YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY **ITEM 6**

Date: **26 September 2023**

Report: **NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Purpose of the report

1. To update Members on a number of national developments that will potentially influence the content of the next National Park Management Plan, and to seek approval for some changes to the membership of the Steering Group.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That Members:
    a. note the current national developments and their likely impact on the production and content of the next National Park Management Plan;
    b. note the provisional timetable and process agreed by the National Park Management Plan Steering Group for updating the Plan;
    c. approve the proposed changes to the membership of the National Park Management Plan Steering Group.

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:
    - ***Action Plan 2023-24***
      27.12 Develop and adopt arrangements for the production of the NPMP 2025-30

Background

4. The National Park Circular (statutory guidance) makes clear that the National Park Management Plan is **the** single most important document for the management of the National Park. It guides the work and plans of a range of organisations and provides the framework for a number of other key strategy documents, including the Local Plan.

5. Members will be aware that in 2019 the 'Landscapes Review' led by Julian Glover made a number of proposals about the future of National Parks, and the role of National Park Authorities and other bodies. This included several proposals that would affect the nature and content of National Park Management Plans, most notably:

Strengthened Management Plans should set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery including, but not limited to, wilder areas and the response to climate change (notably tree planting and peatland restoration). Their implementation must be backed up by stronger status in law.

6. The Government responded to the Review in January 2022 setting out its intentions on some issues and further consultation on others. This included:
    a. Greater emphasis on nature recovery and climate change;
    b. Greater emphasis on increasing engagement with all parts of society and supporting public health;
    c. Strengthening the duty on public bodies to have regard to National Park purposes;
    d. Defra to set national targets for National Parks;
    e. Natural England to produce an 'outcomes framework' to help track progress in delivering national targets and other key outcomes in National Parks
    f. Natural England to update guidance on management plans.

7. The current Management Plan was published in January 2019, and runs until 2024. There is a statutory duty to review the National Park Management Plan "at intervals of not more than five years" (s66 of the Environment Act 1995).

8. The responsibility for the preparation and monitoring of the National Park Management rests with the National Park Management Plan Steering Group. The Steering Group is made up of the bodies and the local businesses that play the biggest role in helping to achieve the objectives set out in the Plan. **Annex A** sets out the terms of reference and includes a list of the current members.

Consideration

9. After a significant amount of work earlier this year, it now appears that the Government may not be taking forward the legislative changes needed to give statutory effect to items a., b. and c. in paragraph 7 above. However, those policy aims will still be promoted by Defra – not least through the new guidance on Management Plans, which is being prepared by Natural England. The main effects are likely to be:
    a. ***Nature recovery/climate change/engagement/health & wellbeing***. The guidance will emphasise the importance of these issues. The Plan's objectives will need to focus more on these issues, and show the requisite level of ambition to support the achievement of national targets.
    b. ***Duty on public bodies (s62)***. The Government has indicated its intention to amend the legislation in the Environment Act so as to require other public bodies to give greater weight to the statutory purposes for which National Parks were designated whenever they are operating within them (or making policy decisions that would affect them). This will also include strengthening the requirements in relation to National Park Management Plans. That would include not only engaging actively in the production of the Plan but also in the delivery of the objectives within it.

c. ***National targets*** – Defra still intends to set a series of targets for National Parks (and AONBs) collectively to achieve. These will focus primarily on existing long-term national targets for e.g. increasing tree cover, restoring habitats, reaching net zero by 2050 etc. The key thing to note is that these will be targets for the *place* (not for just the National Park Authorities), and so all relevant local partners will be expected to contribute to their achievement. The exact methodology for apportioning each of these down to individual protected landscapes is still being considered but the eventual targets for the Yorkshire Dales National Park (and the resources that local partners are able to contribute towards achieving them) will be a key part of the updated Management Plan.

d. ***Outcomes framework*** – while Defra intends to set national targets for some key issues, there is a recognition that National Parks contribute to a much wider range of important outcomes. Natural England is, therefore, developing a wider 'outcomes framework', which will contain a series of high level indicators (based on national datasets) that will be used to monitor progress in National Parks, and drive local action. The availability of this data should be helpful in setting SMART objectives;

e. ***New Management Plan guidance*** – Natural England is working on an update to the national guidance on National Park (and AONB) Management Plans. The guidance has not been updated since 2005. The intention is that the new guidance will be web-based and 'modular' so that individual elements can be more easily updated in future. It will advise on the practical implementation of the changes highlighted above, share existing good practice, and sources of further information.

Timing

10. The Government had previously indicated that the changes identified in para 9 above would be put in place early in 2023. That timetable has clearly slipped. Time is quickly running out for any legislative changes to be incorporated into the Levelling Up Bill currently going through Parliament. However, there may well be progress on the widely-trailed policy changes through the new NPMP guidance, which Natural England is currently working on.

11. The current NPMP was adopted at the start of 2019, and so would normally need to be updated early in 2024. Given the significant legislative changes we expected, the start of work on the new Plan was delayed (an approach originally endorsed by Defra). With legislation now in the balance the advice from government is that protected landscapes that need to update their Management Plans should start the process of doing so. We are anticipating that the final version of the new guidance will be published early in 2024, and there is little risk now in starting without that in place.

12. From previous experience, it should take 12-18 months to review and update the Management Plan. The NPMP Steering Group met in June and agreed that:

    a. the production of the new Plan will follow a broadly similar process to the current one (see **Annex B** for the provisional timetable);

b. the current 'vision' and the 6 ambitions for 2040 would form the basis for structuring the Plan but with greater importance/emphasis on the ambitions for climate and nature, with the other 4 ambitions supporting those (**Annex C**).

