Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 7**

Audit and Review Committee

26 November 2024

Major Project Review – Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership

Purpose of the report

1. To assess the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's (YDNPA) role in the Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership (WDLP) scheme, and to identify lessons learned.

Recommendations

2. That Members:
   a. note the lessons learned from the WDLP scheme, and
   b. agree that the recommendations in section 36 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 recommendation contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:
   - ***National Park Management Plan Objective***
     '*A7 Deliver co-ordinated programmes of activity that enhance the distinctive landscape, geology and cultural heritage of the 'Ingleborough Dales' (by 2020) and the 'Westmorland Dales' (by 2023).*'

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 in April that 'Lessons learned from the Westmorland Dales, Landscape Partnership scheme' should be one of the 'major projects' for review this year.

5. The vision of the WDLP scheme was to:

> *"Unlock and reveal the hidden heritage of the Westmorland Dales, enabling more people to connect with, enjoy and benefit from this inspirational landscape."*

6. It was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). The scheme had four main objectives:
    I. Revealing the area's hidden heritage;
    II. Conserving what makes the area special;
    III. Engaging people in enjoying and benefitting from their heritage; and
    IV. Sustaining the benefits of the scheme in the long-term.

7. It was managed by Friends of the Lake District (FLD) and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. The other delivery partners were: Cumbria GeoConservation, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Eden Rivers Trust, Lune Rivers Trust, The Farmer Network, Woodland Trust and Electricity North West. Although not directly delivering any of the projects. the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust provided significant funding for the scheme. These and other partners were engaged in the Board, providing guidance and direction.

8. There were 21 projects, later increased to 22, grouped into three areas of work relating to the themes of natural heritage, cultural heritage and connecting heritage. 6 projects were directly delivered by the YDNPA and the remaining 16 were delivered by the WDLP team and partner organisations working with landowners, volunteers, community groups and others.

9. The YDNPA had a number of specific roles prior to the commencement of the scheme and during the delivery. These included:
    - Development of the scheme with partners (2016/17)
    - Writing and submission of the Landscape Conservation Action Plan (2017/18)
    - Member of the WDLP Board (2019 to 2024)
    - Members of the Management Group alongside FLD (2019 to 2024)
    - Accountable financial body for the scheme (2019 to 2024)
    - Recruitment of the WDLP team (2017 to 2019)
    - Delivery of six specific projects (2019 to 2024):
        a) Digging the Past (Conservation and Community)
        b) Monuments at Risk (Conservation and Community)
        c) A Way Through (Park Services)
        d) Skills for the Future (Park Services)
        e) Discovering Westmorland Dales (Park Services)
        f) Distinctly Westmorland Dales (Eden DC, Park Services)

Achievements

10. From the initial proposal in 2016, through the development stage during the following two years, to the final award in early 2019 for the delivery phase, YDNPA played a major role in successfully developing and delivering the 5-year £3.5m programme of projects which made up the WDLP scheme. A full independent evaluation report commissioned

by the WDLP and produced by Shirley Muir Associates outlines the key achievements and lessons learnt from the project **(see Appendix 1)**.

Lessons Learned

11. The following is a summary of the main lesson learned; full details are in the attached Annex (paragraphs 22 to 33).

    - The recruitment process between FLD and YDNPA was thorough and resulted in successful appointments.
    - There was clear co-ordination through the Management Group between the Lead Organisation (FLD) and Accountable Body (YDNPA).
    - Adaptability was key to addressing the challenges, particularly in dealing with the Covid pandemic and staff changes/lack of capacity within partner organisations.
    - The restoration of the built heritage did not achieve all of its targets due to a number of reasons.
    - The impact of the scheme on tourism could not be measured as seriously affected by Covid.

Financial Implications

12. Financial implications will be dependent on the nature and scale of future individual projects and will be judged on a ‘case-by-case’ basis.

Legal Implications

13. The legal agreements, and governance arrangements required with partners for future projects will be determined on a ‘case by case’ basis to ensure that they are appropriate and proportionate.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

14. None

Conclusion

15. The YDNPA involvement in the WDLP scheme achieved its objective to create a step change in management in the area and to bring significant resources to help in establishing the Authority in the Westmorland Dales area.

