

25 March 2025

Communication Strategy

Purpose of the Report

1. To present a new five-year communication strategy for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.

Recommendation

2. That Members approve the new communication strategy (**Annex**)

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and support the strategic planning framework:
 - Corporate Plan Objective 31.3: Produce a 5-year communication strategy for 2025-30.

Background

4. The current communication strategy was adopted in March 2020 by the Chief Executive Officer under delegated powers during the first lockdown.
5. Our approach to communication introduced in 2020 continues to serve us well - especially so during the pandemic - and remains at the heart of this updated strategy (**Annex**).

Financial Implications

6. As part of the new communication strategy a new website will be developed for the National Park Authority. £80,000 has been set aside for this work, subject to Member approval of the 2025/26 budget.

Legal Implications

7. There are no legal implications applicable to the communication strategy.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

8. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the new communication strategy.

Conclusion

9. Several areas for development have been proposed to ensure our communication outputs remain fresh, up to date and relevant. These include the development of a new website for the Authority, a new intranet integrated within Sharepoint for improved internal communication, and a review of our visual identity, printed media and social media.
10. This new strategy enables us to build on what has been achieved over the last five years and will enable us to:
 - continue to provide a high-quality communication service across the Authority.
 - continue to protect and enhance the reputation of the National Park and the National Park Authority.
 - continue to innovate and be alive and responsive to the fast pace of change in communication

Mark Sadler
Communications Manager

Communication Strategy 2025-30

Purpose

This Strategy is designed to deliver two objectives:

A primary one,

- **Promote the National Park** - Promote, protect and enhance the Yorkshire Dales National Park, by stimulating engagement, action and care. Communication is a key element in delivering the objectives set out in the National Park Management Plan (NPMP).

And a secondary one,

- **Promote the Authority** - Promote the work the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority does, to ensure that stakeholders continue to value the Authority as it delivers its purposes and objectives, and to enhance the reputation of the National Park Authority.

The vision for the National Park, laid out in the NPMP, sits at the heart of all our communications:

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

This vision will be achieved by delivering the objectives set out in the NPMP, the legal framework for which is provided by our statutory purposes. These overarching requirements translate into the three themes of this strategy:

Theme 1 - Understanding our audience and their characteristics; so we can reach, engage and interact with them positively.

Theme 2 - Empowering and educating Members, Officers and Volunteers; so they too can reach, engage and interact with our audience positively.

Theme 3 - Providing effective communication outputs; so we can support delivery of both NPMP and corporate objectives.

Theme 1. Understanding our audience

We need to understand who our audience are and their characteristics. We need to know where they are, how to reach them, and how to engage them. Our work will be evidence based, using insight from a range of sources, including, but not limited to, digital analytics, resident and visitor surveys, feedback from the programmes, projects and events we deliver and leveraging the resource provided by the UK National Parks communication team. This will inform how we segment the audience, drill down to get to know them better, understand how they feel about the ways we are communicating - and can best communicate - with them. There are two aspects of this work:

- (i) **Knowing our audience** - our audience fall into one of four distinct categories.
 - People (and organisations) who **live** and/or **work** here: residents, businesses, landowners and farmers, community groups and local authorities.
 - People who **visit** here including those who are thinking of visiting, planning to visit and those already here, national and international visitors.
 - People who are **opinion formers** and **policy makers**: politicians and journalists, campaign groups, influencers, and organisations with interests in the environment and/or outdoor recreation.
 - People with a keen interest in the Yorkshire Dales National Park and what we do as an Authority but who don't visit, work or reside here.
- (ii) **Reaching and engaging them** - we will use whatever form and content of communication will best achieve effective engagement with our audience, with the intention of encouraging them to care for the National Park, and to positively interact with us. Appropriate mechanisms include:
 - In person
 - Digital – our website, online meetings and apps
 - Social Media
 - Print – leaflets, newspapers and magazines
 - Traditional media – broadcast, print and online titles
 - Interpretation

Theme 2. Empowering and educating Members, Officers and Volunteers

Communicating on behalf of the Authority, acting as guardians of our 'brand' and managing the Authority's reputation are the responsibility of us all. Every day our Members, Officers and Volunteers are in contact with residents, visitors, key stakeholders and influencers, employers, opinion formers and policy makers – our audience.

We need to ensure anyone telling our stories are properly equipped for this responsibility, so that they can share our stories effectively and play their part in presenting a consistent, professional face for the Authority.

Much of our approach to presenting information about the National Park is captured within existing strategies from across the organisation, for example by our Special Qualities, Special Experiences strategy, which describes how we will engage with visitors and other outdoor recreational interests, as well as setting out our stall on education, information

provision and interpretation. The Volunteering Strategy identifies the role volunteers have in cascading environmental understanding and other messages to a wider audience. And we have a number of other specific policies and resources designed to support effective communication:

For Members:

- Corporate Media Procedure and Protocol
- Social Media Protocol for Members
- Planning Good Practice Code

For Officers:

- Media Procedure and Protocol (updated in 2023)
- Communications information series
- [Social Media Strategy](#) & Guidelines (updated in 2023)
- Corporate Identity Guidelines (updated in 2023)
- UK National Parks 'We are here' shared brand story 2019
- The NPE & NPUK Communications Strategy and Protocol

For Volunteers:

- Volunteer Handbook

Theme 3. Providing effective communication outputs

Our communications will always be tailored according to context, in particular whether we are communicating proactively or reactively.

