Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Item 7

Audit & Review Committee

16 July 2024

Review of Authority Performance 2023/24

Purpose of the report

1. To provide Members with a detailed assessment of the Authority's performance in 2023/24.

Recommendation

2. That Members comment on and note the Authority's performance in 2023/24.

Strategic Framework

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

   Corporate Plan objective.
   30. Plan and manage the Authority's work so as to make the most effective use of its resources…

Background

4. Each year the Authority goes through a process of setting out what we want to achieve in the year ahead. This starts with Members setting the priorities, then setting specific objectives and a budget, and finally approving detailed actions.

5. Overall progress on the 35 objectives in the 2023/24 Corporate Plan was reported to the Authority meeting in June. This report provides a more detailed assessment, incorporating additional information on:

   a. The performance of the Authority in achieving the actions set out in the 2023/24 Action Plan;

   b. External assessments of the Authority's performance;

   c. Comparisons with other national park authorities;

   d. Comparisons with performance in previous years.

Summary of overall performance

6. Headlines from 2023/24:
    a. The high level of income generated meant that Authority expenditure (£11.5m) significantly exceeded the 2022/23 target (£9m) needed to meet the Authority's long-term funding objective.
    b. Spend was lower than originally projected (£12.8m) – partly as a result of issues with the Grow Back Greener; and Westmorland Dales projects.
    c. Of the 35 objectives, 24 (69%) were achieved or remained on-course – down from 72% the previous year;
    d. External validation continues to demonstrate that we operate high standards of corporate governance and customer service – although national issues with external audit are still creating problems;
    e. We performed very well in comparison to other NPAs in relation to the NPA family performance indicators.

Objectives

7. Good progress has been made on most of the objectives. Details were reported to the Authority in June, and are not repeated in full here but highlights include:
    - Almost £1.4 million was provided to local farm businesses through the Defra-funded Farming in Protected Landscapes programme;
    - Working with Friends of the Lake District to complete the 5-year Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership programme, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund;
    - Restoration works were completed on 8 traditional farm buildings, with 28 others being repaired as part of conversion to new uses;
    - Delivered educational and skills-based activities to over 3,200 school children from in and around the National Park;
    - Over £27,000 was raised during the year to support repairs to the Three Peaks route;
    - Commenced implementation of the Coast-to-Coast National Trail, including legal works to secure the route as a Public Right of Way.
    - Provided opportunities for volunteer days for young people (age 11–29) through Young Rangers, 'Upskill-Down Dale' and 'Dales Action Days'
    - Through the Swinden Quarry and Dry Rigg Quarry Natural Environment Funds support a range of environmental enhancements in local areas affected by quarrying;
    - Through Catchment Sensitive Farming, advice and assistance was provided to 160 farmers to help reduce diffuse pollution from agriculture;
    - With funding from the Woodland Trust, White Rose Forest and others, we facilitated and supported the creation of 47 ha of new native woodland;

- Granted planning permission for 98 new dwellings, taking the average for the last 5 years to 93;
- Supported 21 local community and business projects, with grants of almost £100,000, through the Sustainable Development Fund;
- Determined 89% of 'minor' and 92% of 'other' planning applications within Government target times;
- 2 new trainees were recruited, taking the cumulative total to 21 apprentices and 8 trainees since 2018;
- Generated over £7 million of external income (i.e. excluding Defra core grant), which accounted for 56% of total income;
- Retained the 'Customer Service Excellence' Award for the 14th year.

8. Whilst there has been good progress on many objectives, there have been problems in progressing some of them to the extent we would have wished. **Annex A** provides explanations for the objectives which haven't made the intended progress.

9. To provide more analysis of longer term performance, **Annex B** shows the trends over the last 5 years for some of the Authority's long-standing objectives.

Actions

10. Many of the 143 actions that were completed last year are linked directly to the achievement of the objectives described above. Some of the more significant *other* actions that were achieved were:
    a. With the other protected landscapes in North Yorkshire, secured funding to carry out research to show the value of a transition to regenerative farming;
    b. as part of the Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership, completed the repairs to Smardale Lime Kilns, so that the scheduled monument is no longer at risk;
    c. carried out engineering works to 800m of public rights of way, including landscaping and drainage works along the bridleway at Bowderdale;
    d. repaired 2.5km of previously engineered routes, including repairs to footpath surfacing at Havera, Sedbergh and Gunnerside Bottoms;
    e. as part of 'Our Uplands Commons', designed and installed panels that tell the story of Grassington's lead mining heritage;
    f. as part of Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected ran year 3 of the 'Uplands for Education' project, providing education activities for school children in Darlington, Northallerton and Bedale;
    g. consulted landowners on the line as part of establishing a traffic-free, multi-user route (bridleway) from Hawes to Garsdale, and determine next steps;
    h. ran a Development Management event for Parish Councils to help them to contribute effectively to the planning process;

i. resolved 163 enforcement cases;

j. published and distributed 85,000 copies of 'The Visitor 2024' as the official guide to the National Park;

k. installed a 'Changing Places' facility at Grassington;

l. with funding from BMW, installed 6 further Electric Vehicle (EV) Podpoint Chargers in Authority public car parks.

11. **Annex C** shows the 29 actions that were not achieved, together with a brief explanation as to why.

NPA Performance Indicators

12. **Annex D** shows how this Authority compares with other National Park Authorities in England, on a number of performance measures. ✸ indicates the Authority's 'ranking' (out of 8) each year. As previously requested by the Committee, the figures for the ***Lake District*** and ***North York Moors*** National Park Authorities have also been highlighted for comparison.

13. For the 9 indicators reported, the Authority was in the top quartile (1st or 2nd) for 8 and 3rd for the other.

14. **Annex E** shows additional performance information for the Development Management Service.

Financial Implications

15. The financial implications of the outcome of the 2023-24 financial year were covered in depth in the out-turn report to the Finance and Resources Committee in May.

Legal Implications

16. None

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

17. None

Conclusion

18. The Authority retains a robust, evidence-based approach to monitoring and reporting publicly on its performance.
19. The scale of the Authority's work continued to grow, principally as a consequence of the further growth in external funding. Significant progress was made on a

number of objectives – notably through Farming in Protected Landscapes, inspirational and educational activities, the Coast-to-Coast route, Tees-Swale project, and woodland creation.

20. However, it was also evident that delivery could not keep pace with the scale of growth in planned activity' leading to an increase in the number of objectives that were 'near misses' this year.

Gary Smith
Deputy Chief Executive

24 June 2024

Background Papers:

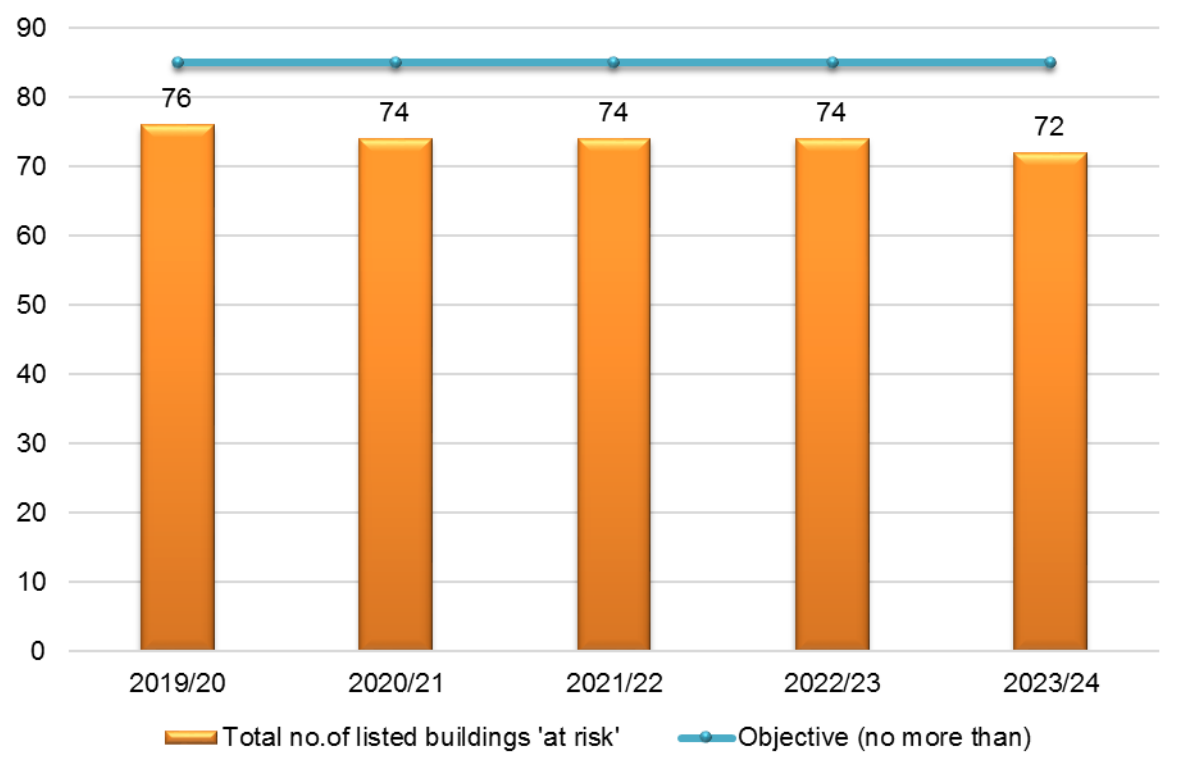
Objectives that were <u>not</u> on-course or achieved in 2023/24

Objective	Target by March 2024	Progress	Status
6. Use DCM and HER 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 2024.	Initial HER enhancement completed	Phase 1 of the HER enhancement (172 km^2 mapped using LIDAR data) has been completed. Historic England will be funding a survey of the rest of the area over the next 2 years.	≈
7. Benefit a wide variety of users by raising the standard of all public rights of way so that 90% are 'easy to use' by 2023.	90%	89% of routes were easy to use in March 2024, though the average over the period of 2019–2024 remains at 90%.	≈
12. 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.	7,000 volunteer days	6,879 days of volunteering have been undertaken in 2023/24 with 19% coming from under-represented groups.	≈
19. Work with farmers and landowners to improve the condition of the Aire, Eden, Lune, Ribble, Swale, Ure and Wharfe so that at least 90% of all rivers achieve 'good ecological status' by 2027.	67%	51% of rivers are in good ecological status (down from 62%). Through the CSF programme, advice & assistance was provided to more than 160 farmers to help reduce diffuse pollution from agriculture.	X
20. Work with moorland managers and other stakeholders to end illegal persecution of raptors, including independent and scientifically robust monitoring, and co-ordinated hen harrier nest and roost site protection.	Local coordination of nest and roost protection	15 hen harrier nesting attempts across the Yorkshire Dales and Nidderdale in 2023 - the highest number of nesting attempts recorded in the area. There were also six confirmed persecution incidents	≈
24. Undertake a 5-year programme of measures to promote the National Park as a place to live for younger, working age households (18-44) including identifying measures to reduce the proportion of under-occupied properties.	Complete 5-year programme	Local Plan will include a 'permanent residency' condition to prevent new housing becoming second homes/holiday lets. NYC and W&F Councils are introducing a Council Tax Premium in April 2025.	≈
27. Work with neighbouring authorities to produce a single, updated Local Plan for the whole of the National Park by 2024, which will help achieve the vision and objectives in the National Park Management Plan.	Publish final draft Local Plan	Publication of full draft plan delayed by additional work being undertaken by the Local Plan Advisory Group to consider detailed options for future housing sites.	≈

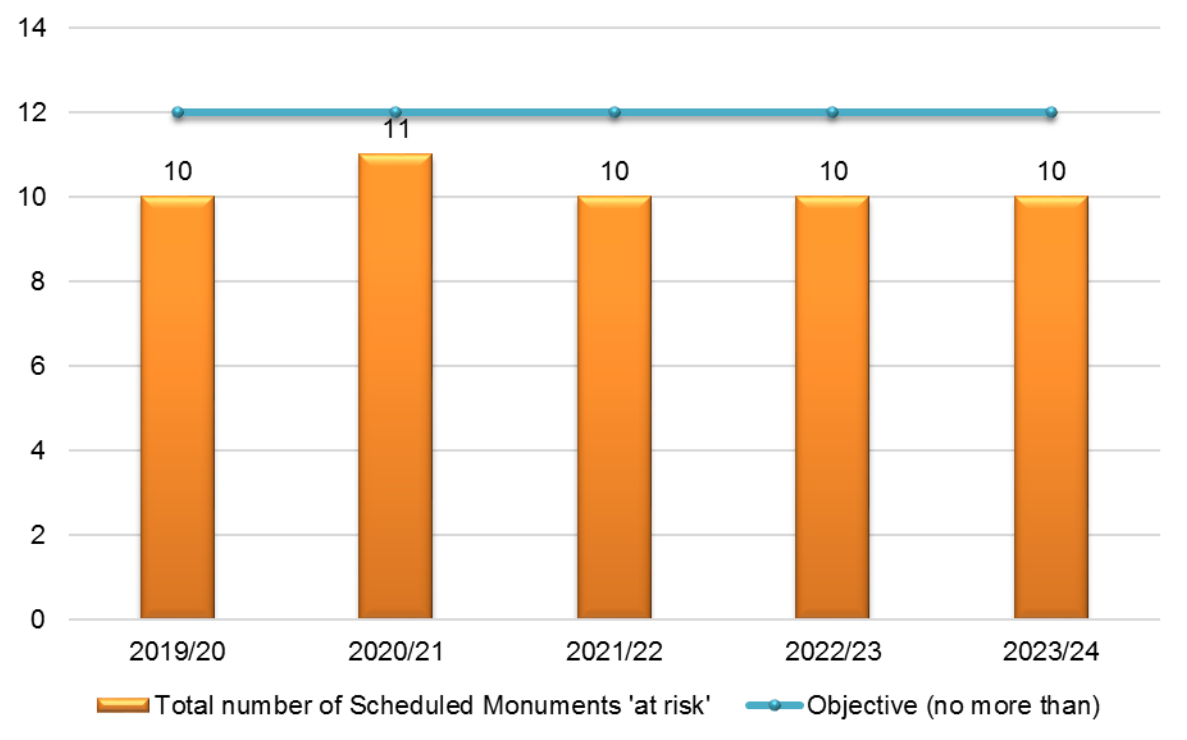
29. Improve the quality, variety and marketing of the tourism 'offer' to encourage more overnight stays and more visitors in the quieter months, by 2024.	5% more overnight stays	2022 figures showed staying visitors increased by 20% from 2021. However, overall staying visitors were still 1% below 2017 levels. Awaiting STEAM report for 2023.	≈
32. Operate governance arrangements that are fit for purpose, as reported through the Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Governance Report.	Unqualified External Audit opinion	Annual Governance Statement and Governance Report completed to schedule. National delays in the public sector audit regime mean there are delays in External Audit.	≈
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 internal audit's reporting on relevant systems.	Unqualified VfM opinion	Internal audit completed (received 'substantial assurance'). External audit for 2021/22 has been finished but is awaiting final sign off from auditors. The 2022/23 audit will not be a full audit.	≈
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 of at least 30 times our residual annual emissions.	Emissions - 76%	By March 2024 emissions had been reduced by 74% since 2005/06. Work is underway to procure a fleet of electric vehicles in 2024.	≈

5 Year Trends

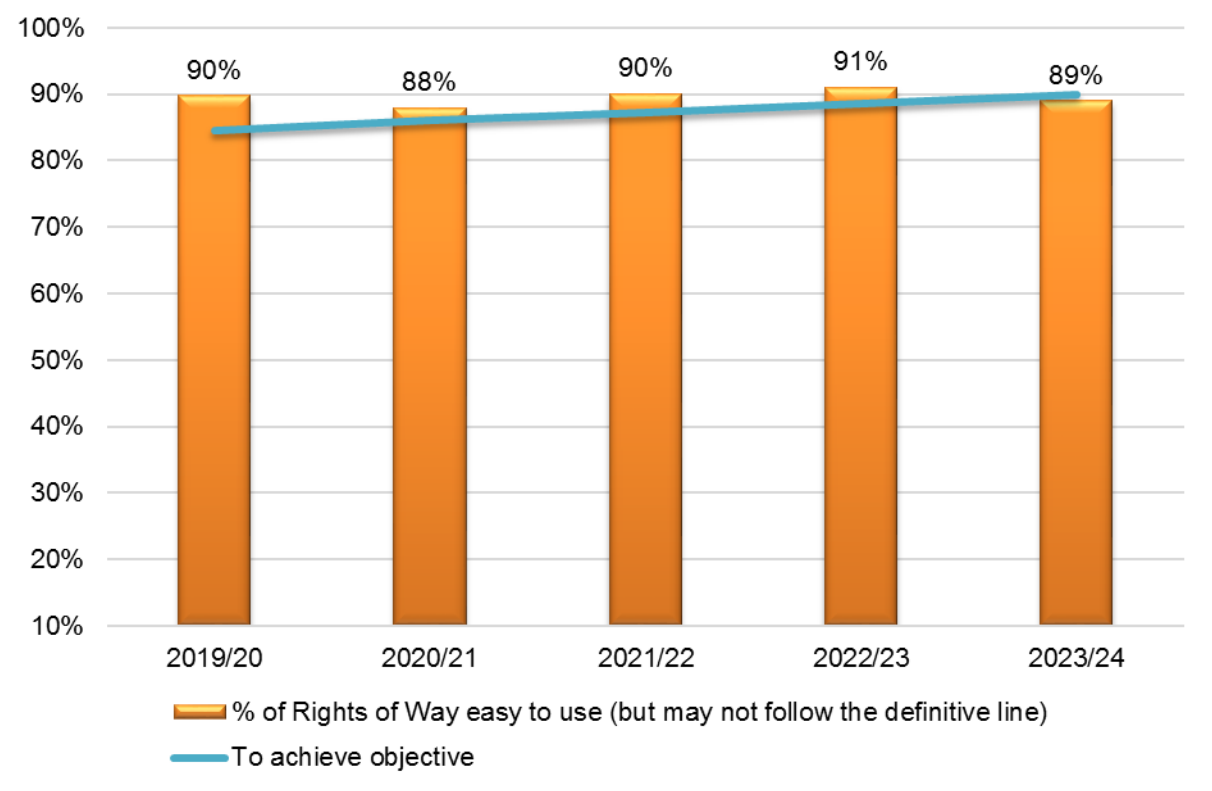
Objective 5a – Total No. of Listed Buildings 'at risk'



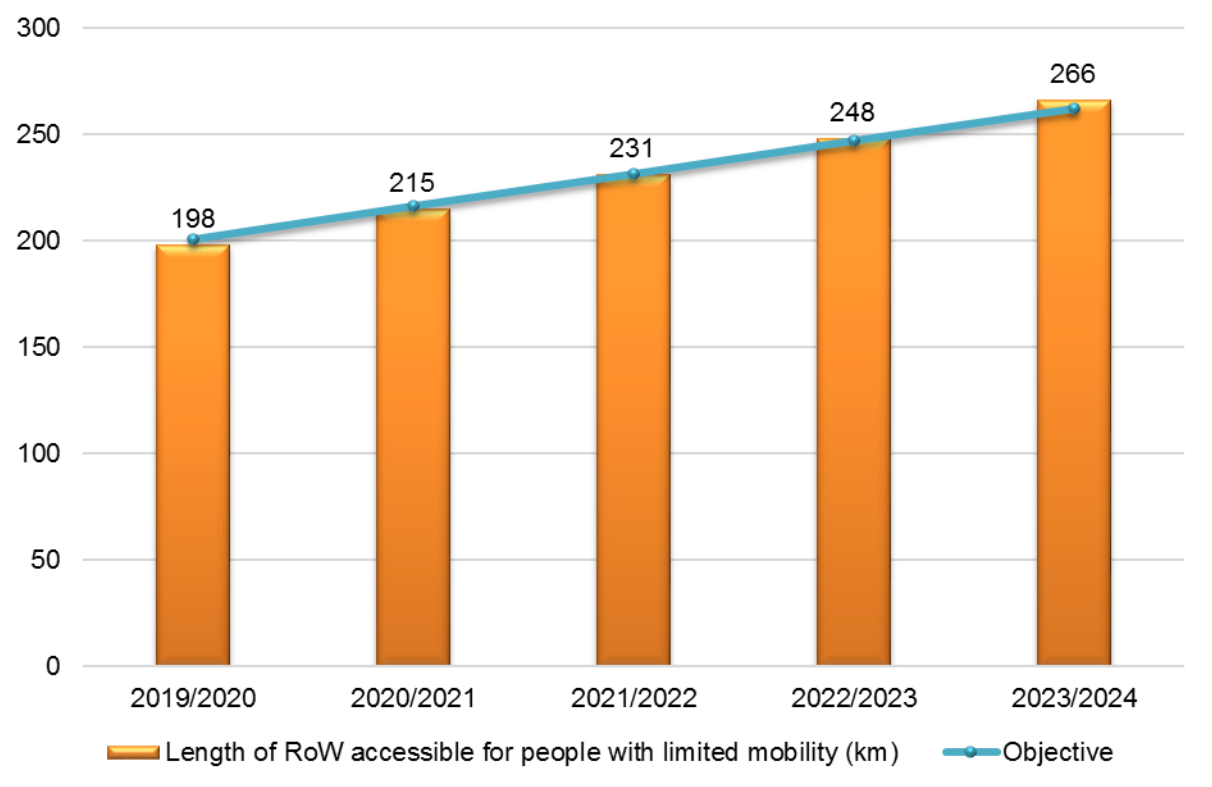
Objective 5b – Total No. of Scheduled Monuments 'at risk'