16. The YDNPA, will continue to play a lead role in ensuring that the work delivered as part of the WDLP scheme will provide a lasting legacy for the National Park, its residents and visitors. Three particular areas of work have been identified where we will commit resources to ensure this legacy:

- The maintenance and continued improvement of the rights of way network, including the Pennine Bridleway link and the Yorkshire Dales Cycleway extension.
- Monitoring and maintenance of the conservation works undertaken on the Smardale limekilns
- Distribution, updating and maintenance of the interpretation produced as part of the Scheme.

17. These commitments are all set out in detail in **Appendix 2** management and maintenance plans, which form an integral element of the Scheme's legacy plan. In reality, the resources committed to ensure the legacy of the project go well beyond these key commitments. The Westmorland Dales is an integral part of the National Park, and we are extremely grateful for the grant funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which has helped make this possible and delivered so much for the benefit of the area's heritage, people and the community.

Alan Hulme
Head of Park Management

Annex

Lessons Learned from the Westmoreland Dales Landscape Partnership Scheme, National Lottery Heritage Fund Project
(Development Phase 2016/17, Delivery Phase 2019-2024)

The Intention

Why was the project established?

1. The original proposals for the Westmorland Dales landscape partnership (WDLP) were developed in 2016, after the Public Inquiry into the extension of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. At that time, it was recognised that if the area was designated, this in itself would not be sufficient to conserve the area's many special qualities. The YDNPA could offer skills and expertise, but it lacked the resources required to create a significant step change in management. While landowners, farmers and other land managers have maintained the natural beauty and recreational opportunities of the area, and after 70 years it was still of National Park quality, it was clear that a landscape-led and integrated approach to the management of the area was required. It needed an injection of dedicated funding to achieve this and an NLHF landscape partnership, with its focus on engaging individuals, groups and organisations in partnerships at a landscape scale, was the obvious way forward.

2. The FLD established a Landscape Partnership, in the northern area of the National Park in 2015, with the purpose of submitting an application to the NLHF Landscape Partnership fund. At its meeting in March 2016, the YDNPA gave its formal support to the Partnership and, subject to a successful funding bid to the NLHF for an ambitious programme of activities in the identified area.

What was the project intended to achieve?

3. The scheme was intended to have two main aims from a YDNPA point of view:

   I. To assist in the delivery of the project's vison, 'to reveal and protect the hidden heritage of the Westmorland Dales, enabling more people to connect with, enjoy and benefit from this inspirational landscape'. Alongside conservation work, enhancing access opportunities and interpreting the area's significant features, to provide support for tourism businesses, training for people seeking careers using traditional skills, and opportunities for volunteers to record the areas cultural and natural heritage.

   II. For the YDNPA to be involved in a significant project providing an excellent opportunity for positive engagement with new communities in delivering National Park purposes through a genuine partnership rooted in the area.

What was the original timescale?

4. The Partnership, with the support of local people, community organisations and interest groups, submitted an expression of interest to the NLHF in 2015. This was subsequently approved in 2016 and the development phase ran from January 2017

to October 2018. At the end of this period a second stage application was submitted to NHLF for the delivery phase. Permission to start the project was officially granted on the 27 February 2019. The delivery phase was due to run from March 2019 to 31 July 2023.

How would the project be delivered?

5. It was managed by Friends of the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority; and the other delivery partners were: Cumbria GeoConservation, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Eden Rivers Trust, Lune Rivers Trust, The Farmer Network, Woodland Trust and Electricity North West. The Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust provided significant match funding for the scheme. These and other partners were members of the Board, providing guidance and direction for the scheme. There were 21 projects, later increased to 22, grouped into three areas of work relating to the themes of natural heritage, cultural heritage and connecting heritage. Six were directly delivered by the YDNPA and the remaining 16 were delivered by the WDLP team and partner organisations working with landowners, volunteers, community groups and others.

6. The Authority provided one member of staff (Head of Park Management) to represent the YDNPA on the Westmorland Dales LP Board. The Management Group consisted of the YDNPA Director of Park Services, Director of Corporate Affairs, Head of Finance & Head of Park Management alongside the FLD Chief Executive Officer, Land Manager and Policy Officer and the Scheme Manager (employed by FLD)

7. 6 of the projects were delivered by individual lead officers from the YDNPA as part of their roles as identified as part of the Authority's Action Plan and Corporate Plan process annually.

8. The WDLP team appointed by FLD consisted of a Scheme Manager (development and delivery stage) 1.0FTE, Interpretation Officer 0.4FTE, Cultural Heritage Officer 1.0 FTE, Community Engagement Officer 0.6FTE and Administration & Finance Officer 1.0 FTE. In addition, an Apprentice Supervisor 1.0FTE was employed by YDNPA. All posts were funded through the NHLF as new posts.

