

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

3 December 2019

PROGRESS IMPLEMENTING THE CORPORATE PLAN 2019-2020

Report of the Head of Strategy and Performance

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT: To inform Members about the progress made in implementing key actions within the current Corporate Plan for the period April 2019-September 2020.

RECOMMENDATION: The Authority is recommended to:

- (1) NOTE the progress in implementing the Authority's key commitments set out in the Corporate Plan 2019-2020
- (2) AGREE the changes to the Corporate Plan 2019-20 outlined in section 3.4 and 3.5
- (3) DELEGATE to the Finance and Performance Advisory Panel and Leadership Team further scrutiny of Authority performance across all the Corporate Plan actions for the next reporting period to 31 March 2020.

Authority Corporate Plan: The Corporate Plan outlines the priorities for the Authority for the period to March 2020 and how we will help to achieve the priorities in the *Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan*. It continues to closely follow the priorities set out by Defra in its *8-Point Plan for England's National Parks* and the Government's *25 Year Environment Plan*, whilst recognising that 2019/20 is likely to be a period of change and transition for the Authority

Legal and Equality Implications: Section 65(4) Environment Act 1995 – provides powers to the National Park Authority to “do anything which in the opinion of the Authority, is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to:-

- (a) the accomplishment of the purposes mentioned in s. 65 (1) [National Park purposes]
- (b) the carrying out of any functions conferred on it by virtue of any other enactment.”

The equality impact of the recommendations of this report has been assessed as follows: There are no foreseen adverse impacts on any protected group(s). Engagement through the outreach work within the plan is designed to have a positive impact on protected groups.

Consideration has been given to the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and an assessment of the implications of the recommendations of this report is as follows: There are no implications for the Human Rights Act.

Financial and Risk Implications: No financial or risk implications have been identified. Performance management exerts a positive influence on financial and risk management

Climate Change Response: Additional actions have been added to the Corporate Plan in response to the Climate Emergency Declaration

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 2019-20 Corporate Plan was approved by the Authority on 02 April 2019. It set out the key priorities for the Authority for the period of the plan.
- 1.2 Performance is monitored quarterly by Leadership Team to ensure that the actions within the Corporate Plan are being achieved and, if necessary, to provide an opportunity for resources to be re-allocated or to review the proposed action. Oversight is provided by members through the Finance and Performance Advisory Panel.
- 1.3 This six month review sets out progress against the Corporate Plan from April to the end of September 2019.

2. Corporate Plan at a Glance

- 2.1 The actions within the plan are grouped as follows:

People	<p>Exmoor for All: Where everyone feels welcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Exmoor Experience • Well-managed Recreation and Access • Thriving Tourism built on Sustainability
Place	<p>Inspiring Landscapes: Diverse and beautiful, rich in wildlife and history</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrated Landscapes • Wildness and Tranquillity with Dark Night Skies, and Sensitive Development • Valued Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage • Rich in Wildlife
Prosperity	<p>Working Landscapes: Thriving communities and a vibrant local economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Landscapes • Strong Local Economy • Thriving Communities <p>A Valued Asset</p>
Monitoring and Research	Improving our knowledge and understanding of Exmoor's special qualities
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to a new funding era • Work with communities, businesses and partners to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan and statutory purposes • Develop and maintain effective and efficient services • Manage the Authority's Estate and operations to support delivery of National Park purposes