Steering Group Membership

13. A number of changes have recently been made to the membership of the Steering Group in light of Local Government Reform in North Yorkshire and Cumbria. This has reduced the size of the group from 18 to 16. It is recommended that the Steering Group is expanded to provide additional expertise in relation to:

    a. Historic environment – Historic England, the Government's statutory advisers on cultural heritage;

    b. The enhanced priorities of climate change and health/well-being. For climate change, the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership has been at the forefront of developing an approach to economic development that will deliver on the ambition to reach net zero by 2034. The LEP would also provide valuable wider economic input. For health and well-being, it is proposed to liaise with the two new unitary authorities to identify the most appropriate body to invite on to the group.

Next steps

14. Subject to Members views today, the next steps will be:

    a. Finalise appointments to the Steering Group;

    b. Officers collate initial evidence reports to inform the production of the Plan;

    c. A Policy Development Forum in October for Members to consider and advise on the big issues that they would like the Management Plan to cover;

    d. NPMP Steering Group meeting in November to agree the detailed arrangements for the initial public consultation.

    e. First public consultation in January 2024

Conclusion

15. The Management Plan is the most important document for the National Park. The Yorkshire Dales Plan – and the approach taken to producing it – is widely acknowledged as being an example of good practice: producing a concise, meaningful Plan that has wide buy-in. The next update of the Plan (covering the period from 2025-2030) will set the framework for a critical phase in the National Park's future, as probably the last chance to alter the trajectory of the climate and nature emergencies.

Gary Smith
Director of Conservation and Community

12 September 202

National Park Management Plan Steering Group
Terms of Reference

Membership

1. The Steering Group will be made up of the authorities and organisations that have a major contribution to make to *delivering* the objectives in the Management Plan.

2. Each body listed in the appendix shall have a named representative and one named substitute. That representative to have been nominated following consideration of the criteria set out below.

3. The Steering Group shall be supported by officers of the National Park Authority, led by the Director of Conservation and Community.

4. The Steering Group shall nominate and elect its own chair and deputy chair (one of whom must be the Chair of the National Park Authority).

Role

5. The role of the Steering Group is to:

    a. oversee the 5-yearly review of the Management Plan;

    b. ensure that the Management Plan takes account of:
        - the two statutory purposes for which the National Park was designated, and the associated statutory duty;
        - national guidance on National Parks;
        - all relevant local, regional and national strategies;
        - the results of public and stakeholder consultation;
        - up-to-date evidence of the 'state of the Park'.

    c. provide 'integrated thinking' and seek to resolve issues arising when there is a conflict between competing policy objectives;

    d. monitor and report on progress in implementing the Management Plan

Responsibilities

6. The Steering Group will:

    a. meet as often as is necessary to prepare the Plan, and thereafter twice a year;

    b. ensure that robust and timely data is provided by the key partners in accordance with the timetable;

    c. agree the framework for monitoring progress, including:

- the indicators to be used to measure progress against the Plan's objectives;
- the most relevant sources of information;
- responsibilities for supplying the relevant information;

d. prepare annual progress reports to inform the National Park Authority and other key delivery partners.

e. identify where there are opportunities or need for greater collaboration and co-ordinated action amongst partners in order to deliver the objectives in the Management plan.

f. hold an 'annual Forum' to widen local engagement with the Management Plan

Steering Group Members

7. It is for each partner organisation to determine who is best placed to represent them on the Steering Group, having regard to:

   a. the roles and responsibilities of the Steering Group (as set out above); and,

   b. the key requirements of each individual, including
      i. availability to attend the meetings;
      ii. having the capacity to speak on behalf of their organisation with authority;
      iii. communicating information about the Steering Group's work widely within their own organisation;
      iv. co-ordinating views from across their organisation in order to provide a single organisational view on relevant issues;
      v. co-ordinating the timely provision of relevant monitoring information from across their organisation.

Appendix - Current Membership of NPMP Steering Group

- Dales Farm Businesses (Cumbria/Lancashire)
- Dales Farm Businesses (Yorkshire)
- Dales Rural Estates (Cumbria/Lancashire)
- Dales Rural Estates (Yorkshire)
- Dales Tourism Businesses (Cumbria/Lancashire)
- Dales Tourism Businesses (Yorkshire)
- Environment Agency
- Forestry Commission
- Natural England;
- North Yorkshire Council
- Westmorland and Furness Council
- Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust
- Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (x2)
- Youth representatives (x2)

Provisional timetable for updating the National Park Management Plan

1. Engagement, research and analysis	
Jul 23 – Nov 23	Prepare thorough evidence documents for each of the 6 ambitions - trends; policy context; issues.
Jan-Feb 24	Wide and open public consultation on the key issues the revised Plan needs to respond to.
Mar 24	Produce ‘scoping’ report - results of consultation, and update evidence documents.
2. Drafting the Plan	
Apr 24	Establish ‘drafting groups’ for each of the 6 ‘ambitions’.
May 24	Set ‘strategic direction’ for the work of the drafting groups.
May-Jul 24	Draft initial objectives.
Sep 24	Moderate initial objectives (to avoid conflict, duplication etc).
3. Consulting on the Plan	
Nov-Dec 24	Full public consultation on full draft NPMP.
Jan 25	Collate and assess feedback.
4. Finalising the Plan	
Feb 25	Final revisions to objectives.
Mar-May 25	Adopt, publish and launch the Plan.

Our Vision

Through their passion for this special place, local people, businesses and organisations will keep the Yorkshire Dales National Park a thriving area. It's unique cultural landscape will be treasured for its stunning scenery, exceptional heritage and wonderful wildlife, and every year millions of people will be inspired to be part of it.

By 2040, it will be:

