mean that some planned actions will have to be changed, delayed or even cancelled altogether. These will be reported to Members, as appropriate, during the year.

Gary Smith
Deputy Chief Executive