Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 9**

Audit and Review Committee

25 November 2025

Major Project Review - Access Unlimited: Generation Green 2

Purpose of the report

1. To provide an assessment of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's (YDNPA) involvement in Access Unlimited Generation Green 2 project, and to identify lessons learnt.

Recommendation

2. That Members note the lessons learned and recommendations from the Generation Green 2 project in **Appendix A**.

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 3.3
     By 2030 work with 200 community groups to co-design activity days, support and training to help people from under-served communities to experience the special qualities of the Yorkshire Dales National Park more easily.
   - National Park Management Plan Objective 3.4
     Provide curriculum-based outdoor learning and skills-based activities to enable 5,000 young people from in and around the National Park to explore and take action to enhance their environment each year.

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 and what didn't; and to make recommendations for future project development and management across the Authority. The Committee agreed in July that the 'Generation Green 2' project should be one of the two 'major projects' for review this year.

5. Generation Green 2 was a £4.5 million, 12-month project funded by Defra and led by the Access Unlimited coalition. It aimed to connect over 25,000 young people from

under-served and socially disadvantaged communities with the outdoors, through immersive experiences in Protected Landscapes. The project aimed to cultivate a wider interest in green spaces among the next generation, fostering lifelong wellbeing benefits among participants, and opening Protected Landscapes to even more young people. It ran from April 2024 to March 2025.

6. As a delivery partner in Generation Green, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority received £54,755 to deliver outdoor experiences in the National Park to 570 young people.

7. Full details of the project, how it was run, what was achieved, and the lessons learnt are set out in the **Appendix**.

Achievements

8. Overall, the project was a success, exceeding its delivery targets by supporting 690 individuals — 570 through initial funding and an additional 120 via our own funding — to visit the National Park. It primarily engaged young people from deprived areas, with 58% identifying as non-white and 93% being first-time or infrequent visitors. It significantly contributed to the 2019–2024 National Park Management Plan by achieving 25% of the annual target for Objective B4 and 23% of the annual target for Objective B5, which focus on increasing access and environmental engagement among under-served groups. The project enabled us to strengthen partnerships, and form new connections schools and community groups and enhanced collaboration among Access Unlimited Partners, while attracting positive media attention

Lessons Learnt

9. In undertaking this review, relevant officers were consulted for their views. Additionally, the overall programme has been extensively evaluated, providing insight from schools, youth group leaders and young participants. You can view the final GG2 report here.

10. Key factors in achieving the success of the project included early support from SMT to pilot the new per-head funding model, providing match from the Opportunities Fund to cover potential budget shortfall and enable YDNPA to commit as a project partner. Existing relationships with groups and schools and team performance were also key success factors, with a skilled project officer and core staff praised for exceeding delivery targets, especially for farm visits and residentials.

11. However, the project faced several challenges. Delays in funding confirmation from DEFRA and the recruitment and induction of a fixed-term officer reduced the delivery window from 12 to 9 months. Seasonal constraints and complicated residential planning made delivery challenging and the project required additional support from the core team. The funding model's exclusion of adult participants, cancellations and higher costs for SEND groups negatively affected the budget and evaluation design issues presented challenges to officers and participants.

Recommendations

12. The key recommendations from the review are to:

    a. Develop a more robust understanding of the costs of our delivery model and better use of external funding to replace core programme and staffing costs.

    b. Acknowledge limitations in delivering residential programmes and avoid proactively pursuing this model. The focus in future should be on day, farm or evening experiences, which are more cost effective and operationally feasible for YDNPA.

    c. Use the success of Generation Green to continue to advocate within the Access Unlimited Partnership, funders and with Government for sustained, inclusive funding models for delivery at scale, rather than a continued reliance on short-term funding programmes.

Financial Implications

13. The total cost of delivering the project was £55,756.91, and the total income received was £54,800. This included an extra £3,550 received for over delivery. There was a total overspend of just over £1,000 on programme costs which was absorbed by core budget. Costs were higher than anticipated because:

    - Funding excluded essential adult participants (e.g., group leaders, care workers, teachers), and family members
    - Smaller group sizes for SEND participants raised per capita costs, making financial sustainability harder.
    - Cancelled groups, especially residentials, were not funded but still had to be paid for.

14. The payment per head funding model of Generation Green is becoming increasingly popular**,** we will look to develop a better understanding of what the true costs of per head delivery is, which will help assess value for money of future projects. This should include meals, transport, delivery staff, volunteer support, venue, activity, management and admin time and visiting staff support. Future funding applications should also look to maximise internal resources by reallocating core staff to deliver externally funded projects where criteria allow, reducing reliance and additional costs of fixed-term appointments.

Legal Implications

15. None

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

16. The project was specifically targeted to increase equity and opportunity for young people accessing the countryside and specifically supported young people from areas of high deprivation (IMB 1-3) or schools with ≥30% Pupil Premium, who are least likely to visit the National Park.

