

## Chief Executive's Update

**Recommendation that:**     **a    The Authority is asked to note the update on key topics since the last meeting.**

### 1     **Defra Updates**

- 1.1     The Government's comprehensive spending review was published on 11 June. Defra's departmental settlement equates to a 2.7% (real terms) reduction in funding over the period of the spending review. The cash reductions are more heavily weighted towards the later years of the review with the department receiving a flat cash settlement in 2026/27.
- 1.2     It is too early to say what impact this will have on National Park Grant (NPG) funding levels, with NPG determined through Defra's own business planning cycle across the Autumn and Winter. We will continue to push for a multi-year settlement through that process on revenue and capital both directly and through National Parks England (NPE).
- 1.3     Both Tamara Finkelstein (Permanent Secretary for Defra) and Janet Hughes (Programme Director for Defra's Future Farming and Countryside Programme) will leave the department this Summer. We will update Members on their replacements later in the year.
- 1.4     Defra has now launched a call for evidence on expanding the role of the private sector in nature recovery and more information can be found here:

[Expanding the role of the private sector in nature recovery - GOV.UK](#)

[Expanding the role of the private sector in nature recovery: call for evidence - GOV.UK](#)

The call for evidence will run until 7 August 2025, coordinated by the Defra green finance team. They are keen for protected landscape partners to respond with any views and evidence. The call covers a broad range of environmental outcomes and sectors, including questions regarding protected landscapes:

**Q13.** *What measures could be used to increase and diversify funding to ensure our Protected Landscapes are sustainably resourced?*

**Q14.** *Would you support greater application of the beneficiary pays principle in Protected Landscapes?*

**Q15.** *Would you support greater application of the polluter pays principle in Protected Landscapes?*

**Q16.** *What are the benefits, and barriers, to businesses investing in actions which help to contribute to 30by30?*

- 1.5     This is not a consultation and doesn't offer firm decisions by Government but seeks evidence and insights to support policy development across the department. We are welcome to share any evidence and insights that we think are helpful for policy development in the department and the protected landscapes team. These can be case studies and examples of things that have

and haven't worked but also new opportunities or barriers (resource, governance, legislation etc) to bringing more money to protected landscapes as organisations and places in the future.

- 1.6 National Parks Partnerships will be coordinating a joint response from National Park Authorities, and we will respond directly too.
- 1.7 We have held some initial discussions with Hilary Cottam who has been commissioned by Defra to review support mechanisms for upland farming and commons. In particular, Hilary's brief includes developing proposals to pilot more bespoke, place based and co-produced schemes of support for upland areas. This resonates strongly with requests that the Lake District National Park Partnership (LDNPP) have made to Government over recent months. I have met with Hilary to discuss the potential advantages of locating such a trial in the Lake District. We have also worked through the LDNPP to mobilise our local MPs in support of this too.

## **2 Partnership activity in relation to upland hill farming**

- 2.1 The Partnership has continuing concerns over the current financial crisis facing our farming community and the implications for the farmers themselves, our rural communities, and the special qualities of our National Park, both cultural and environmental, and our World Heritage Site. As such, since January a small taskforce of partners convened by LDNPA and involving the Country Land and Business Association, National Farmers Union and National Trust with the Partnership Chair, have been working to advocate for improvements to the current agri-environment system to ensure fair support for our farmers which enables them to successfully and sustainably steward our cultural landscape.
- 2.2 Letters have been sent to the DEFRA Permanent Secretary and the DEFRA Farming Minister. Indications from Government suggest that reforms are planned which may benefit small farmers in less favourable areas. However, these are unlikely to materialise for some time.
- 2.3 Over recent weeks separate meetings have been held with each of our four Lake District MPs. All are supportive of our messages and are working to secure an audience with ministers including the Secretary of State to discuss the issues, with an aim of working collaboratively with Government to devise appropriate solutions including quick-win interim measures to address major current shortfalls whilst longer term solutions are worked up.

## **3 Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) 2025/26**

- 3.1 On 18 June, we are hosting a DEFRA regional workshop at Gowbarrow Hall Farm for multiple staff from the 11 northern protected landscapes, followed by a site visit to Ullswater CIC's river restoration work in Matterdale. We are taking the opportunity to present our significant FiPL achievements to date, advocating for the continuation of this valuable fund which is well respected by our farming community. On the following day, 19 June, we are also hosting Historic England and DEFRA on-site visits to some of the Historic Barn Restoration Grant sites in the Ullswater area and will, again, be reiterating an ask for a continuation of this project fund that has worked so well for our cultural landscape.

## **4 Responsible Body status**

- 4.1 I am pleased to report that LDNPA was granted Responsible Body status by DEFRA in January, after a six-month application process. Achieving this status allows us to administer and enter into new legal agreements known as Conservation Covenants. This is a new legal tool designed by DEFRA to enable ecological or historical conservation initiatives and to facilitate private or blended funding streams, such as Biodiversity Net Gain. These agreements become a deed on the land and can remain for any agreed length of time up until perpetuity.
- 4.2 There are many benefits of Responsible Body status for the Authority including:
- Allowing us to support landowners, their tenants and eNGOs (English Non-Governmental Organisations) to deliver conservation objectives funded by private or blended finance and delivering the goals of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
  - Providing developer buyer confidence around the quality and monitoring by adding the LDNPA brand to the project.
- 4.3 As this is not a statutory function, we are under no obligation to accept any agreement, giving us flexibility in projects that we do or do not wish to support. This status allows us to set standards on those projects whereby we can safeguard our Special Qualities and Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) from unintended consequences of schemes. We can, for example, insist that all projects must undergo a Heritage Impact Assessment, be ecologically sound and support local communities.
- 4.4 Income for the Authority can be derived from the agreement, including costs incurred through monitoring requirements. As well as operating within our own administrative area, developers outside of the area can approach us to verify, through the Conservation Covenant, thereby also offering us another income opportunity. Although long-term monitoring arrangements will be funded through the Responsible Body service, these agreements will remain a liability upon the Authority and must be assessed for risk.
- 4.5 Following an initial piloting stage, we will need to decide the scope of the service that we wish to provide, alongside decision making processes, thresholds on risk, quality, and our working boundaries. It is likely the first Conservation Covenant will be taken to our Development Control Committee for a decision later this year. If necessary, and given the newness of this approach, ultimately it may be decided to revert to Authority Committee.

## **5 Visitor Management**

- 5.1 There is much activity regarding visitor management across the Park through the Strategic Visitor Management Group. Concerns around wildfire have now abated to some extent given recent weather conditions, but key messaging on open fires, barbeques and the wider 'Lake District Kind' messaging remain a priority.
- 5.2 We have also initiated our 'influence the influencer work' and have received high levels of engagement and interaction with the posts placed on social media channels.

- 5.3 You will have received copies of Visitor Management Action Plans for Ullswater, Hawkshead and West Windermere, Langdale and Wasdale. More localised Area Action Plans are in place for Stonethwaite, Castlerigg Circle for the solstice, Tilberthwaite, and Harrowslack.
- 5.4 Our Visitor Management Officers continue to organise multi-agency patrols, particularly over Bank Holiday periods, providing greater visible presence.

Background Papers	None
Author/Post	Gavin Capstick/Chief Executive
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