Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 6**

Full Authority

17 December 2024

Update on Local Nature Recovery Strategies

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval from Members to delegate decisions (as outlined in this report) concerning three Local Nature Recovery Strategies relevant to the National Park.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the Authority authorises the Director of Conservation and Community to respond on the NPA's behalf to formal requests from Responsible Authorities for approval of Local Nature Recovery Strategies at the key stages outlined in paragraph 6 of this report. Responses to be prepared:
    a. In consultation with the YDNPA Chair and the Member Champion for Natural Environment; and,
    b. Using the Authority's adopted 'Yorkshire Dales National Park Nature Recovery Plan' to guide its submission.

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and support the strategic planning framework, and in particular:

    National Park Management Plan 2019-2024
    "By 2040 the Yorkshire Dales National Park will be home to the finest variety of wildlife in England".

Background

4. The Government's 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) includes the commitment to "a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife". The aim is to create a UK 'Nature Recovery Network' (NRN) "to protect and restore wildlife and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that we have lost from our countryside". The NRN will come about through linking the best existing wildlife sites, creating or restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the SSSI network.

5. Central to delivery of the EIP will be Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs). These are statutory documents that identify the priorities for nature recovery in each area. They will map existing wildlife-rich locations and indicate where measures are to be encouraged for future habitat creation and restoration. The National Park will be covered by three LNRSs – the production of which is being led by Lancashire County Council, North Yorkshire Council and Westmorland and Furness Council (the 'Responsible Authorities').

6. The National Park Authority is formally designated as a 'Supporting Authority' and must, therefore, be involved in producing and agreeing the strategies. There are two key stages in the preparation of each LNRS at which Supporting Authorities will be asked formally for views by the Responsible Authorities:

    - Immediately prior to statutory public consultation on the LNRS when the Supporting Authorities will be asked to approve the consultation draft;
    - Before final publication of the LNRS to indicate whether the Supporting Authorities agree with it.

7. At each stage the Supporting Authorities have only a limited amount of time (28 days) to make their views known.

8. In September 2023 members agreed to endorse the Yorkshire Dales National Park Nature Recovery Plan as the basis for influencing the LNRSs being prepared by the local authorities. The full final version of the plan can be found at https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2024/01/Nature-Recovery-Plan-for-the-Yorkshire-Dales-National-Park.pdf

The importance of the Yorkshire Dales National Park for nature

9. The Yorkshire Dales National Park will form a vital part of the Nature Recovery Network nationally as well as locally, and its importance and that of other protected landscapes needs to be recognised appropriately in the local LNRSs being produced.

10. As Members will be aware, the YDNP contains the finest limestone scenery in the UK within which is found a multitude of rare and special plants and animals. The fells and moorland fringes host internationally important upland bird populations and its peatlands provide a vital carbon sink. In total, the National Park contains 24 nationally important 'Priority Habitats', covering 83,000 hectares – the most of any English National Park. There are particular national concentrations of some of these habitats in YDNP such as of upland hay meadows, limestone pavements, calcareous grasslands and blanket bog. Over 25% of the National Park (57,000 ha) is formally designated as nationally or internationally important for wildlife – again, the most of any English National Park.

11. The National Park supports almost 400 species that are of UK conservation importance. Among these are iconic species such as Red Squirrel, Lady's Slipper Orchid and Curlew. However, the species list also contains less well-known ones - like the Yorkshire Feather-moss (which occurs in this National Park and nowhere else) – that live here in nationally and, in some cases, internationally important populations. It is to be hoped

that the LNRSs that will cover the National Park will include measures that deal with maintaining and increasing populations of such key species.

12. Through the introduction of the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, the Government has highlighted the importance of Protected Landscapes in meeting the national targets for nature recovery – including targets for habitat creation, woodland creation and peatland restoration. It should be expected, therefore, that the LNRSs will recognise, prioritise and enable the landscape-scale action needed to meet national nature recovery targets within the National Park. Wildlife corridors that link the protected landscapes should also be a priority in each LNRS. Some national trails (such as the Coast to Coast) offer great opportunities for better habitat connectivity.

Progress with the three LNRSs

13. NPA officers have been closely engaged in the three LNRSs processes. All three Responsible Authorities have striven to involve the National Park Authority fully in the process of preparation and have each demonstrated their willingness to take on board suggestions and recommendations. There have also been public engagement events to which YDNP farmers and landowners have been invited and have attended. The situation that has been reached in the preparation of each LNRS is:

    - **Cumbria** – Westmorland & Furness Council is the Responsible Authority producing an LNRS for the whole of Cumbria. 27 Priorities are in the current draft with 128 measures associated. The intention is that a draft LNRS will be submitted to Supporting Authorities during the third week of January 2025 and that a public consultation will be initiated in March.
    - **Lancashire** – According to Lancashire County Council: “The aim is that the draft strategy will go out for public consultation in the first quarter of 2025”.
    - **North Yorkshire and York** – At the time of writing the final version of the likely text of the consultation draft LNRS has become available. There are 44 priorities identified with 185 associated measures. The mapping that will be published to indicate where measures will be encouraged is being carried out and is currently on course to being completed on time. North Yorkshire Council intends to release the proposed consultation draft to Supporting Authorities towards the end of January 2025

14. Members will note from the above that the Authority is likely to be formally consulted on the public consultation draft for all three LNRSs in January/February 2025. Given the 28 days’ timescale, it will not be possible to seek approval from the Authority. It is, therefore, proposed that the decisions concerning our response are delegated to the Director of Conservation and Community, in consultation with the Chair and Member Champion for Natural Environment. They will then be reported at the March NPA meeting.

Financial, Legal, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

15. None.

Climate Change Implications

16. To be compliant with Defra guidance each draft LNRS should identify the co-benefits that will arise from the proposed nature recovery measures including ones relating to climate change mitigation. For example, measures for peatland restoration, that would be beneficial for biodiversity will capture carbon, while increased tree cover could help natural flood management depending on where the trees are situated. Better connectivity of habitats will help species migrate in response to climate change making for more resilient habitat networks.

Conclusion

17. The Yorkshire Dales National Park is home to many habitats and species of animals and plants that have suffered significant losses elsewhere. There is evidence of deterioration in the quality of some habitats in the Dales and indications that certain key species are declining even here. It is now widely acknowledged that trying to cling on to what we have is no longer enough. The Government has made it clear that it expects Protected Landscapes to be at the heart of the national nature recovery network. The Yorkshire Dales National Park Nature Recovery Plan sets out a full range of quantified local targets for nature recovery and has been held up as an example of good practice for other protected landscapes. The Local Nature Recovery Strategies that cover the National Park ought to provide an important statutory mechanism to help deliver the scale of change necessary to meet the national and local expectations for nature recovery here. The Authority is continuing to work positively with three relevant authorities and fully expects the LNRSs to recognise the important contribution that the National Park can make.

Tony Serjeant
Senior Wildlife Conservation Officer