3. Performance Report - Overview

- 3.1 Exmoor National Park Authority has had another busy and successful six months delivering strongly against Partnership Plan and Corporate Plan objectives. This has been made possible by a dedicated staff team with appropriate Member contributions. The majority of Corporate Plan actions are being implemented, although some have fallen behind due to various pressures arising from staff changes, sickness absences, and factors outside the control of the Authority.
- 3.2 Progress in delivering the Corporate plan over the last six months has been achieved against a background of increasing expectations nationally in the light of the Glover review of Protected Landscapes, the declaration of a climate emergency, and a diminishing budget, as reported to members at the November Authority meeting. In real terms the budget has now reduced by around 50% since 2010. We are in the final year of a four year Defra funding settlement, which has created some welcome stability, but future budgets are not yet know. A recent job evaluation process, increasing pension costs as well as recent one-off liabilities relating to the Authority's Estate have put strain on Authority finances such that staff vacancies are being held where possible and some actions are falling behind, and one is not being progressed. We continue to explore ways of growing our income base, work with partners, and to make efficiencies in relation to our systems and procedures in response to these pressures.
- 3.3 A full assessment of progress with the actions in the Corporate Plan is given in Appendix 1. In addition to the numerous successes marked in green, areas where progress was not on target are marked in amber and include areas where the timetable has slipped or where progress was not made due to factors outside the Authority's control.
- 3.4 Despite the constraints in relation to staffing and budget, only one Corporate Plan action is not being progressed and is marked as red:
- Action 26: Develop measures to replace character trees outside woods in response to disease and other pressures. Work with CareMoor and local initiatives to raise and allocate funds for new landmark trees in prominent locations
- 3.5 One new action has been added to the Corporate Plan in the light of the Authority's Climate Emergency Declaration:
- Develop an action plan to work towards the Authority being carbon neutral by 2030, and work with partners and local communities to respond to the climate emergency including contributing to the preparation of the Devon and Somerset Carbon Plans.
- 3.6 The Glover Report following the Review of Protected Landscapes commissioned by Government was issued in September 2019. Initial discussions have been held with members and staff on the recommendations of the report, and Leadership Team is looking at how the Authority can take forward the spirit of the report in the short term, whilst waiting for a formal response from Government.

Clare Reid, Head of Strategy and Performance
Hazel Malcolm, Business Support Officer
December 2019

Background papers on which this report, or an important part of it are based, constitute the list of background papers required by Section 100 D (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to be open to members of the public comprise:

Exmoor National Park Authority Corporate Plan 2019/20

8-Point Plan for England's National Parks – March 2016 (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)

Government's 25 Year Environment Plan

Protected Landscapes Review, Julian Glover September 2019

Appendix 1: Progress Against Corporate Plan Actions

People – The Exmoor Experience

Highlights:

- A wide range of volunteering opportunities to support National Park purposes have been supported through the Get Involved Programme, delivering:
 - 42 guided walks with 375 participants
 - 24 Wildwatch events
 - 285 registered volunteers with 106 regularly recording hours
- Health and Wellbeing benefits from Exmoor have been promoted through the FUN Project (Families United through Nature) targeting communities in Bridgwater and Taunton. 25 activities have been delivered involving 287 children, 179 parents and carers, and 40 staff or volunteers. Support has been given to the Connecting Actively to Nature programme, targeting inactive 55+ year olds and the Devon Recovery Learning College with 'Wild Things' – a programme co-designed with people with lived experience recovering from poor mental health.
- The Learning and Outreach Service continues to engage with young people and professional staff teams. School bookings are running at full capacity both for day visits and residentials through Pinkery Centre for Outdoor Learning. During this period 2867 young people have had an Exmoor Experience. Preparation is well advanced for Outreach visits from new schools funded by the Forest Holidays Partnership with residentials booked for Q3. The offer at Pinkery is being improved including new displays due for completion Q3. The team is also coordinating the new national Education resource for all National Parks.
- The National Park Centres have seen consistent visitor numbers although slightly down compared with the same period last year at 110,052 visitors. Revenue from visitor spend at the centres is up 12.3%.
- We continue to deliver a broad programme of public engagement events including:
 - Over 100 public events with over 3000 people attending
 - The Historic Buildings Festival (September 2019) was a success with 18 events taking place over 7 days involving an estimated 500 people
 - The Dark Skies festival has just been completed in October 2019 and will be reported in Q3

People – Well-managed Recreation and Access

Highlights:

- There are no current restrictions on Access land. A number of path diversion orders have been successfully completed. Two long-term permitted path agreements were secured for popular routes in the Barle Valley and Snowdrop valley. Network improvements have been made, including replacement of the bridge at Edgcott (Exton) as well as several smaller ones, and installation of a new footbridge to replace stepping stones at Timberscombe.
- Good progress is being made with Woodside Bridge. The initial fundraising target has been met and the planning application submitted.