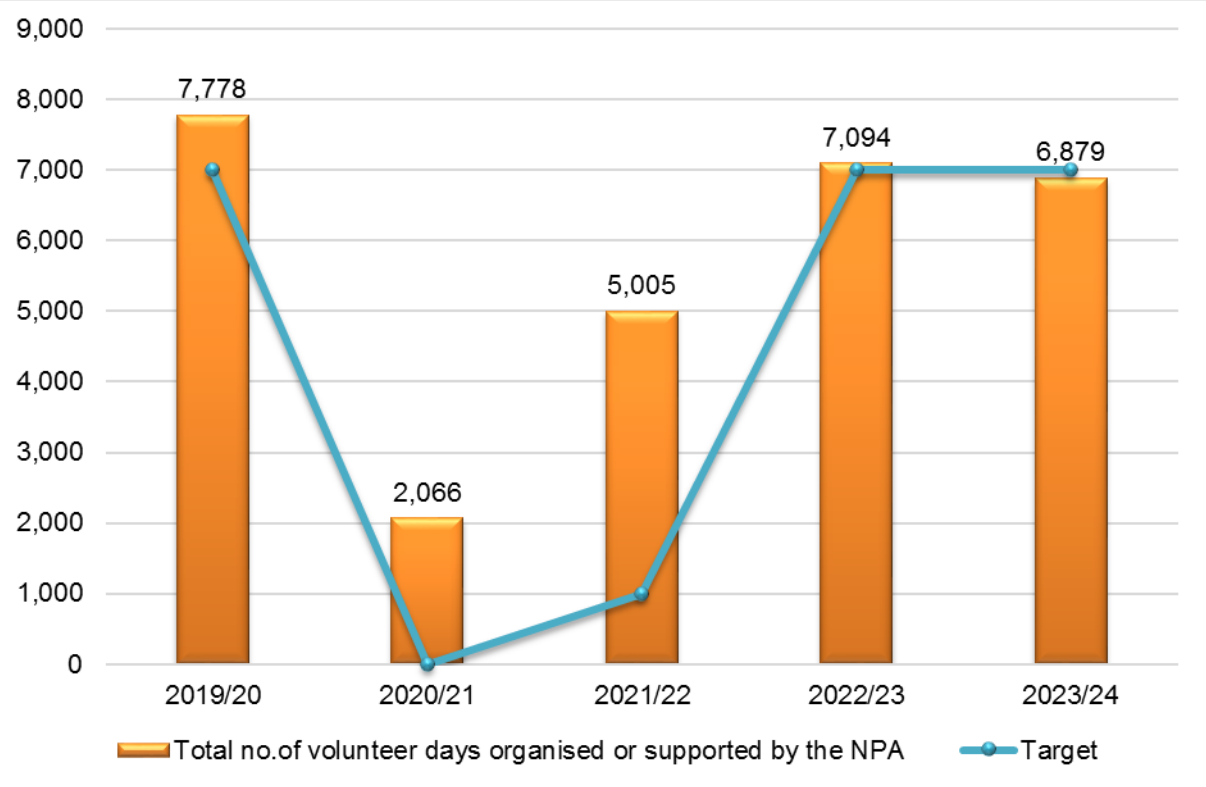
Objective 7 – Rights of Way that are 'Easy to Use'



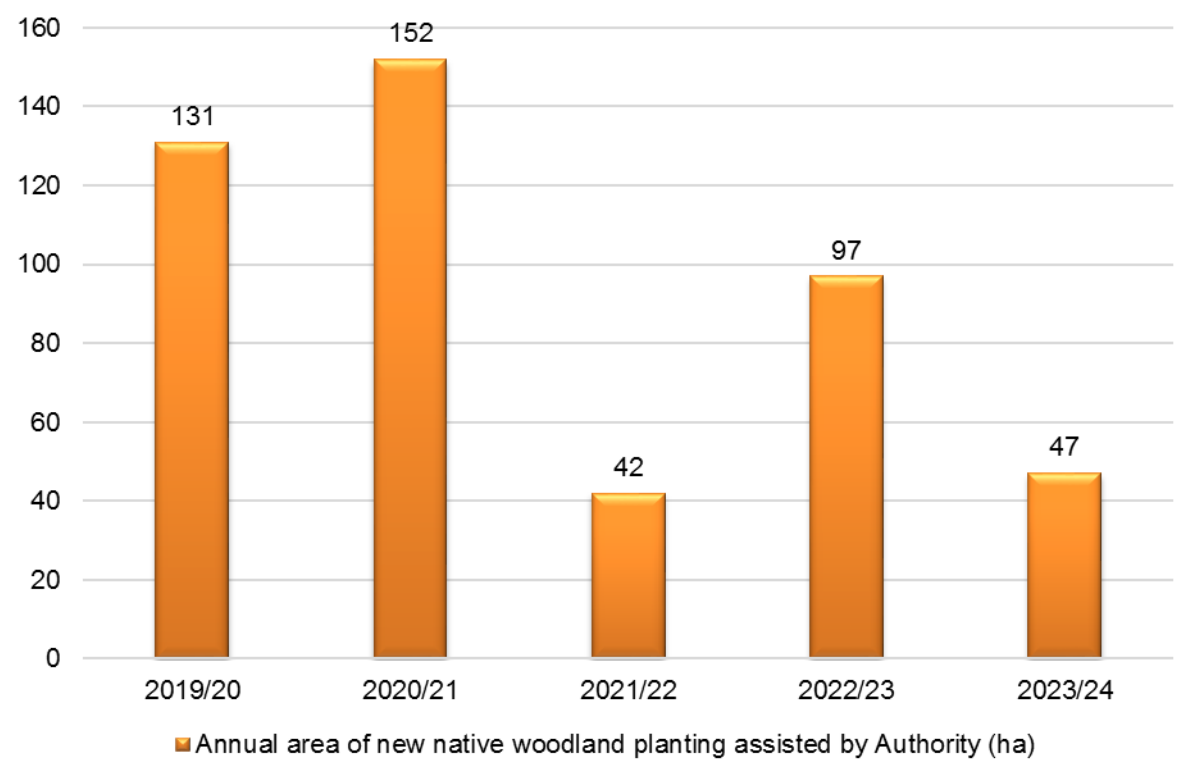
Objective 9 – Length of RoW (km) suitable for all users



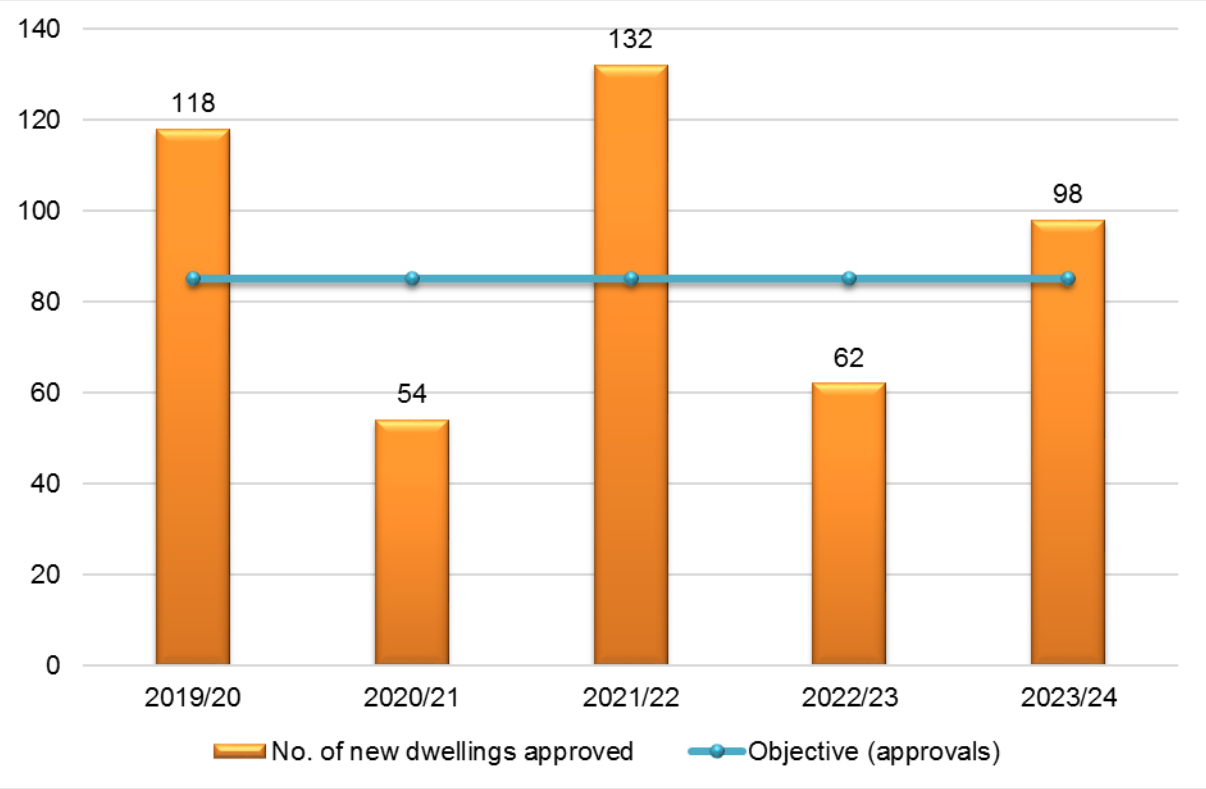
Objective 12 – Number of volunteer days provided