How much was it supposed to cost (YDNPA staff time/funding)?

9. Whilst FLD have managed other NHLF bids, at £3.5 million this was a large project for an organisation whose annual budget is approximately £500k. In addition, FLD are not VAT-registered, though as a Trust they can access funds through their charitable status. It was proposed early in the development stage that the YDNPA took on the role of the accountable body for the implementation phase of the project. This had the advantage of allowing the funding to be spent on services without incurring VAT. Adding VAT would have made the project more costly and would also require more match funding (the alternative being there would have been less delivery). In addition, many of the projects were going to be led by YDNPA staff and by being the Accountable body was seen to make it easier from a financial point of view. However, this meant that the YDNPA took on any financial risk associated with the project. Specific risks identified were: the collection of the appropriate supporting documentation to support claims that were to be submitted to NHLF; making sure that the full available grant was drawn down; and that grant payments

were not at risk because of a poor audit trail. In addition, there was risk of collating the match funding required from individual partners to also ensure the entire grant was drawn down

10. In this context, it is important to remember the Authority was contributing the most match-funding to the project, but the National Park stood to gain the most in return. The S151 Officer was involved in the development of the project and scrutinised the Stage 2 bid before it was submitted.

11. The total project cost was £3,454,922 with a grant award of £2,273,400 from NHLF and a match figure of £1,181,522 (of which £199,900 could be in kind or volunteer match).

12. In March 2016, the YDNPA allocated up to £300k to match any successful finding bid to the NHLF.

13. YDNPA staff time was not recorded either in the development stage or during delivery stage, but this was considerable and should be considered carefully when developing large projects or programmes of this nature.

14. The original contingency figure covered unexpected costs for staff, accommodation, and for the main capital projects, and a reserve project fund for new projects. The latter was drawn on to cover new projects delivered in 2022 by the Lune Rivers Trust and an extension to the Farmer Network project. The revised budget in 2022 due to the impact of COVID 19 required further draws on the contingencies to fund:

- Staff Costs - additional costs for employing the core Westmorland Dales team a further six months
- Full Cost Recovery – additional costs to cover FLD's support for the project a further six
- Further funding to allow an extra season of surveying by the Lune Rivers Trust project.

15. The draw on contingencies had no direct impact on the YDNPA but increased staff support to the project by a further 6 months than originally expected.

Project cost summary (at 12 Dec 2018)

	Target
Cash Match	£ 981,522
Heritage Fund	£2,273,400
Total Cash	**£3,254,922**
In-kind	£ 9,600
Volunteer time	£ 190,300
Grand Total	£3,454,822

The Reality

What did the project actually achieve?

16. The following are the achievements specifically relevant to elements for which the YDNPA was directly responsible during the scheme, helping to significantly raise the profile of the YDNPA in this area of the Park following the boundary extension in 2016:

- The WDLP scheme was very well managed and it successfully delivered all its aims and objectives. The way that the Board and Management Group operated was effective, with decisions reached by consensus in which YDNPA played a major role.

- Relationships between YDNPA and partners have flourished through WDLP, with close links made between organisations and community groups, some of which we had not previously worked with.

- Community engagement has been central to the success of the scheme, both in terms of how people have been involved with heritage and the way that the scheme has helped to strengthen the community network from which YDNPA continues to benefit.

- The Covid pandemic was a significant challenge. The scheme developed new ways to engage the community online and resumed in-person activities when possible. The move to online events was effective and over 4,000 people attended or viewed webinars including those presented by YDNPA staff.

- As a result of the scheme, there is a much better record of the heritage of this area of the National Park. The archaeological surveys and excavations revealed and recorded a wealth of data. Surveys of dry stone walls, field barns and small-scale heritage features added to the knowledge of built heritage. Eight Local Geological Sites were reviewed; twelve new sites were added to the database; and the special qualities of the area's geology has been recognised.

- A range of interpretation across the scheme, including welcome panels, map boards, geology panels, a booklet pack, leaflets on walks and other topics, have and continue to enhance visitor and locals experience of the area, which the YDNPA will continue to manage and maintain for at least 5 years, with funding identified to support this **(see Appendix 3 & 3a)**.