- The team continue to support Natural England with implementation of the England Coast Path. Planning applications are being prepared for several sites where changes to the Coast Path route are being proposed.
- During this period, 24 large events took place, all of which have had some degree of consultation with ENPA. Information for communities on our website has been further improved in response to concerns about a road cycle event.
- The Field Services Team are behind with general work such as gates, stiles and bridges, partly due to putting a greater emphasis on paring over the last two summers. However the team are catching up and a new system is being looked at for next year.
- Negotiations with landowners are underway for the family friendly cycle trails, although this progressing more slowly than hoped.
- Promote 10 accessible walks: all on site assessment works have been completed for the selected 'Exmoor's Top Walks'. A full mock-up of the online/printed support materials for the Simonsbath routes is being worked up as a test model before rolling this out further to all of the selected routes. The timetable for production has slipped slightly due to other commitments.

People – Thriving Tourism built on Sustainability

Highlights:

- Ranger Experience Days have been successfully established with high occupancy (in excess of 90%) and continued positive feedback.
- There has been a comprehensive programme of events to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Lorna Doone.
- Phase 2 of the Eat Exmoor project is progressing with promotional materials developed to be rolled out with participating retailers in Q3. A further series of CareMoor Dining events have been planned with industry partners.
- Training continues to be delivered for local tourism providers, and a revised 'Park Partner' scheme is under development.
- There has been limited progress developing the Pinkery short activity breaks due to other commitments including the Big Picnic. 4 weekends with 3 programmes were confirmed but 3 had to be cancelled due to lack of uptake or capacity to pursue. One family weekend was held with 50% occupancy. A review is taking place and there will be a revised offer for 2020 building on learning.

Place – Celebrated Landscapes, Wildness & Tranquillity, Dark Night Skies

Highlights:

- A programme of events for the Year of Green Action is being implemented by partners in the Learning and Engagement Network. The Big Picnic, including the visit by their royal highnesses Prince Charles and Camilla, was organised on behalf of UK National Parks to celebrate the 70th anniversary in July.
- A desk study and literature review is underway on heather moorland. Further discussions on swaling and climate change are planned.

- Conservation works at White Rock Cottage and Simonsbath Old School have progressed well. The building project is on course to be completed by the beginning of December 2019. Meanwhile in Ashcombe Gardens a group of volunteers have met monthly and are continuing to open up the gardens and replant certain areas. The site was opened for Heritage Open Day on 16th September.
- The Landscape Character Assessment is being used to guide development management and projects.
- Joint work is underway with the landscape, planning policy and economy teams to review dark sky evidence and to consider options for practical guidance on lighting proposals to avoid and minimise light pollution to protect the Dark Sky Reserve.
- The action to develop measures to replace character trees outside woods has been put on hold due to reduced capacity in the woodlands team.
- Work on the Design Group has not progressed due to lack of capacity.
- Enhancement projects are being scoped for ENPA land at the Valley of Rocks and at Culbone, although these have not progressed as quickly as hoped.

Place – Valued Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage

Highlights:

- A number of conservation works have been carried out as part of Historic England's Monuments Management Scheme.
- Conservation Area assessments are now complete. This work identified the need for Article 4 directions in some areas and proposals were presented to members. Around 100 listed buildings are left to survey.
- A new Historic Environment Record Website has been completed.
- Rapid coastal zone assessment study: no progress has been made to date. This will be picked up in Q3/4.

Place: Rich in Wildlife

Highlights:

- The Nature Conservation Advisory Panel has been working with a wildlife illustrator to develop a vision for ecological recovery networks on Exmoor. Further discussion is planned with the group for Q3.
- The Exmoor Non-native Invasive Species project now has 2 project officers appointed with a Steering Group set up. Around 35 volunteers have signed up to help with signal crayfish monitoring and invasive plant survey.

Prosperity – Working Landscapes

Highlights:

- Funding has been secured for the Environmental Land Management Scheme Test and Trial and the project is underway as of Q3. The next steps are to recruit and select 25 sample areas and re-engage partners on landscape scale priority setting.

- An evidence group is being set up by ENPA to explore gaps in evidence and understanding of Game Shoots impacts. Members and staff attended an open day held by GESA and Loyton Sporting Ltd.
- Funding from the Exmoor Landscape Conservation Grant Scheme has now been committed. Work continues through the Devon and Somerset hedgerow groups to support hedgerow management. Farmers and land managers have expressed concerns over meeting the required criteria for grants through the Countryside Stewardship scheme.
- The Headwaters of the Exe project is progressing well with 31 grant applications received to date for projects to improve water quality.
- The annual swaling report (2018/19) was produced with all the burning carried out across the National Park mapped. The team continue to work with the fire service on fire plans for moorland areas.
- DNA samples from the ENPA herds of Exmoor ponies are with the Exmoor Pony Society for genome mapping although the timetable for this has slipped.
- On promoting sustainable local timber there was a successful audit by the Soil Association Woodmark, but the project has been unable to be developed further due to reduced capacity.
- There has been limited progress working with partners to investigate opportunities for integrated catchment management. Follow up work on woody material in Exmoor's rivers has been unable to be developed further due to reduced capacity in the woodland team.