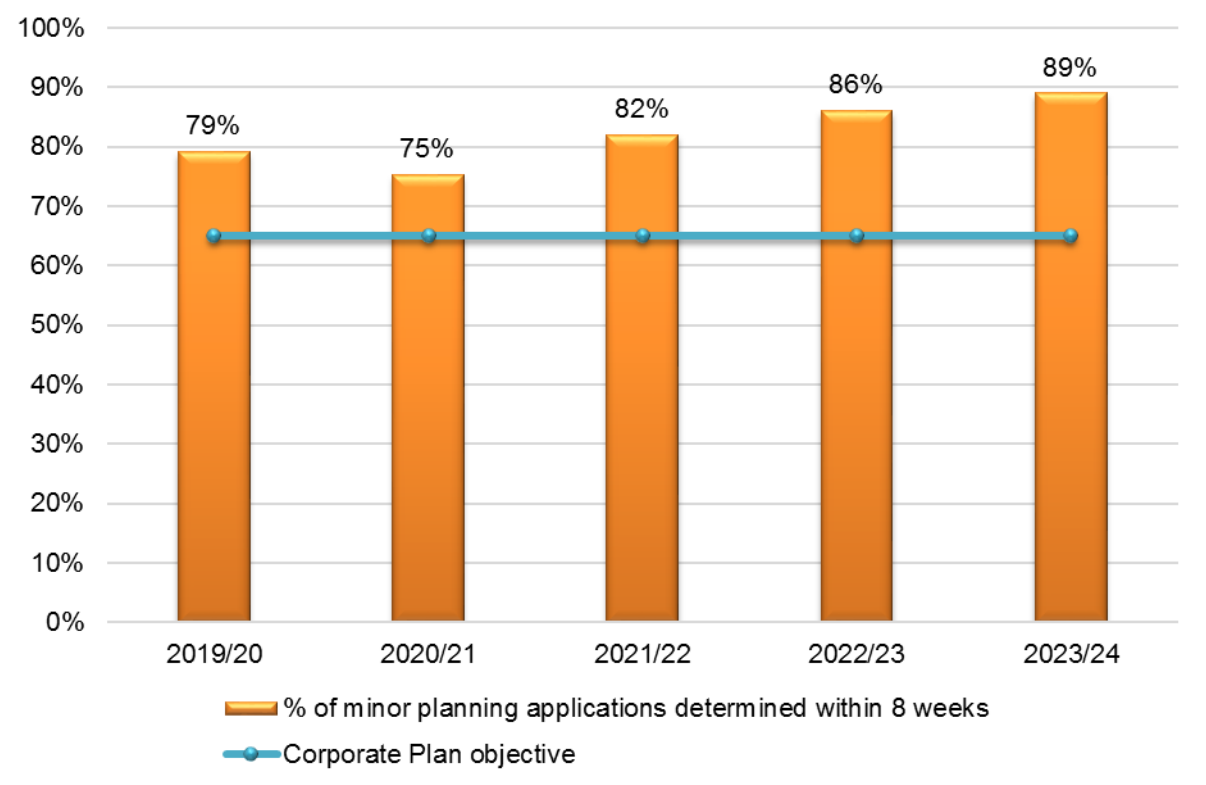
Objective 22 – Annual area of new native woodland supported (ha)



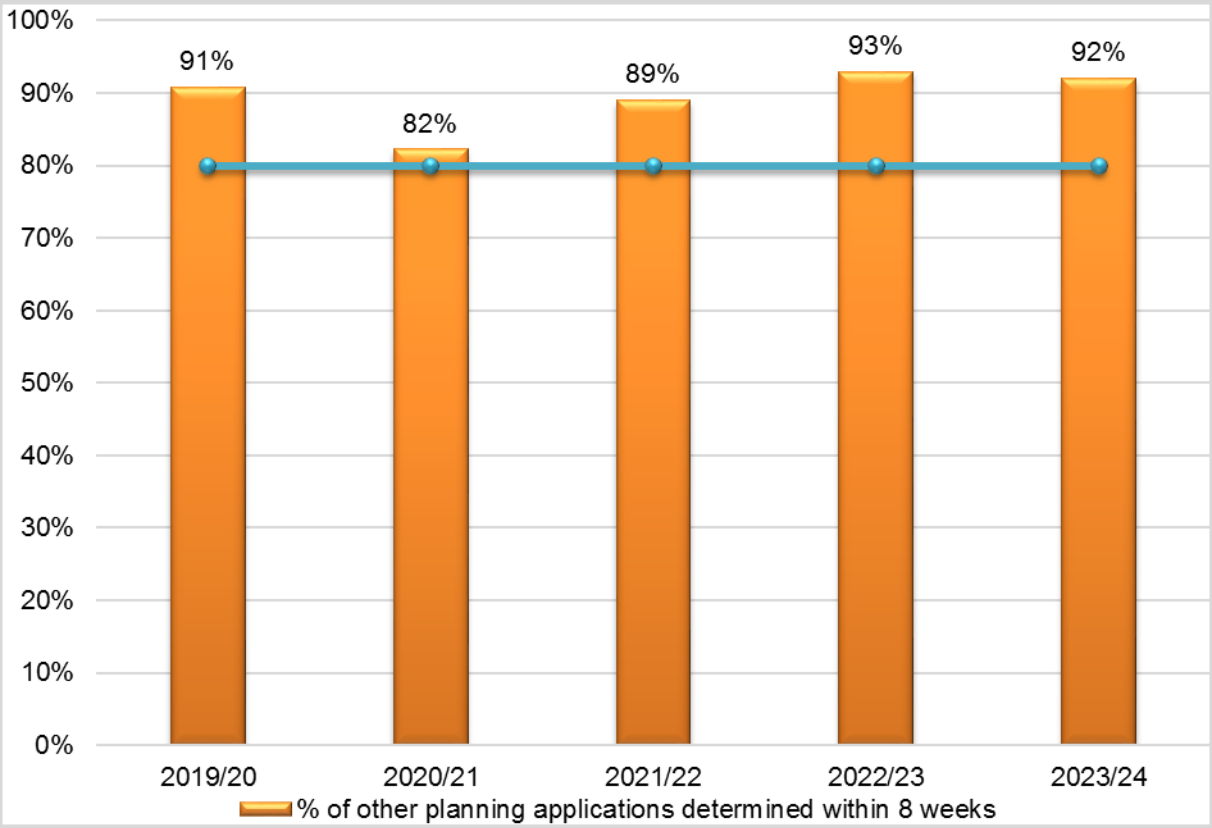
Objective 23 – No. of dwellings approved



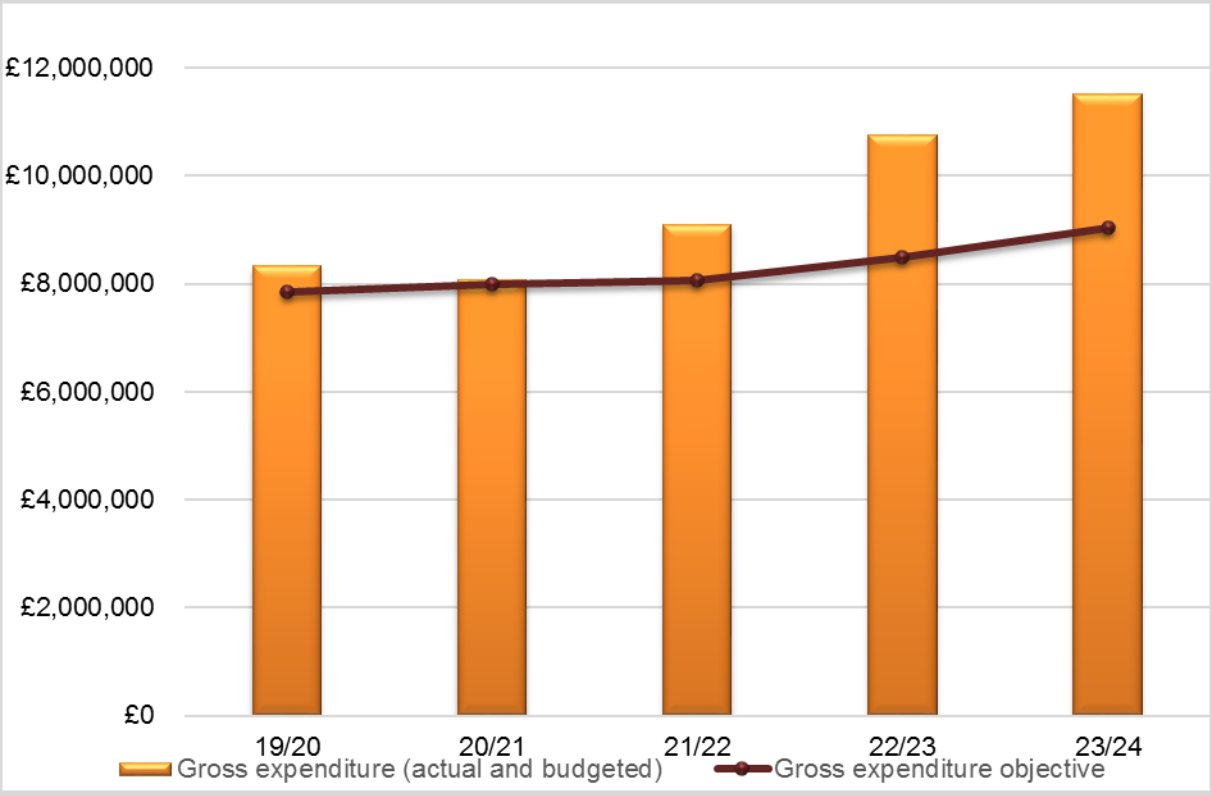
Objective 26a – 'Minor' planning applications determined within 8 weeks



