Notes of Western Parishes Forum meeting
7pm on Tuesday 29 April 2025 at Sedbergh Peoples Hall

Chaired by Libby Bateman (YDNPA Board Member)

Parishes in attendance:

Casterton	Ken Humphris
Clapham Cum Newby	Ann Sheridan
Dent Parish Council	Andrew Povey
Ireby with Leck	Carol Howard
Ireby with Leck	Andrew Makinson
Kirkby Stepehen	Adrian Waite
Mansergh	Peter Robinson
Mansergh	Bert Metcalfe
Sedbergh	Douglas Thomson

YDNPA:

Derek Twine	Chair
David Butterworth	CEO
Gary Smith	Director of Conservation & Community
Elliott Lorimer	Director of Park Services
Rebecca Eslick	Committees Officer
Susan Allison	Executive Assistant [job share] to CEO & Chair - admin support

1. **Welcome and Introduction – Libby Bateman**

   Libby welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **YDNPA Projects 2025/26 – Gary Smith & Elliott Lorimer**

   Gary and Elliott ran through the bigger projects that the Authority was planning this year:

   Farming in Protected Landscapes - £1.5m to provide in grants to support farmers in the National Park to carry out works that benefit nature, climate, people or place.

   Rights of Way – programme of works to keep 90% of the rights of way easy. Westmolrand and Furness Council contributes financially towards this work. Local projects included the repair of Hall Hill Bridge, Mallerstang.

   Active Travel Plans – producing a plan to improve opportunities for walking, cycling, wheeling and horse-riding in order to travel between villages or to schools and services. A draft network will be published at the end of April [the second round of public consultation] and will be sent to all Parish Councils. **Action: EL**

   Access & Engagement – continuing a series of projects to provide opportunities for under-served groups to access the National Park;

   Coast to Coast – completing the infrastructure needed now that the Coast to Coast has been designated as a national trail. Main project will be improvements to the route at Mossy Hill - laying stone flags along 1.5km.

   Garsdale to Hawes multi-user route – continuing legal preparations for creating a multi-use route along the former Wensleydale rail line. Noted that the route can be converted back to provide a railway if such an occasion arises.

Cross Keys Bridge Project - upgraded to a 2.5m wide bridge and further work this year to improve the surface of the bridleway to make it accessible for those with limited mobility.

Smaredale Accessibility Project - part of the larger Access to Eden project run by the Eden Rivers Trust. Providing 1.5km of accessible footpath (no access for cyclists) with planned works to increase access for All terrain wheelchairs

Questions from the floor followed

DB was asked whether the ranger service was at risk/affordable in the current climate. DB explained that capital funding has been given to the Park for this year but future years will depend on the results of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

3. **National Park Management Plan update - Gary Smith**

GS gave a quick recap of the work done so far to produce an updated National Park Management Plan for 2025-30. The final public consultation setting out the proposed objectives (sent to all parish councils in January) closed in March. Responses were generally very supportive. The main point that came back was to make sure that the Plan reflects the fact that many local groups (including parish councils) play important roles in looking after the National Park. The Partnership that produces the Plan has considered the responses and agreed final proposals.

Questions from the floor included how the partnership worked in practice. GS affirmed that North Yorkshire and Westmorland and Furness Councils were supportive of the plan and worked with all the partners to update regularly and report its progress every year.

4. **Miles without stiles – Elliott Lorimer**

Elliott gave a short presentation on the work that the Authority is doing to open up access by making some routes suitable for all ages and abilities. The work takes inspiration from John Dower's report of 1945 which was instrumental in creating National Parks: 'National Parks are for people of every class and kind, from every part of the country. They are not for any privileged or otherwise restricted section of the population but for all those who care to refresh their minds and spirits and to exercise their bodies in a peaceful setting of natural beauty.'

Currently 10% of routes are suitable for all ages and abilities – meeting the target set in the last National Park Management Plan. 19 routes are promoted by the Authority, the most local being Sedbergh and Killington. Aysgarth NP Centre - has been developed as an accessibility hub and now has two all-terrain wheelchairs for free use, which can access the new 2.5km access for all route. The route runs through private farmland – provides benefit to the farmer through new fencing that helps with stock management control and prevents issues with dogs off leads.