- People have been engaged and have gained skills. Volunteers were engaged throughout the scheme in a variety of ways, including recording and conserving heritage and contributing to interpretive content. Altogether, there were 1,750 volunteer days contributed across the scheme and 637 training days delivered.

- The apprenticeship scheme directly employed through the YDNPA was seen as a great success. The apprentices acted as ambassadors for WDLP and the YDNPA. Eight people completed the apprenticeship, six of whom are now in employment and one is in full-time education and a further Heritage Trainee is also in full-time employment.

- Key features of the built heritage are in better condition. Major conservation and restoration work was carried out at Smardale lime kilns, a Scheduled Ancient Monument previously identified as at risk.

- Key features of the natural heritage are in better condition, with habitat restoration focused on grassland, river corridors and woodland creation. The output targets were well exceeded, with over 33 hectares of habitat restored in total.

- The scheme has helped establish a sense of place for the Westmorland Dales. Surveys and interviews showed that most people feel that the profile of the Westmorland Dales has increased as a result of WDLP and the YDNPA recognising that the area had its own 'geographic identity'.

- There was a strong case made for the WDLP scheme to bring the knowledge and management of the recently designated Westmorland Dales area up to the same standard as the rest of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The evaluation (**Appendix 2)** indicates that it has largely achieved this aim.

- A strong and clear legacy has been developed and will continue to benefit the area. This includes funding to support a range of management and maintenance of assets created/established during the scheme **(see Appendix 3)**.

How long did it actually take?

17. The COVID-19 pandemic clearly had a significant impact on delivery of the scheme and its projects, and on the level of engagement. The principle of extending the scheme was discussed for some time. However, it was agreed that it was best to leave any formal request until the scheme had made significant progress, and a plan for completion was clearer. At a meeting with Heritage Fund officers and representatives of the Management Group in August 2022, it was agreed to seek a formal extension to the project.

18. A formal request to extend the scheme for approximately seven months, with projects being completed by the Autumn of 2023 and a final grant expiry date of 29th February 2024 was subsequently submitted. No additional funding was requested; more simply a request for the ability to draw on contingencies and adjust some other items of expenditure to complete delivery and maximise the impact of the scheme delivery.

Request included:

- The extension of individual project deadlines from 31st March 2023 to 30th September 2023
- The extension of most Westmorland Dales staff contracts to 31st October 2023, but a couple of months longer for the admin and finance officer, and scheme manager posts
- The extension of the grant expiry date from 31st July 2023 to 29th February 2024

Permission to extend the scheme by NLHF was granted on the 14 November 2022. Considering the impacts of COVID-19 this was a reasonable and justified reason to extend the scheme.

How was it actually delivered?

19. The WDLP scheme was delivered in partnership (FLD & YDNPA), rather than being led by one organisation. The Scheme Manager successfully managed the development and delivery of the scheme and provided a central role and good communications between the Management Group and Board. Feedback from

individual project leads in partner organisation referred to good communication and support from the Scheme Manager and the WDLP team throughout the project.

How much did it actually cost?

20. The scheme came in £115k underspent on the overall total of the project which is approximately 3%. When considering the overall cost and scale of the project this appears acceptable.

21. Of the £300k committed in 2016, the YDNPA contributed £280k in 'cash' match funding. Records of YDNPA staff time involved in the Management Group, Board and in the delivery of the 6 individual projects led by the YDNPA were not kept. The scheme and the individual projects were very much seen as a benefit to National Park purposes and duty and were incorporated into YDNPA staff individual roles.

Income summary (at 29 Feb 2024)

	Target	Total Income
Cash Match	£ 981,522	**£914,586**
Heritage Fund	£2,273,400	**£2,128,634**
Total Cash	**£3,254,922**	**£3,043,220**
In-kind	£ 9,600	£80,653
Volunteer time	£ 190,300	£215,773
Grand Total	£3,454,822	£3,339,646

Lessons learned

What went well, and why?

22. The recruitment process between FLD and YDNPA was thorough and resulted in good appointments of the WDLP team, which has been effective and has provided good continuity throughout the programme.

23. There was good co-ordination through the Management Group between the Lead Organisation (FLD) and Accountable Body (YDNPA) led by the Scheme Manager.

24. As accountable body the setting up of a clear financial coding system at the outset enabled all projects to be closely monitored and allowed the scheme administrators easy access to data needed to fill in claims.

