Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 6**

Audit and Review Committee

14 April 2026

Major Project Review – Cross Keys Bridge, Cautley

Purpose of the report

1. To assess the Authority's role in the Cross Keys Bridge construction project, and to identify lessons learned.

Recommendations

2. That Members:
   a. note the lessons learned from the Cross Keys Bridge project, and
   b. agree that the recommendations in section 51 of the **Annex** should be taken into account in guiding the Authority's future approach for development and delivery of similar projects.

Strategic Planning Framework

3. The information and recommendations contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:
   - **National Park Management Plan Objective (2019-24)**
     'B3 – 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.'

Background

4. Reports on lessons learned from 'major projects' provide Members with an opportunity to hear from officers about what has been achieved, what worked well and what didn't; and make recommendations for future project development and management across the Authority. Members agreed that 'lessons learned from the Cross Keys Bridge construction' should be one of the 'major projects' for review this year.

5. The vision of the project was to:

   "Unlock the special qualities of the Cautley Valley and make it more accessible to a range of users, enabling more people to connect with, enjoy and benefit from this inspirational area."

6. In the Western area of the Yorkshire Dales there are still limited opportunities that can be promoted as offering access for many[1]. The replacement of the steep steps and narrow footbridge with the provision of a bridge befitting its status as a public bridleway creates an access point into the local bridleway network and to one of the most spectacular locations in the National Park.

7. The Authority had several specific roles prior to the commencement of the scheme and during the delivery. These included:
    - Development of the scheme with partners;
    - Confirming the acceptability of the outline bridge design;
    - Submission of the planning application and subsequent approval by Members;
    - Undertaking of the preliminary Ecological Assessment;
    - Procurement of the various construction elements;
    - Application to the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme;
    - Liaison with Westmorland and Furness Council;
    - Oversight of contract preparation and negotiations; and
    - Oversight of bridge constructions works

Achievements

8. From the initial concept in 2019, through the development stage to the bridge being open to the public in December 2024, the Authority played a pivotal role in the successful development and delivery of the project alongside the specialist contractors.

Lessons Learned

9. The following is a summary of the principal lessons learned; full details are contained in the **Annex** (paragraphs 36 to 48).
    - Clear co-ordination and oversight from the Ranger Service throughout the project ensured effective delivery.
    - Garnering strong support and involvement from across the Authority throughout the development and delivery of the project,
    - Generating support from partners, landowners, local community and other interested parties played a significant role in the success of the project.
    - Securing of external funding enabled the project to come to fruition.
    - The importance of identifying areas requiring specialist external input.
    - Adaptability was key to addressing the challenges, particularly dealing with staff changes and late proposals for changes to the agreed bridge dimensions.

[1] Miles Without Stiles grading **Access For Many:** Suitable for assisted wheelchair users and all-terrain mobility equipment. May have steeper gradients (up to 1:8) and rougher surfaces (stone up to 4cm).

- The project increased our own knowledge and understanding of contract specifications and experience of significant infrastructure projects.

Financial Implications

10. The project experienced sustained cost escalation due to a wide range of additional statutory, design, legal, and contractual requirements as the works progressed.

11. Despite extensive early planning, these additional obligations, many of which were not fully defined or foreseen in the planning stage, introduced new tasks, approvals, and specialist inputs that increased the overall cost of delivery from an estimate of £300k to a final cost of £410k. However, of this total cost, £320k external funding was received resulting in an overall cost to the Authority of £90k.

Legal Implications

12. The legal agreements and governance arrangements developed through this project will strengthen the Authority's position and provide a robust framework for future projects to follow.

13. The Authority is delegated responsibility by Westmorland and Furness Council (W&FC) for the maintenance of Public Rights of Way, while W&FC retains the overall legal responsibility for the bridge.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

14. Removing the existing steps and narrow footbridge and replacing them with an accessible bridleway bridge has made the route available to a much wider range of users, including those with mobility impairments.

Conclusion

15. The Authority's involvement in the Cross Keys Bridge project successfully removed a long-standing obstruction to accessing the local bridleway network, where steep steps and a very narrow footbridge had prevented this access for many years. Without the Authority's intervention, it is highly unlikely that this situation would have changed, and public access would have continued to be constrained, preventing people from experiencing the special qualities of this area.

16. The Authority will continue to play a leading role in ensuring that the work delivered through the Public Rights of Way priority programme provides lasting and significant enhancements to the network for the National Park, its residents, and its visitors.

Alan Hulme
Head of Park Management

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