5. **Local Plan and national planning policy update - Gary Smith**

The Local Plan is coming towards the end of its long preparation process. After 7 informal consultations over the last 3 years, the full final draft of the plan was published for formal consultation in March (copy sent to all Parishes). The deadline for comments is 6 May. All responses will then go on to a Planning Inspector who will hold a public 'examination' of the Plan – hopefully this Autumn. If the Plan is found to be 'sound' it should be adopted in Spring 2026. Once adopted it will replace all the different planning policies in different parts of the National Park.

GS also noted that the Government has made or is considering a number of significant changes to national policy, including: Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023; National Planning Policy Framework review; and Planning and Infrastructure Bill 2025 (emerging).

Questions followed included:

Why are only small windows allowed in barn conversions? GS explained that planning policy was intented to help retain the character of what were agricultural buildings but wasn't completely inflexible in terms of allowing enough light to make the buildings livable. Obviously, there is more leeway with new buildings. Kyle Blue's presentation on the design guide at the last forum meeting was instructive on this matter.

A futher question about energy efficiency in buildings was answered. Most new builds can be very highly adapted for energy efficiency – including barns.

Question about Climate Infrastructure Levy. GS confirmed that the Authority doesn't charge CIL

The Chair noted that Defra is working on giving effect to the new duty on all public bodies to actively seek to promote the statutory duties of National Parks when going about their day to day business in the National Park. For example – new telecomms is being put underground in the west of the Park [B4RN, Fibrus] but still lots of poles being put up in other parts. Duty also applies to water companies and the management of highways (which should be different in Sedbergh than it is in central Leeds). All are encouraged to report back to Natural England if bodies are not following the new duty.

6. YDNPA Financial situation – David Butterworth

The CEO gave an update on the financial situation of the Authority which detailed the reduction in grant from £5.7m in 2024 to the level of £4.7m this coming year. He asked all to note that the last time we had this level of funding was in 2006-7 when this was our only grant funding.

He noted the state of nature, which is really bad in the UK compared to our European neighbours, and noted that if funding wasn't given to rural areas then what hope for nature in the UK in urban areas/nationally.

The Authority supplements its grant with externally funded projects – increasing the budget to between £12 and £14m. No decisions will be taken on the long-term structure of the Authority until after the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (results for the Authority not likely to be known until early 2026). DB added that it is disappointing that successive Governments haven't recognised the value of investing in Protected landscapes. A recent meeting with Steve Reed confirmed the direction of Government spend focus (Health; Defence), and the intention to gradually reduce revenue spending and increase capital spending. Finances will be especially tough for 'non-protected' areas like Environment.

7. Ideas for future Forum meetings

All were reminded that the Autumn meeting will be held online for all PCs to attend. The Chair asked Parish Councillors present to consider items of interest that they might share with other PCs at future meetings? Affordable Housing scheme successes had been reported as part of this meeting by a PC in the past.

8. Any other business

A point was raised about water quality (white froth) in the Lune. Councillors noted that the quality of the water in the becks is not as it was decades ago with fewer fish and insects, such as cadis flies. This is a statutory duty of the Environment Agency to deal with so councillors are urged to please do flag issues up with them and to be the eyes and ears on the ground. Noted that really low water levels have probably exacerbated the problems. GS added that the national picture of water quality is much worse than it is in the Dales with only 14% of rivers in good condition rather than the 50% figure in the Dales. The main source of pollution in the National Park is phosphates and nitrates from farming practices (because so much of the land is farmed rather than urban). There are also issues with the leaching of metals from former mines (particularly in Swaledale), and overflows from sewage treatment works. With septic tanks, climate change and flash floods also playing a part in the issue, this is an enormous task to tackle. LB added that the natural flood management policies and peat restoration initiatives of the NPA are helping in better storage of water with decreased run off from the hills, helping to reduce flood impacts downstream. **Action: GS** to consider whether water quality could be an idea for a future forum.

With no other matters to discuss, the meeting closed at 8.30pm.