25. Adaptability was key to addressing the challenges, particularly the Covid pandemic

26. The YDNPA provided significant match funding for the scheme and considerable staff support, which was not directly accounted for by the NLHF grant. However, the project has been hugely beneficial towards YDNPA purposes and duty, but staff already employed in HR, Finance, IT, Legal and general management cannot be reclaimed through NLHF, only new positions.

What went less well, and why?

Overall Management

27. Although there was very good co-ordination and management of the project between the Lead Organisation (FLD) and Accountable Body (YDNPA). It was noted that having one organisation with both roles would have avoided some organisational complications, such as IT and financial processes.

28. The Lead Organisation (FLD) is a relatively small organisation which restricted the support it could provide to the WDLP team and its activities. FLD staff resources are limited and the management structure did not lend itself well to employing and managing a separate team.

29. Staff changes and lack of capacity in partner organisations was another challenge that caused delays in project delivery, including for the YDNPA. Although gaps were filled and ultimately projects were delivered, there was added pressure to complete large projects late in the programme, for example, Smardale Lime Kilns.

30. Budget management throughout the scheme proved very difficult to profile and monitor. This was generally down to working with a range of different partners, as well as external factors COVID-19, staff changes and lack of capacity in partner organisations. For example, COVID-19 and the change from Eden District Council to Westmorland and Furness Council meant that the engagement of tourism businesses was delayed until very late in the scheme and picked up by the YDNPA Park Services team.

31. The restoration of the built heritage did not achieve all of its targets for several reasons. The original plans were ambitious, inflation led to substantially increased costs, and the budget for Smardale lime kilns almost doubled when detailed surveys revealed that more work was required than had been costed. Increases between cost estimates in the development stage and detailed costs in the delivery stage, when work is tendered, often causes a challenge for projects, especially for major capital works. This is compounded by the fact that the development stage occurs so early in the process.

32. The impact of the scheme on tourism could not be measured for a number of reasons. The area has very few honeypot sites where reliable visitor surveys can be carried out; and baseline surveys were cancelled due to COVID-19. The pandemic had an immense effect on tourism, making it impossible to identify the impact of the scheme. The engagement of local tourism businesses was delayed until very late in the scheme due to a change in the Lead Partner. Due to capacity issues and changes in local government Eden District Council were unable to fulfil their role with YDNPA stepping in at the 11th hour to deliver aspects of the Distinctly Westmorland Dales project, but it has not been possible to measure the impact of their involvement at this late stage.

33. The project produced a series of interpretative publications and resources through different sources. Although there was an interpretation strategy it might have been better managed by one specialist officer, which would have resulted in the production of a more cohesive brand and style.

Recommendations for the future

34. The YDNPA role has been a significant success by bringing security and experience to the scheme. Project management and external funding is key in assisting in delivering National Park purposes in the future and similar schemes to the WDLP are currently being developed.

35. The split between Lead Organisation (FLD) and Accountable Body (YDNPA) did not cause significant problems. However, if future projects are delivered in a similar vein, there will be need for very careful consideration as to the management structure, as it may be a lot simpler for one organisation to perform both roles.

36. The Senior Management Team and Section Heads are already exploring how we become more project based in delivery of our work. It should not be underestimated how long projects of this scale and the input/skills required from YDNPA staff take to develop and then deliver.

37. Recommendations for future large project or programme development and delivery:

    I. Ensure that the governance and management structure (Lead Organisation and Accountable Body) of future projects is carefully considered during the development stage to establish clarity over roles and responsibilities.

    II. Engage with a wide group of staff (from all parts of the Authority and partners that could be involved in the project) at an early stage.

    III. Being better at recognising the real costs of doing what we do and charging that full cost (or using that full cost as match-funding) whenever we can. If funding conditions prevent reimbursement of existing staff costs, as in this case. Ensure the full impact of offering officer time is fully considered in both the development stage and delivery stage of similar projects.

    IV. The financial contingency element of a project should be carefully considered during project development and budgetary planning to maximise grant funding.

    V. Being more flexible in how we achieve our objectives. Reliance on external funding inevitably means that detailed work plans can't be set in stone. Sometimes new funding will become available that will allow us to achieve something much greater than the work we'd originally planned. That will mean some planned work being postponed or abandoned to create capacity for the new opportunity.

    VI. Individual project leads were identified and roles and responsibilities clearly defined in relation to project/budget management and communication within the project team and the wider Authority.

    VII. There are clear continuity plans for partners and project teams developed and detailed in the Risk Register (specifically staffing).