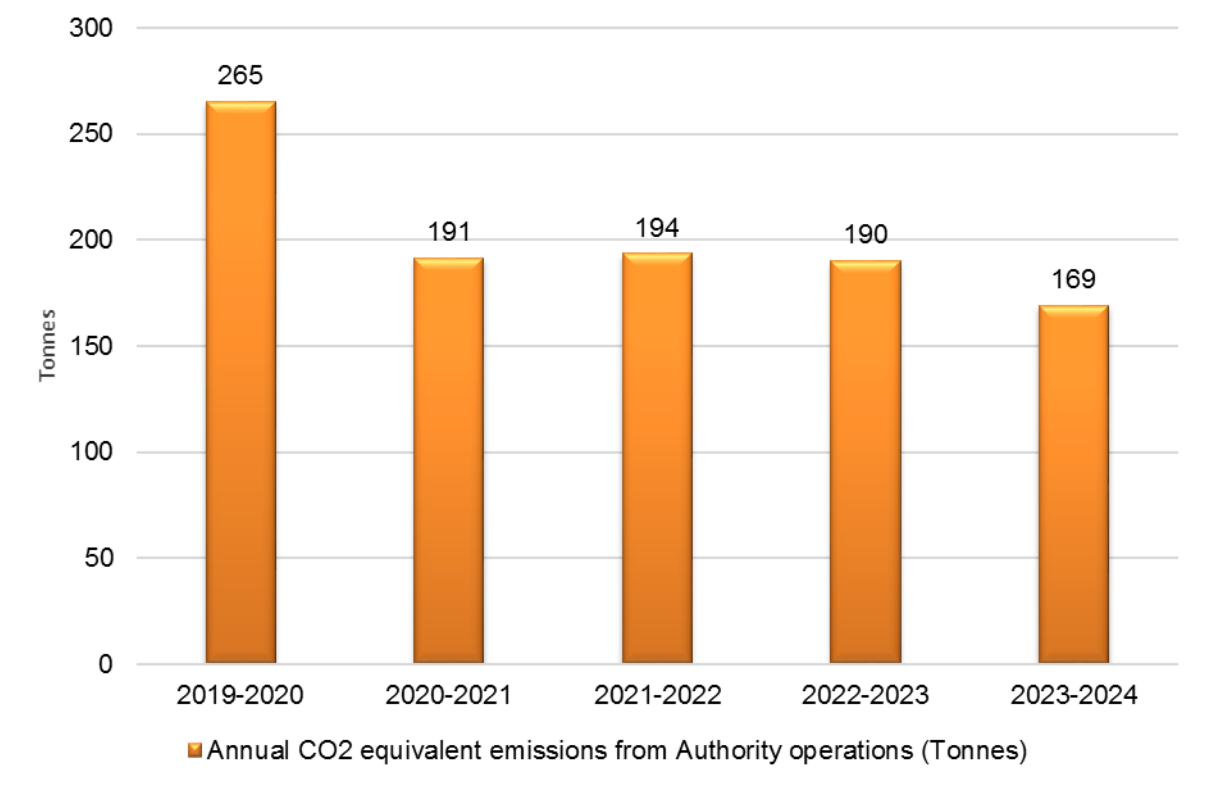
Objective 26b – 'Other' planning applications determined within 8 weeks



Objective 30 – Authority expenditure



Objective 35 - Annual CO^2t equivalent emissions from Authority operations



2023/24 – Actions not achieved

5.	**Help local people to restore, repair and - where possible - bring back into use nationally-important historical sites, buildings and structures so that less than 4% of scheduled monuments and listed buildings are 'at risk' by 2024**		
5.3	Carry out the second phase of repairs to Linton clapper bridge	Nov	Cancelled[1]
5.4	Through Tees-Swale: naturally connected, support a programme of practical measures to help reduce pollution from lead-mining sites on Barney Beck in Swaledale	Mar	Postponed[2]
6.	**Use the Dales Countryside Museum 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 Historic Environment Record for the new area of the National Park by 2024**		
6.3	Complete the enhancement of the material from the former '*Out Of Oblivion - a landscape through time*' website, and launch its replacement (p)	Mar	Postponed[3]
6.8	Use the learning from the Family-friendly project to provide a welcome corner to meet the criteria of the *Kids in Museums* manifesto	Mar	Postponed[4]
6.11	Undertake post-excavation analysis and write up of the Quaker Field project and disseminate results	Mar	Postponed[5]
7.	**Benefit a wide variety of users by raising the standard of all public rights of way so that 90% are 'easy to use' by 2023**		
7.3	Review with Unitary Authorities the delegated statutory duties provided by the Authority	Dec	Cancelled[6]
7.4	Replace Thringill Bridge, Mallerstang in partnership with the Parish Council	Dec	Cancelled[7]
7.5	Conduct repair works across the National Park so that 90% of routes are 'easy to use'	Mar	Cancelled[8]

1 Quotations received from contractors were significantly beyond the available budget
2 Work by the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust was delayed pending completion of mine-remediation projects in the Teesdale part of the project area. Baseline habitat and vegetation surveys have been started at Barney Beck and Gunnerside Gil to inform the programme of remediation works that will now start later this year.
3 Awaiting some final website work with completion by August
4 Delayed awaiting contractor. Completion expected early Summer
5 Delayed by need for officers to prioritise projects that had come forward as part of the Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme. Completion now expected in early summer.
6 Original action replaced by a light-touch, Member-led review, as agreed by A&R Committee in April 2024. Review due to be completed by November.
7 The Parish Council withdrew from the scheme.
8 In spite of an extensive programme of repairs, the proportion of routes that are 'easy to use' dropped from 91% to 89%in 2023/24. As part of the budget for 2024-25 approved by the Authority in March, the target for Rights of Way has now been lowered (to 88%).

7.7	Review the 5 year Public Rights of Way maintenance report	Mar	Postponed[9]
8.	**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.**		
8.4	Run year 1 of 'Creatively Connected' to engage communities and visitors with the Tees-Swale project area through artistic activity	Mar	Postponed[10]
9.	**Carry out works to improve access on appropriate public rights of way and established permissive routes so that 262 km (10%) are suitable for users of all ages and abilities by 2024**		
9.6	Produce leaflets for accessible town trails for Hawes and Grassington	Mar	Postponed[11]
17.	**Support farmers and landowners to restore and manage landscape-scale mosaics of priority habitats, and support stable or increasing populations of priority species**		
17.5	Analyse habitat condition data to identify where effort is best expended to increase the area of Priority Habitat in 'good condition'	Feb	Postponed[12]
17.10	Make ecological network mapping more readily accessible to farmers and landowners by revising and updating the 'Re-cover' webmap	Mar	Postponed[13]
22.	**Through Grow Back Greener and other local funding programmes, support farmers and landowners to create a further 225 hectares of native broadleaved and mixed woodland that enhances the National Park's landscape by 2025**		
22.3	Create 50ha of new native woodland with funding from the Woodland Trust's *Grow Back Greener* programme	Mar	Postponed[14]
27.	**Work with neighbouring authorities to produce a single, updated Local Plan for the whole of the National Park by 2024, which will help achieve the vision and objectives in the National Park Management Plan**		
27.6	Agree preferred allocated housing sites and new development boundaries	Mar	Postponed[15]

[9] Review completed but subject to outcome of negotiations with Westmorland and Furness and North Yorkshire Councils about future delegated statutory responsibilities (see action 7.3) before implementation.
[10] Project start was delayed due to an administrative problem getting the funds from Arts Council England.
[11] Delayed by decision not to re-fill the Interpretation Officer post. The route has been planned and an external designer commissioned to complete the work by September.
[12] Analysis of the data is underway and results for the grasslands are available now. Work will be completed by September to inform a bid for a major conservation project.
[13] Delayed by the need to focus resources on supporting the development of the two Local Nature Recovery Strategies (see 17.6). Will be completed by end of September.
[14] One big scheme (20 ha) was withdrawn by the landowner late in the year. It is hoped that the small overall shortfall will be made up by additional planting in 2024/25.
[15] Delays in receiving the detailed information needed to enable the Local Plan Advisory Group to complete its assessment of the extended list of potential allocated housing sites. Work should be completed this month, prior to further public consultation.

27.7	Prepare 'development briefs' for preferred allocated housing sites	Mar	Cancelled[16]
27.9	Publish the final 'publication version' of the draft Local Plan for consultation	Mar	Postponed[17]
27.10	Produce the Habitat Regulations Assessment to support the Publication Local Plan	Mar	Postponed[17]
27.11	Agree statements of Common Ground with neighbouring Planning Authorities	Dec	Postponed[18]
27.16	Hold the NPMP Annual Forum	Feb	Postponed[19]
32.	**Operate governance arrangements that are fit for purpose, as reported through the Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Governance Report**		
32.4	Achieve an unqualified external audit opinion for the delayed 2021/22 audit.	Dec	Postponed[20]
32.5	Produce the Statutory Accounts for 2022/23, and achieve an unqualified external audit opinion	Mar	Postponed[21]
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 work of the Authority effectively, as evidenced by accreditation under the Investors in People standard**		
33.2	Review and update Sickness Absence, Home-working and Recruitment policies (p)	Mar	Postponed[22]

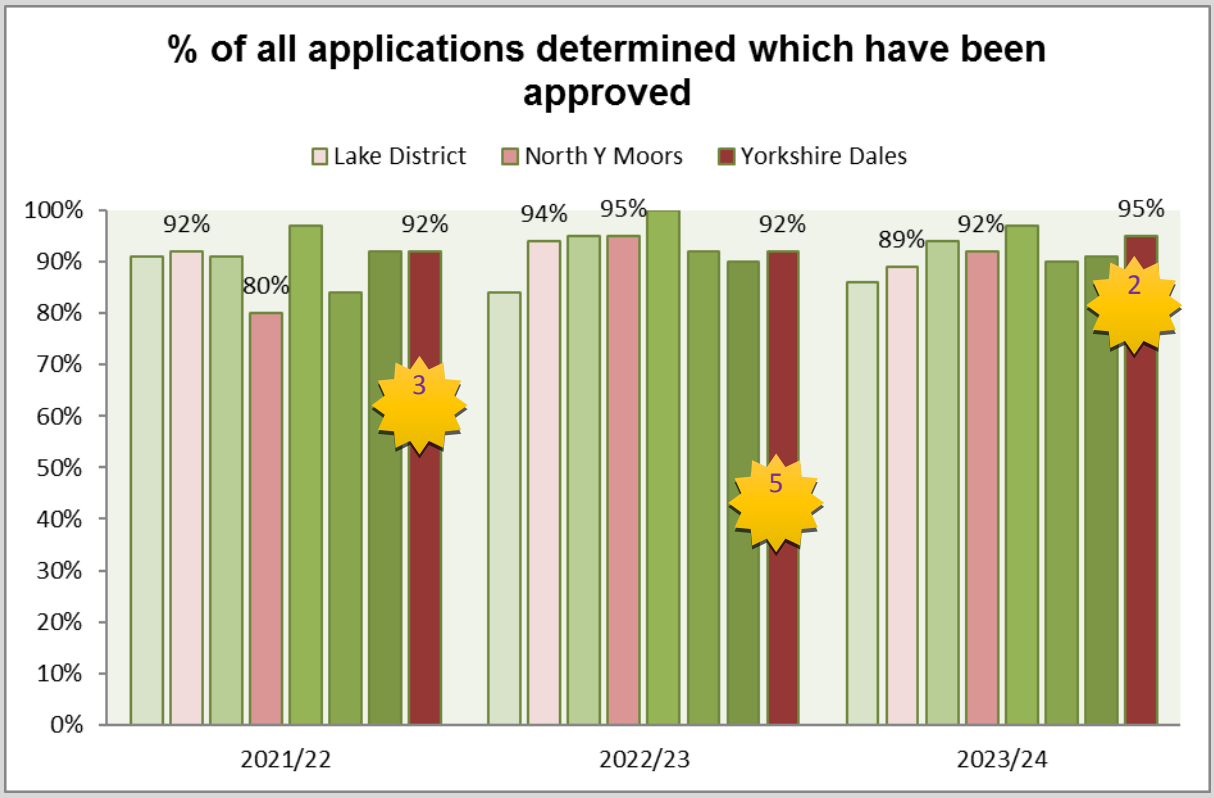
[16] No capacity to prepare these whilst also still assessing the allocated sites and preparing the full draft Local Plan for publication later this year. Will consider whether to produce development briefs next year, when the Plan is nearing adoption.
[17] Delayed pending completion of the work to identify recommended housing sites
[18] Delayed due to prioritising work on the Local Plan. Draft statement has been shared with the neighbouring authorities, with a view to formal completion by September.
[19] Forum delayed until after the public consultation on priorities for the Management Plan, and was held in May
[20] The audit is complete but still awaiting an audit opinion from Ernst & Young. It is still expected this will be an unqualified audit.
[21] Significant national delays and shortfall in external audit provision. The accounts have been written and drafts are published on our website. It is now hoped that they will be signed off in the Autumn. However, we have been advised that the Auditors will not be providing a full audit opinion for 2022/23.
[22] Postponed to prioritise work on other policies, including Market Rate Supplement, Flexitime Scheme, Vehicle Use on Authority Business, Home Working, Paternity Leave and Flexible Working.