Proactive communication. This means planning our communications workload to support delivery of the NPMP objectives. The communications team is fully briefed on the Authority's corporate objectives at the start of each year to ensure it can meet corporate-level communication requirements, adjusting that plan through the year and re-setting it at the start of each successive year. Its focus will be on:

- informing people about the opportunities to enjoy and better understand the special qualities of the National Park, and to drive engagement, action and care.
- raising the profile of the National Park and driving awareness of it as a destination for sustainable tourism.
- improving audience understanding of the role of the Authority, the work the Authority is undertaking itself and with partners and celebrating our achievements.

We will seek to reflect the sense of day, tapping into relevant local, regional and national discussions, events and topics, and we will always use the most appropriate communications media and channels. Our content will be brought to life using friendly, inclusive language and striking visuals.

Reactive Communication and Reputation Management. This means anticipating reaction from the public, media and others to the decisions we make and actions we take

and responding to criticism where appropriate. This means engaging and interacting with our audience to ensure the Authority's position is presented in an open, clear and accessible way. The characteristics of this approach include:

- Responding to criticism positively, accurately and objectively
- Clarifying the Authority's position and policies and accentuating the positive contribution the Authority makes, with partners and others, to the communities who live in, work in and visit the National Park.
- Using relevant or all appropriate communication channels to do so.

Our objective is to produce creative and engaging communications that are relevant to our audiences, and which best promote the incredible work we do as an Authority.

Measuring success and improving what we do

There are two key qualitative measures of success that link directly to the objectives of this strategy:

- Have we delivered the NPMP objectives? And where communications resource was devised and delivered, did this meet expectations and what have we been able to learn from these.
- Is the organisation in good reputational health? The measure of our success will be the improvement of our reputation amongst our audience and the maintenance of strong reputation management.

More specific measures and indicators exist - and can be further developed - as a means of gauging the success of individual communications initiatives. Examples we currently have in place to measure impact and success of our communications output include:

- Social media and website analytics: gathering statistical data, to ensure we remain in the top performance quartile for NPAs.
- 'Dales' and 'The Visitor'; gathering customer feedback and undertaking periodic customer (including Resident) surveys to gauge continuing value.
- National Park Centres and Dales Countryside Museum: continuous review of visitor statistics, museum entries and retail sales, to ensure we are best meeting customer demands.
- All services: actively monitoring customer complaints, compliments and other feedback: not just to identify any problems, but to take the temperature of how we are doing.

The fast pace of change in communications, particularly in relation to digital media, means that our approach will evolve over the life of this Strategy. We will use feedback from the range of surveys which will take place during the life of this Strategy to adjust and further develop our approach.

Areas for development

1. **A new website for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority** – The current site, built in house is aging (2017) and individual software apps within the Content Management System are now either obsolete or increasingly incompatible with other apps within the CMS. A new site will have improved navigation at its heart and dedicated content hubs to better serve residents and visitors who have very different and distinct requirements of our website – **2025/26**
2. **A new Sharepoint Intranet** – The Intranet is a key tool for achieving good internal communication. As we continue to embrace Microsoft 365 functionality, we will transition the existing Intranet to a Sharepoint Intranet where it will benefit from being integrated with the existing suite of apps such as Teams, making it easier for staff to keep in touch with Authority updates and each other. This will also allow colleagues to take ownership of their content to keep shared information in one place and up to date – **2025/26**
3. **Adoption of AI tools into the work of the Communications Team** – The team already has its ‘toe in the water’ of AI, for example using ChatGPT to aid content creation. More work is needed to establish how AI tools can further support content creation and website development, and the use of AI tools sustainably and in line with existing policies. This is an area developing at pace and a series of bespoke public sector AI workshops has been identified and booked for the Digital Communications Officer to attend – **2025**
4. **Updated Media Procedure & Protocol** – Review and update the Media Procedure and Protocol as required – **2026**
5. **Visual Identity & Printed Media Review** – We will update the corporate style guide and our visual identify. At the same time, we will explore the possibility of moving to a single Yorkshire Dales National Park logo. We will refresh the printed media created by the Authority, such as Dales newspaper, Visitor magazine, our free mapsheets and other leaflets, handouts and posters. Print remains an important means of communicating with audiences and while it will be sometime before the value of printed media diminishes sufficiently to trigger a move to solely digital publication, we do believe we should conduct a detailed review and refresh of our printed assets so they remain contemporary and relevant – **2026/27**
6. **Social Media Review** – Social media is at the heart of our communication and interaction with audiences and is the only channel for which audiences are growing. This is a fast moving and ever evolving space, and during the life of this strategy we are committed to developing, enhancing and resourcing our approach where appropriate. Following an independent review of our approach to social media in late 2023 we will commission a further such review of our audiences, channel performance, and approach to content creation and delivery on social media and deliver an updated social media strategy – **2026/27**
7. **Multimedia content creation** – The future success of good communication is linked to good digital communications. Good digital communications are increasingly reliant on good multimedia content. A Creative Content Producer was

recruited in 2024 to develop multimedia content - primarily video - to be delivered across all our digital platforms. Over the life of this strategy, we are looking to:

- tell the stories of the National Park, the Authority, its partners and stakeholders through the preparation and production of high-quality multimedia content.
- grow our reach and engagement of young audiences over the life of this strategy.

In addition, our successful walking apps will be further enhanced.