Prosperity – Working Landscapes

Highlights:

- Consultants have been appointed and a steering group established to deliver a research project 'Rural Enterprise Exmoor' on Exmoor's economy to provide enhanced business intelligence, informing future work programmes and a more integrated approach to economic support and development management work.
- A joint National Parks position paper has been drafted on post-Brexit Rural Development funding opportunities in National Parks.

Prosperity – Thriving Communities

Highlights:

- We have secured funding from the West Somerset Community Led Housing Fund 3 years for a Rural Housing Enabling Service/ Rural Housing Network co-ordinator
- Ongoing work to support delivery of affordable housing for local communities includes a rolling programme of housing needs surveys at five-year intervals; we now have up to date surveys across the majority of parishes. Officers are supporting parishes to bring affordable housing sites forward in Cutcombe and surrounding parishes and in Parracombe

- We continue to support Exmoor Young Voices (EYV) and others to promote the delivery of Custom/Self Build dwellings including a tour of completed dwellings with EYV. A summit is being planned for Q4 setting out how ENPA and other organisations can support young people to access housing.
- The Exmoor Rural Crime Partnership meets twice a year and provides a good forum for partnership working. Grants have been received from Devon and Cornwall and Avon and Somerset Police to be used on fly tipping, poaching and cold calling sales.
- Three Partnership Fund grant Applications have been approved from 7 received (Apr – Sept).
- Meetings of the Exmoor Rural Housing Network have been delayed following the resignation of the Rural Housing co-ordinator; this work will be picked up by the new funding secured from the West Somerset Community Led Housing Fund.

Prosperity – A Valued Asset

Highlights:

- The final report from the Glover Review into Protected Landscapes was published in September 2019 and was discussed informally with Members. A staff workshop is set up for Q3.
- Natural Capital: The SWEEP team at Exeter University have completed a draft report on natural capital accounts for Exmoor and Dartmoor National Parks, highlighting some of the limitations of this approach (such as data availability and inconsistent methodologies). A joint meeting to discuss the results with ENPA and DNPA staff will take place in Q3. The results from the study will feed into the Defra Tests and Trials work.
- Significant work has been undertaken to influence the Hot SW LEP's Local industrial Strategy - limited focus on rural areas but some hooks through headline ambition of delivering 'Clean Growth'. The LEP is also involved in the Rural Enterprise Exmoor project.

Prosperity – Monitoring and Research

Highlights:

- A number of areas of work are ongoing to address gaps in our evidence base for the State of the Park Report. We are exploring the use of remote sensing data for monitoring land use / vegetation change in the National Park and also for natural capital registers. Natural England has funded landscape monitoring including cumulative changes arising development, and from game shoots activity. A review of moorland evidence is underway. We continue to support ongoing monitoring of Exmoor ponies and deer. TB in deer has been raised as an increasing issue, further discussion is planned at the Exmoor Parish and Consultative Forum in Q3.

Corporate Priorities -Transition to a new funding era

Highlights:

- The revised budget for 2019/20 was presented to the Authority in November, with recommendations to fund pressures arising in-year. Budget planning for 2020-21 will

take place during Q3 although there are still some uncertainties including the National Park Grant figure which is still unknown.

- Funding through CareMoor is in a healthy position year on year, with the Woodside bridge appeal completed and good take up of Dedications (Donate a Gate scheme) in particular.
- Work continues to grow our income base. We have benefitted from Forest Holidays and Clif Bar funding via National Parks Partnerships, plus support to secure Big Picnic Sponsorship (from Tarmac). Locally, sponsorship has also been secured for our programmes from Airband (Dunster Show / Dark Skies Festival) and Exmoor Trim (Ranger Experience days). Further work is underway to explore other income generating opportunities including our charging policy for planning, car parking and so on.
- A new Service Level Agreement has been signed with Devon County Council to provide Procurement services.