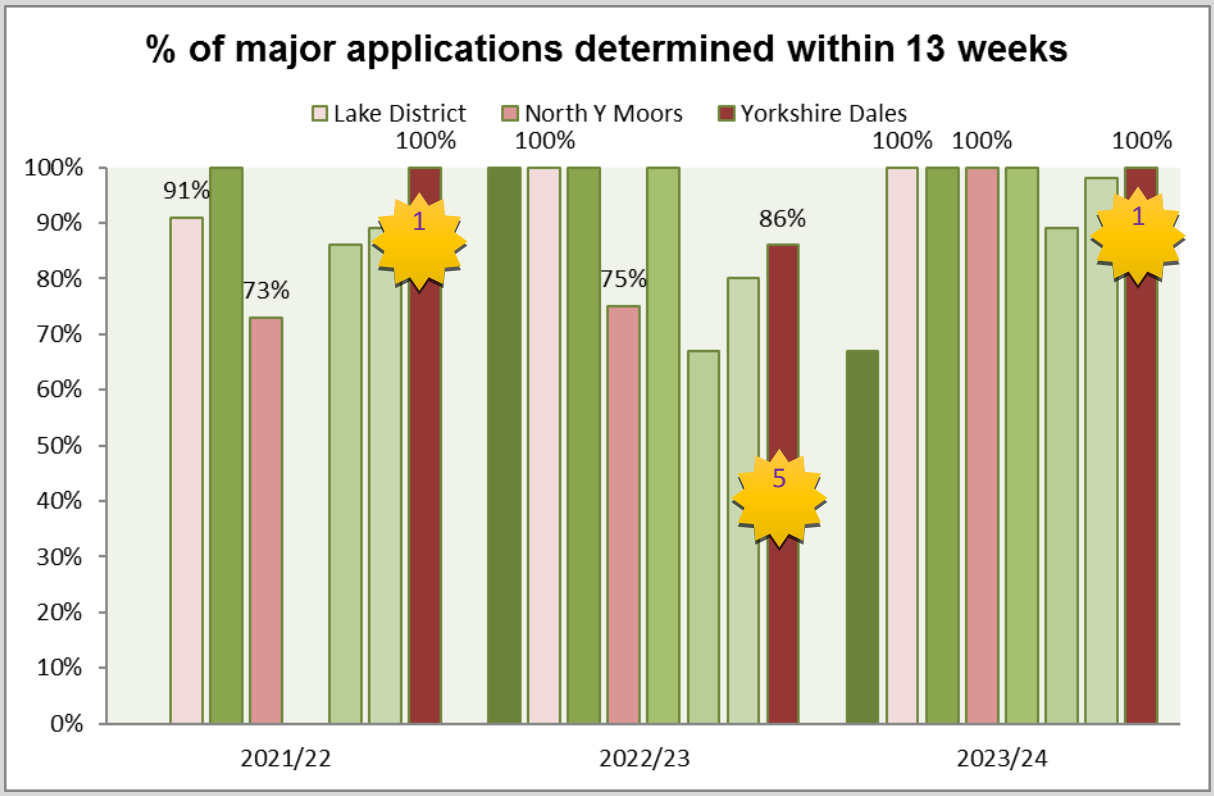
34.	**Provide facilities and IT systems, including blended working, that are fit for purpose and support the effective delivery of our services, as evidenced by the external auditor's annual 'value for money' opinion and internal audit's reporting on relevant systems**		
34.1	Work with departmental stakeholders to develop a structured SharePoint environment to enable staff to migrate their documents into the cloud	Mar	Postponed[23]
34.3	Re-contract phone system – to include softphones to use on laptop or integrate with MS Teams, and rationalise staff mobile phones	Jan	Postponed[24]
34.4	Complete acquisition of plot for a potential new workshop building at Langcliffe Quarry to replace current facilities at Stonedykes Barn (p)	Dec	Postponed[25]
34.5	Implement two factor security authentication on Authority devices	Dec	Postponed[26]
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**		
35.1	Conduct tender procedure for the replacement of the fleet of vans and pool cars with electric alternatives	Dec	Postponed[27]
35.3	Install Electric Vehicle charging points at the main Authority Buildings	Mar	Postponed[28]

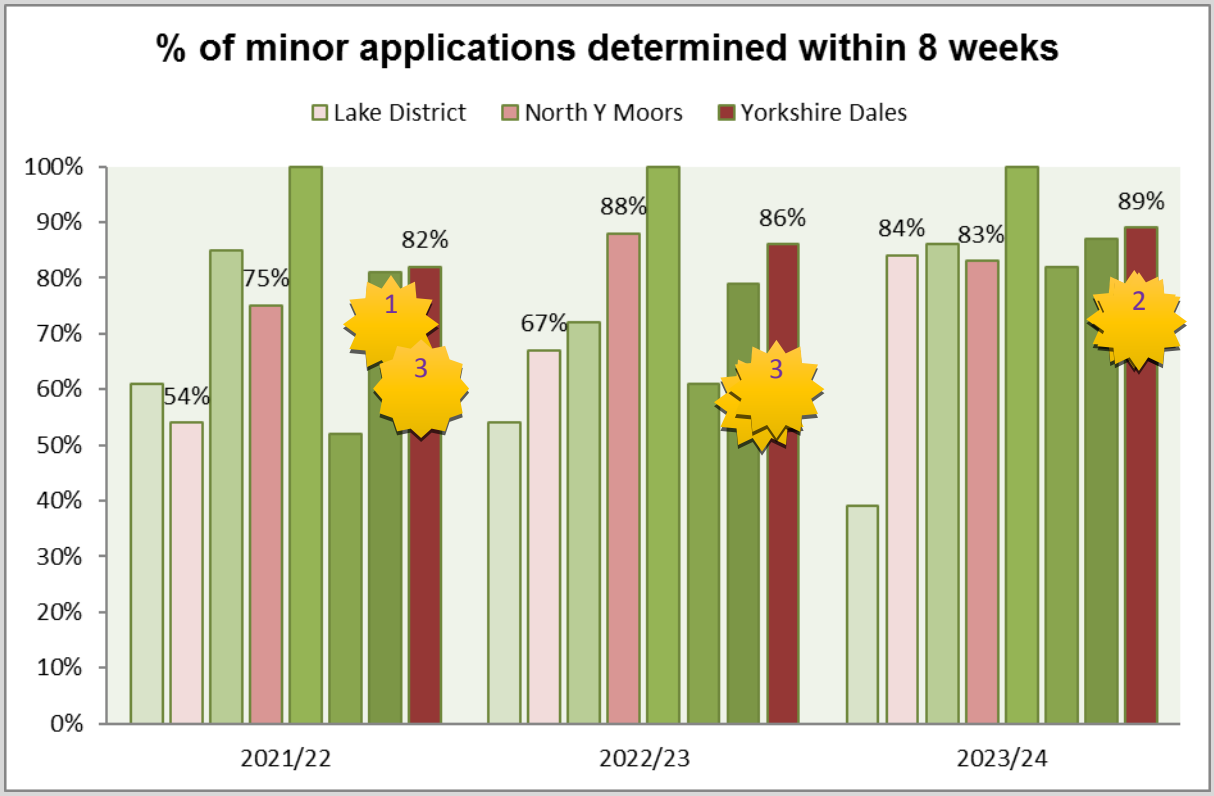
[23] Unforeseen technical work needed to be completed before we could move staff onto SharePoint. The system is built and being tested but the server room needs a major upgrade before it can be used securely.
[24] The new system has been procured but awaiting an installation date from the suppliers.
[25] Legal issues with the contract with NYC have delayed this acquisition. It is hoped that it will be signed by end July 2024
[26] The server room upgrade (see action 34.1) needs to be completed before the system can be brought in.
[27] Delayed due to Defra lease company not supplying tender details within timeframe. A second procurement process to be completed by September
[28] Issues with the tender led to delays in awarding the contract. The order has been placed and the work should be completed by end July 2024