Conclusion

17. The Authority has benefited from being a delivery partner in both Generation Green programmes and will continue to do so if further funding can be secured. Officers are continuing to pursue external funding for youth engagement projects that align with the new Management Plan objectives. Successful models like Generation Green can be replicated to reach underserved young people and deliver nature-based experiences. A recent successful application to the UK Youth 'Adventures Away from Home' Fund for similar activity is an example of the project's legacy. We also have a pipeline of a further 3 youth focused proposals in development, including one with the Access Unlimited Partnership.

Rebecca Greenfield
Head of Access and Engagement

Appendix

Lessons Learned from Generation Green 2 Project

The Intention

Why was the project established?

1. The project had the potential to support the achievement of two of the 2019-24 National Park Management Plan objectives:

   B4. By 2024, provide 6,000 people from under-represented groups with activity days that enable them to access the special qualities of the National Park, and so increase their understanding, enjoyment, health and well-being.

   B5. Through educational and skills-based activities, inspire 3,000 young people from in and around the National Park to explore and enhance their environment each year.

What was the project intended to achieve?

2. Generation Green 2 was a £4.5 million, 12-month project funded by Defra and led by the Access Unlimited coalition[1], aiming to connect over 25,000 young people from under-served and socially disadvantaged communities with the outdoors, through immersive experiences in Protected Landscapes. The project aimed to cultivate a wider interest in green spaces among the next generation, fostering lifelong wellbeing benefits among participants, and opening Protected Landscapes to even more young people.

3. Key objectives for all partners were to:

   - Increase opportunities for young people to engage with nature.
   - Widen access to National Parks and National Landscapes.
   - Boost nature connectedness to foster pro-environmental behaviour.
   - Improve wellbeing through time spent in nature.

4. Within the Yorkshire Dales, the project was intended to provide 570 individual young people from deprived backgrounds an opportunity to experience the National Park, through a supported farm visit, dark sky evening experience, day visit or residential stay. Qualifying individuals were 7–18 year olds from areas of deprivation to access the National Park. Only groups from areas ranked IMD 1–3 or schools with ≥30% Pupil Premium were eligible.

The table overleaf breaks down committed activity:

[1] The Access Unlimited delivery partners: YHA, National Parks, Girl Guiding, The Outward Bound Trust, The Field Studies Council, Scouts and the National Landscapes Associated.

Activity	Number of Individuals
Evening Visits (dark Sky Activity)	100
Farm Visits	70
Day Visits	200
Residential Stays	200

How would the project be delivered?

Securing Funding

5. A short window was available to confirm participation in the project. During this time, YDNPA officers were to:
    - Assess the feasibility of the proposed per-head funding model.
    - Determine deliverable outputs within the funding constraints.
    - Apply to the Senior Management Team for Opportunity Fund support to cover the potential funding shortfall.

6. Funding to National Parks was to be distributed by National Parks England (NPE), who received the grant from DEFRA.

7. Derby University were appointed as the independent project evaluator.

Recruiting Staff

8. Due to a vacancy in the Learning and Engagement Team, a FTE 0.6 fixed-term Access and Engagement Projects Officer was to be recruited specifically to deliver this project. The officer would also deliver another externally funded project for the team.

Activity Delivery

9. The Projects Officer worked with the Learning and Engagement Admin Officer to:
    - Identify and liaise with eligible schools and community groups.
    - Coordinate bookings for accommodation, food, activities, and transport.
    - Collate evaluation

10. Activities were delivered by the Project Officer supported by core staff and YDNPA volunteers. Oversight was provided by the Learning, Engagement and Wellbeing Manager, ensuring all delivery adhered to the Authority's health and safety and safeguarding policies.

Evaluation

11. Project coordination of the evaluation of National Park Delivery was led by National Parks England. Derby University conducted the formal evaluation of project outcomes.

Promotion Activity

12. The Projects Officer was to collaborate with the Communications Team to promote the project and share its outcomes through various media channels.

How much was it supposed to cost?

13. At the time we had to commit to being part of the project budget was expected to be £42,826: with expected income of £33,500. The Authority committed to match fund the difference.

14. During the development of the project, numbers and payment per head from DEFRA changed and at the start of the project the final budget for delivering the project was expected to be £51,250. This included: transport, food, activity leaders, venue hire, accommodation and Access and Engagement Projects Officer salary and NI. It was expected that the Learning, Engagement and Wellbeing Manager and the Learning and Engagement Administration Officer would gift staff time to the project. Volunteering costs were not considered.

15. It was expected that this budget would be matched by the payment per head income.

The Reality

What did the project actually achieve?