Corporate Priorities - work with communities and partners to deliver the Partnership Plan

Highlights:

- The Partnership Plan groups meet twice a year and help to oversee delivery of the Partnership Plan. A progress update is planned for 2020.
- A review of the Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum is nearly complete and will be presented to the meeting in Q3.
- We continue to support the Exmoor Hill Farming Network and Exmoor Young Voices. The EHFN has undertaken a governance review and is setting up as a Community Interest Company.

Corporate Priorities – Develop and maintain effective and efficient services

Highlights:

- Build a more positive perception of the planning service: positive news stories are being communicated as they arise including some engagement through social media with local businesses. Officers continue to work closely with Exmoor Young Voices and the Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum on planning matters. The new computer system for planning is due to go live in Q3.
- The job evaluation review was completed in Q2 following the appeals process. Updates of HR policies are ongoing including Health and Safety and Safeguarding policies. Staff training is also ongoing, with training courses planned for Q3 for mental health first aiders and new first aiders, plus a Mindful Employer workshop for all staff in Q4. Data Protection training for Members, LT and staff to be held during Q3.
- The Land and Property Intern's placement ended in August 2019 and a new intern started in September 2019. A one year Forestry Apprentice started working with the woodland team in August 2019, primarily funded through a grant from the Royal Forestry Society. During the summer we hosted students on a one-week work experience programme.

- Planning service: Changes to the planning team, sickness absences and the development of the new planning computer system have impacted on delivery. Targets for development management are down, however recent recruitment and implementation of the new system should mean that the team gets back on track during the next quarter
- We are making some improvements to our intranet although this has been slower than hoped due to technical difficulties.

Corporate Priorities – Manage the Authority’s Estate and operations

Highlights:

- A new Acquisitions and Disposals policy was signed off by the Authority in May 2019 and work on a comprehensive schedule of assets continues.
- Pinkery review: following discussions with members and staff at a workshop in July, work is underway to consider future options including working with potential partners and what an enhanced offer might look like.
- A Land Choices exercise has been completed for North Hill, with both ENPA and National Trust staff participating. A joint management plan for North Hill is now in preparation with wider stakeholders. Work is planned for Q3 to undertake a similar visioning exercise for other ENPA assets.
- During the first quarter, progress with woodland management on the ENPA Estate was reviewed and work planned for the coming winter. This included identifying sites for future Countryside Stewardship, Plantlife and Butterfly Conservation works. Invasive species control continues through Culbone, Ashcombe and Culvercliffe. Evidence of Ash Dieback is becoming more apparent and measures have begun to fell trees in high risk locations. An estate-wide survey of ash has been completed to enable better decisions and prioritise actions. 1,800 trees in high to medium risk locations have been identified. Income generating opportunities through sale of timber harvested from our woodlands continues, with a broad trend of increasing income from timber sales. As staff capacity allows, the intention is to grow this income.
- Ongoing maintenance of the ENPA estate including:
 - Final phase of rock slope stabilisation work at Weir Cleeve almost complete. Further follow-up work at Weir Cleeve identified, to be undertaken in Q3
 - 12 month inspection of work completed in summer 2018 underway.
 - Contractors bringing forward costed proposals for repairing the main stock building at Driver Farm. Full condition survey of the farmhouse at Driver planned for Q3.
 - Annual safety inspections of old mine workings identified need to repeat the original survey of abandoned mine workings on our land (now 25 years old).
 - Refurbishment of Porlock Weir public conveniences completed.
 - Completed comprehensive schedule of private water supplies (maintenance programme and statutory compliance).

- New solar PV panels installed at Pinkery
 - Work by external specialists to monitor the condition of the revetment wall at the Incline (West Somerset Minerals Railway) continued with a repeat survey (6 month intervals).
 - Metal fuel tank at the Sawmill identified as potentially hazardous; replacement to be investigated.
 - The 'Dead House' at Exmoor House has been dry-lined to provide additional storage.
- Plastic Free Exmoor– the Authority was registered as a Community Leader as part of the Plastic Free Community Scheme. An internal Action Plan has been produced and to date 3 businesses have signed up with actions to become Plastic Free Champions. A Plastic Free Exmoor leaflet has been produced aimed at National Park users and how they can contribute to reducing the impacts of single use plastics. This will be distributed to visitors, particularly through local tourism businesses.