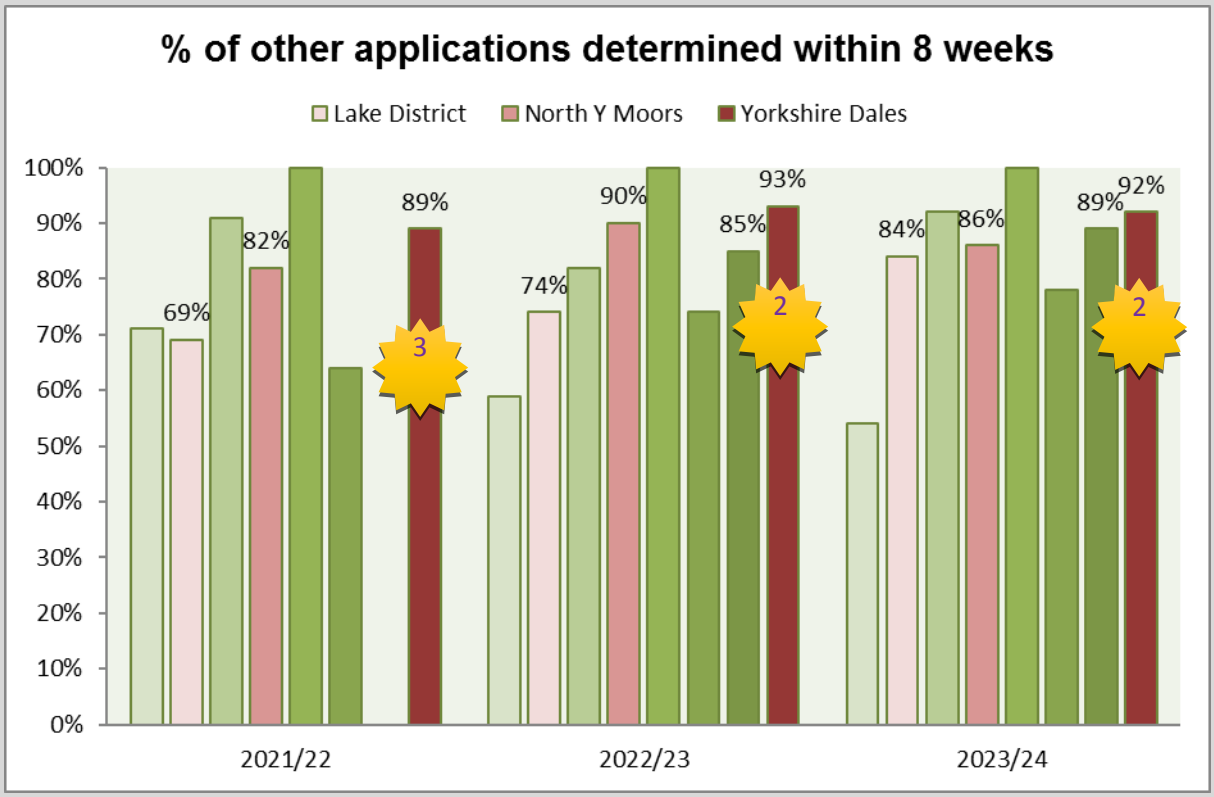
National Park 'Family' Performance Indicators

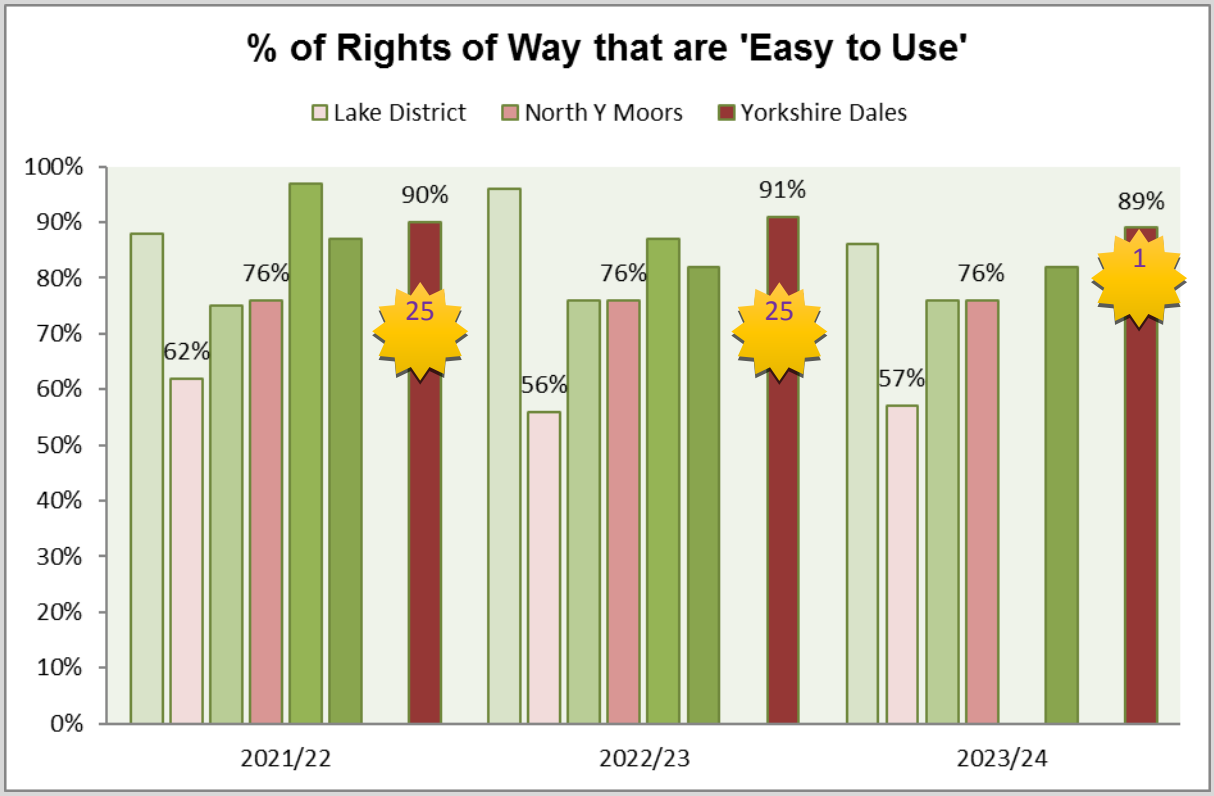
High performing or significantly improving