Exceeded target for project delivery

16. Each partner was set a target of number of individuals for delivery. The YDNPA delivered their agreed target and the project funded 570 qualifying individuals to visit the National Park.

17. Demand for schools and groups to participate in activity was really high, consequently core funding was used to support a further 120 individuals to take part in activity in the National Park. Taking the total number of individuals supported to 690.

Activity	Number of Individuals (target)	Number of Individuals (delivered)
Evening Visits (dark Sky Activity)	100	110
Farm Visits	70	106
Day Visits	200	204
Residential Stays	200	270

Demographics Reached

- Qualifying participants aged 7–18 from areas of deprivation (IMD 1–3 or schools with ≥30% Pupil Premium).
- 58% identified as non-white under census ethnic categories.
- 93% were first-time visitors to a National Park or not engaged in the last 3 years.
- 4.33% met the definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010.

Contributed to Management Plan and Corporate Plan targets

18. The project made a significant impact on the successful delivery the following objectives from the 2019–2024 National Park Management Plan:
    a. The project delivered 25% of the annual target for Objective B4 : By 2024, provide 6,000 people from under-represented groups with activity days that enable them to access the special qualities of the National Park, and so increase their understanding, enjoyment, health and well-being.
    b. The project delivered 23% of the annual target for Objective B5: Through educational and skills-based activities, inspire 3,000 young people from in and around the National Park to explore and enhance their environment each year.

Partnerships formed and strengthened

19. The project enabled us to build on existing relationships with community groups and schools and reach new 5 schools and 4 new community groups – meaning 31% of the groups were new partnerships for YDNPA.

20. The project also reinforced collaboration across the 'Access Unlimited' partners.

Media Coverage

21. The partnership produced a Generation Green 2 newsletter highlighting the diverse and dynamic activities of the project, including dark sky visits in the Yorkshire Dales, engaging young Muslims, supporting young carers, building skills through outdoor adventure, and tackling the complex challenges of overcoming barriers to outdoor learning; it can be viewed here Download it here.

22. The project attracted positive media coverage including:
    a. Facebook – Hilltop Farm visit during residential - visit also featured on Look North
    b. Grinton YHA residential | Generation Green | #yorkshiredales #nationalparks - YouTube Visit to Gam Farm | Generation Green | #yorkshiredales #nationalparks - YouTube Access to Nature | Hyde Park Source | Buckden in Wharfedale | Yorkshire Dales National Park

How long did it actually take?

23. The project was scheduled to run for 12 months, from April to March. However, most of the delivery activity, however, took place between early August and the end of February. This delay was due to several factors:
    - Late confirmation of the project start from DEFRA
    - Time required for induction and familiarisation of the Access and Engagement Projects officer with the project.
    - Promotion of the programme and coordination with group availability and venue/accommodation logistics.

24. Delivery primarily occurred during the autumn and winter months, presented additional challenges such as adverse weather, reduced daylight hours, and lower group engagement during this period.

How was it actually delivered?

25. It was intended that the project would be delivered by a 0.6 FTE Access and Engagement Project Officer on a 12-month fixed term contract. Due to various factors the A&E Project Officer was actually only in post for 10.5 months. She led most of the delivery (81%), while the remaining 19% was undertaken by other members of the L&E team. This support was necessary due to:
    - The Officer starting 6 weeks after the official project launch.
    - Some pre-existing group visits qualifying for project funding.
    - The condensed delivery timeframe and associated workload.
    - Extra support on residential visits and groups with large numbers of participants.

26. The Education & Engagement Support Officer provided admin and organisation support: booking of groups, transport, accommodation, admin support with finance, evaluation, reporting. It's estimated that this was 1/2 days a week work over 12-month period.

27. Volunteers collectively provided 69 days of their time to support delivery.

How much did it actually cost?

28. The total cost of delivering the project was £55,756.91, and the total income received was £54,800. This included an extra £3,550 received for over delivery.

    There was a total overspend of just over £1,000 on programme costs. Costs were higher than anticipated because:
    - Funding excluded essential adult participants (e.g., group leaders, care workers, teachers), and family members

- Smaller group sizes for SEND participants raised per capita costs, making financial sustainability harder.
- Cancelled groups, especially residentials, were not funded but still had to be paid for.

Lessons Learned

What went well, and why?

29. The project helped us fund strategic priorities. The project enabled us to secure external funding to support c 25% of delivery targets towards B4 and B5 of the National Park Management Plan.

30. Effective Engagement with young people. The project was highly targeted (primarily IDM 1–3) and over 90% of participating children had either never visited the Dales or hadn't in the past three years, highlighting successful outreach to new audiences. Being able to use existing relationships the core team had built with eligible groups and schools allowed for quick organisation (particularly at the beginning of the project) without the need for wider promotion—saving valuable time.