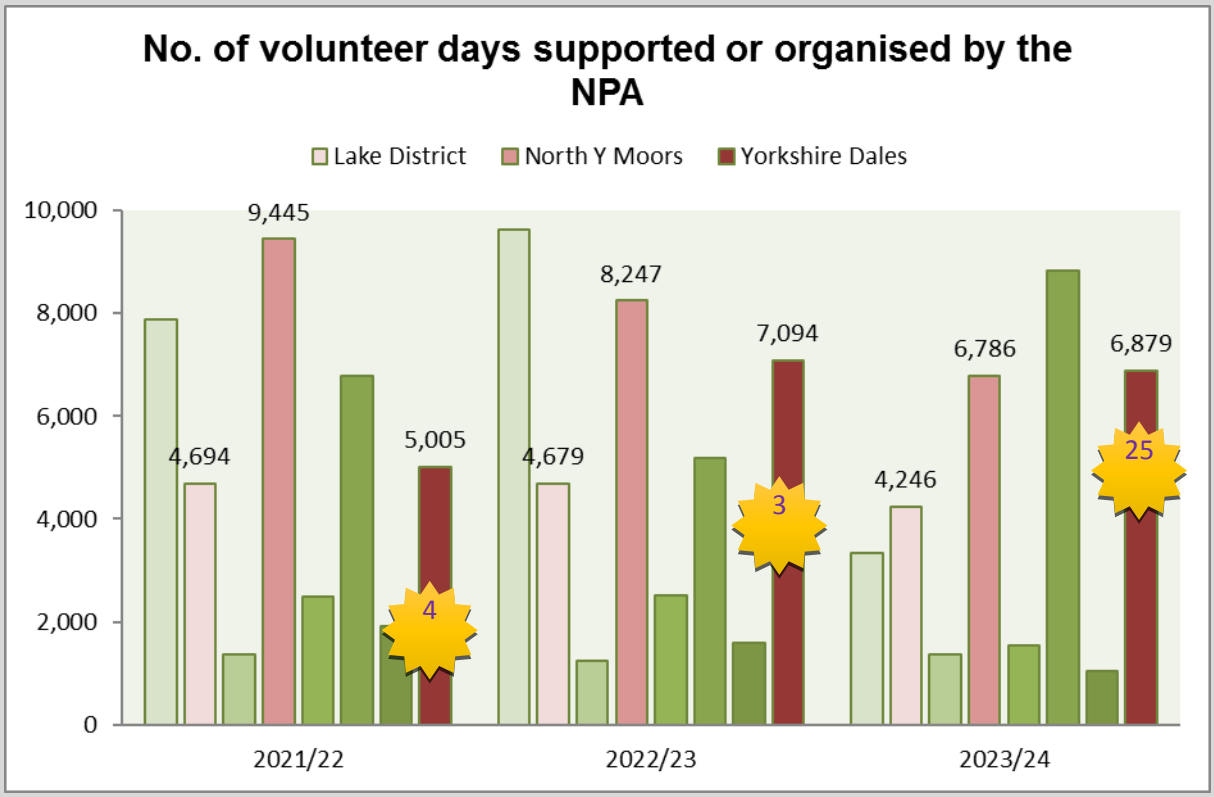


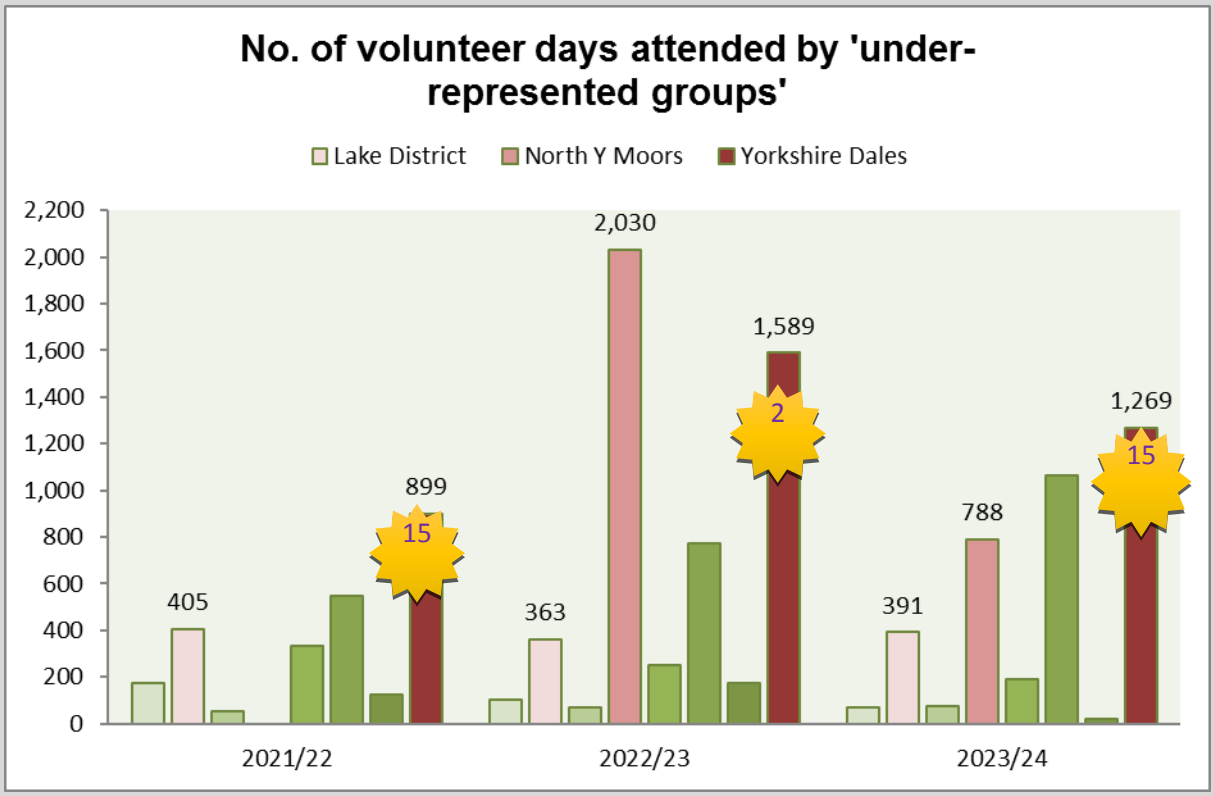


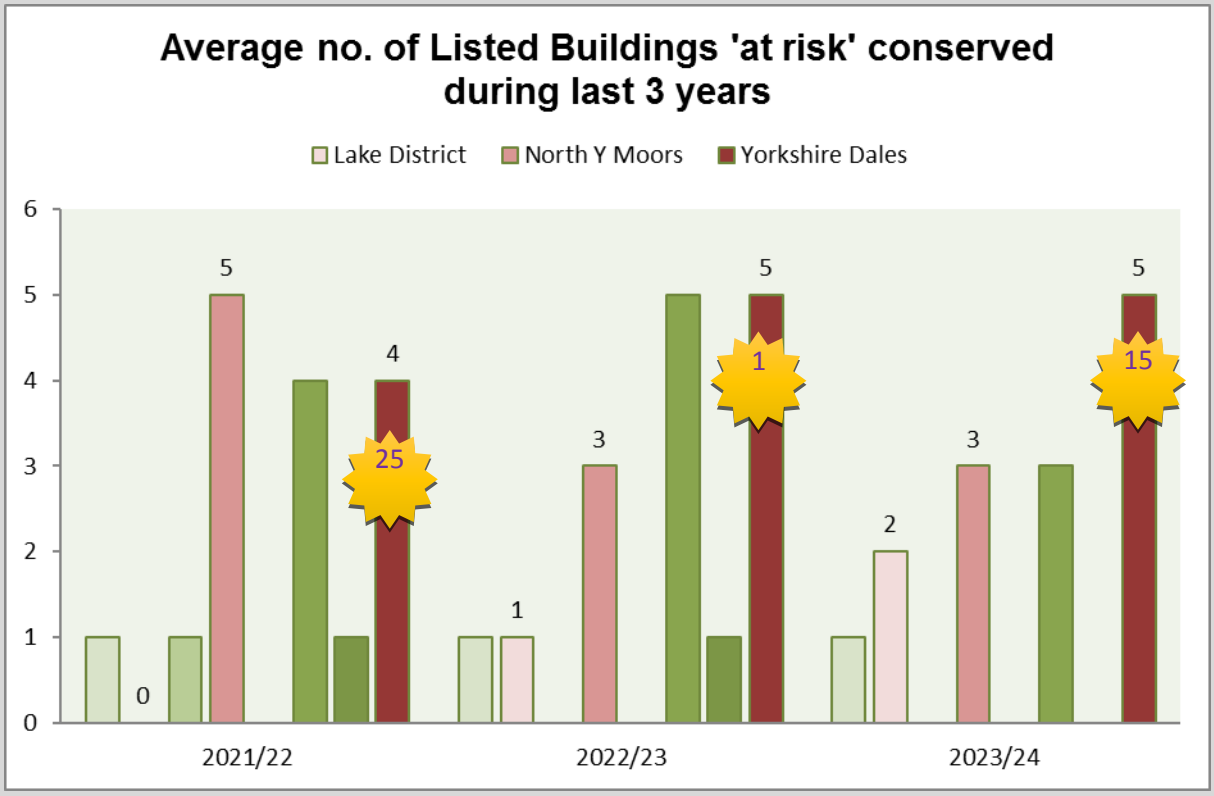

% of minor applications determined within 8 weeks
Lake District
North Y Moors
Yorkshire Dales
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
54%
75%
82%
67%
88%
86%
84%
83%
89%
1
2
3
3
2
2021/22
2022/23
2023/24

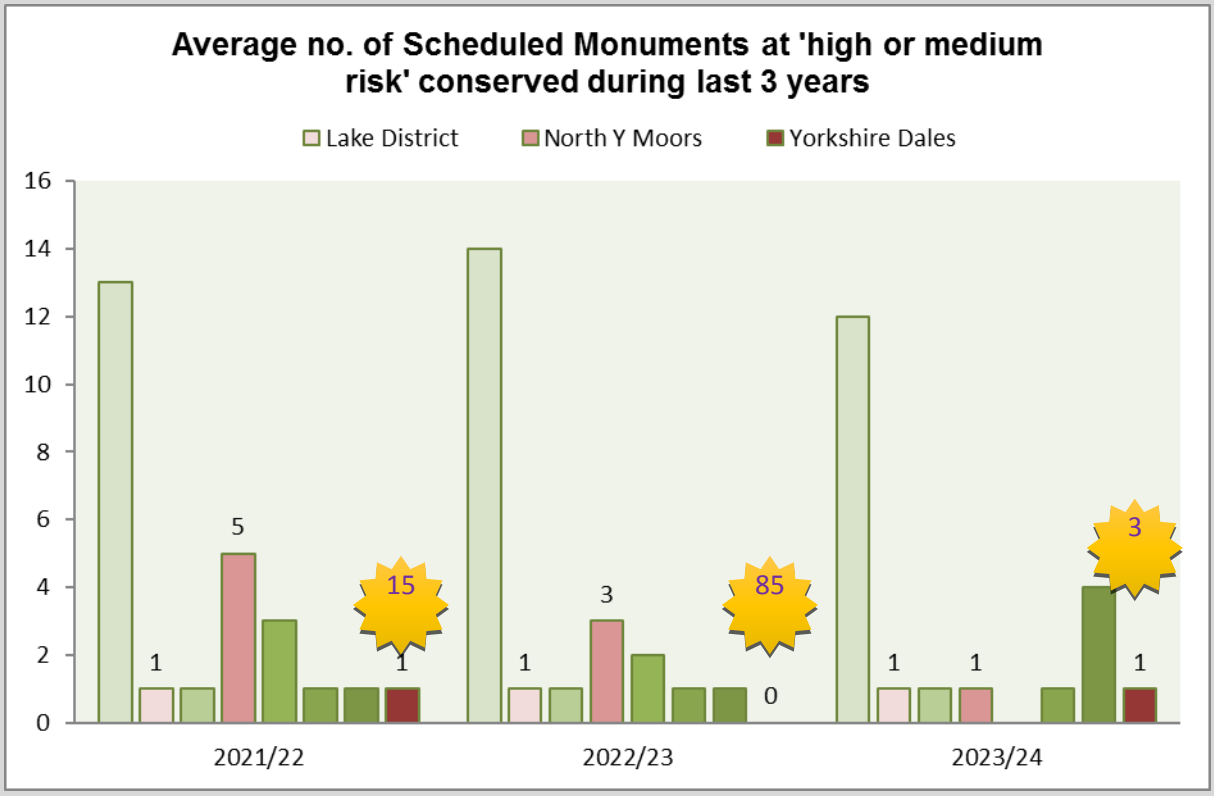

% of other applications determined within 8 weeks
Lake District
North Y Moors
Yorkshire Dales
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
69%
82%
89%
74%
90%
85%
93%
84%
86%
89%
92%
3
2
2
2021/22
2022/23
2023/24


% of Rights of Way that are 'Easy to Use'
Lake District
North Y Moors
Yorkshire Dales
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
62%
76%
90%
25
56%
76%
91%
25
57%
76%
89%
1
2021/22
2022/23
2023/24


No. of volunteer days supported or organised by the NPA
Lake District
North Y Moors
Yorkshire Dales
10,000
8,000
6,000
4,000
2,000
0
4,694
9,445
5,005
4
4,679
8,247
7,094
3
4,246
6,786
6,879
25
2021/22
2022/23
2023/24


No. of volunteer days attended by 'under-represented groups'
Lake District
North Y Moors
Yorkshire Dales
2,200
2,000
1,800
1,600
1,400
1,200
1,000
800
600
400
200
0
405
899
15
363
2,030
1,589
2
391
788
1,269
15
2021/22
2022/23
2023/24


Average no. of Listed Buildings 'at risk' conserved during last 3 years
Lake District
North Y Moors
Yorkshire Dales
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
0
5
4
25
1
3
5
1
2
3
5
15
2021/22
2022/23
2023/24


Average no. of Scheduled Monuments at 'high or medium risk' conserved during last 3 years
Lake District
North Y Moors
Yorkshire Dales
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
5
15
1
1
3
85
0
1
1
3
1
2021/22
2022/23
2023/24

Annex E

Annual Planning Performance Summary

		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
No. of planning applications received		717	661	672
No. of planning applications:				
determined		561	541	565
withdrawn		84	93	51
other closures		2	-	2
% of applications approved		92%	92%	95%
% of decisions:				
delegated		96%	95%	95%
by Committee		4%	5%	5%
No. of technical/prior approval applications received		42	30	40
No. of applications to discharge conditions received		97	97	119
No. of non-material amendment applications received		23	15	17
No. of pre-application enquiries completed.		325	234	207
No. of land charge searches completed		486	419	336
No. of Appeals received		11	11	12
No. of Appeals	allowed	1	4	3
	dismissed	4	11	3
	allowed/dismissed (dual decision)	0	0	0
	withdrawn	0	0	0
No. of enforcement cases opened		88	148	152
No. of enforcement cases closed		81	148	163
% of applications valid on receipt		48%	47%	52%

BLANK PAGE