31. Building Local and National Partnerships. Groups introduced to the National Park through the original Generation Green project had the opportunity to re-engage with us, fostering ongoing collaboration. Positive experiences led to groups making independent re-bookings with residential centre and a farm. 30% of the groups who came of visit were new to working with YDNPA, we hope to continue our relationship with them. The relationship between the Access Unlimited Partnership has been strengthened, an EOI has been submitted to the NHLF for a Generation Green follow-on project.

32. Strong Team Performance. A skilled project officer supported by existing core staff was vital to meeting targets. NPE noted
"YDNPA was a pleasure to work with. You absolutely smashed your delivery targets, especially for farm visits and residentials, and this massively eased the pressure of potential and actual shortfalls across other parks'.
National Parks England provided excellent coordination across National Parks for the project.

What went less well, and why?

Operational and Delivery Challenges

33. Due to staff vacancies in the team a fixed term Access and Engagement Project Officer had to be recruited to deliver this project. Delays in confirmation from DEFRA, recruitment and induction meant there was a delay in starting, reducing the delivery window from 12 to 9 months which made the project more challenging than it should have been. In addition, it meant the project income was not used to replace core

programme or staff costs. In a normal circumstance an externally funded project like this would swap with a planned project using our own funds, saving in-year budget. The tight delivery window (July–Feb) led to delivery pressures, especially in autumn/winter with limited daylight and group availability.

34. Residentials were impactful but resource-intensive, requiring more planning and staff time than day visits. Matching school and groups with accommodation availability for residentials was more complex than previous projects as the YHA did not provide blocked booking dates, and it's always problematic finding providers who can offer one-night residentials, and/or catering.

35. Restrictions on delivery with FiPL/HLS-funded farms excluded some of our preferred farm venues from activity delivery.

Funding model and inclusion

36. As per head payment was a new funding model for us, support from SMT enabled us to 'underwrite' a possible income gap from the Opportunity Fund to enable us to commit to be a project partner. Due to over delivery and efficiency, the final funding gap was just over £1k, which was absorbed by core programme costs. Challenging extra costs included:
    - Funding model excluded essential adult participants (e.g., group leaders, care workers, teachers, parents), and younger children/siblings.
    - Smaller group sizes for SEND participants raised per session costs.
    - Cancelled groups, especially residentials, were not funded—creating financial risk and planning disruption.

Staffing and Support

37. Uncertainty on funding, recruitment and induction impacted delivery start and meant we lost the summer term delivery window. This meant delivery had to be fitted into a shorter time frame necessitating the Project Officer's delivery capacity being supplemented by other staff to meet targets—highlighting the importance of the existence of a core team who are flexible.

Evaluation Design and Communication

38. The evaluation requirements and formats were unclear at the outset, leading to inefficiencies and missed quotas. Specifically, a misalignment between project age range (7–18) and evaluation tools (9–18) caused confusion and extra work; and the evaluation forms were too long and complex for younger children, affecting session quality and data reliability.

Recommendations for the Future

39. The YDNPA has benefited from being a delivery partner of both Generation Green programmes and will continue to do so if further funding can be secured. Recommendations for future project development include:

Addressing the challenges of short-term project funding

40. Officers are continuing to pursue external funding for youth engagement projects that align with Management Plan and Corporate Plan objectives. Successful models like Generation Green can be replicated to reach underserved young people and deliver nature-based experiences. A recent successful application to the UK Youth 'Adventures Away from Home' Fund for similar activity is an example of the project's legacy and continued delivery. We also have a pipeline of a further 3 youth focused proposals in development, including one with the Access Unlimited Partnership.

41. To address some of the challenges of Generation Green, funding applications should look to maximise internal resources by reallocating core staff to deliver externally funded projects where criteria allow, reducing reliance on fixed-term appointments.

42. With the payment per head funding model becoming increasingly popular**,** the learning and engagement team would benefit from finance support to develop a better understanding of what the true costs of per head delivery is, which will help assess value for money of future projects. This should include meals, transport, delivery staff, volunteer support, venue, activity, management and admin time and visiting staff support.

Long-Term Inclusive Funding Advocacy

43. Senior-level advocacy within the Access Unlimited Partnership is continuing to push for sustained, inclusive funding models rather than short term funding programmes should be encouraged. The impact of Generation Green has been well documented and communicated and is a useful resource to build a compelling case for long-term investment.

44. It might also be useful to explore innovative financing**,** including potential pilots using Green Finance mechanisms to support scalable youth engagement.

Residential Delivery

45. It's important to acknowledge our limitations in delivering residential programmes and avoid proactively pursuing this model. Instead, the focus for project-based projects should be on day-based experiences**,** which are more cost-effective and operationally feasible for YDNPA. Other hybrid models like the Tees-Swale pilot at Marrick Priory, where a National Park offer was integrated into an existing residential setting, should also be considered.