ITEM 9: State of the National Park Report

1. Purpose of Report

2. Recommendations
   a. The Authority is recommended to:
      1) Note the contents of the State of the National Park Report 2018 (Appendix 1 to Item 9); and
      2) Authorise the publication of the State of the National Park Report 2018 (Appendix 1 to Item 9) on the Northumberland National Park website.

3. Implications
   Financial
   a. This is a monitoring report only, measuring progress against the aims and outcomes of the National Park Management Plan 2016-2021. There is no financial information relating to the Authority or commitments to allocate Authority funding contained within the report. The State of the National Park Report itself is intended for publication on the Northumberland National Park website which will minimise any printing/publication costs.

   Equalities
   b. There are no equality implications to this report as it is a monitoring report only. However the State of the National Park Report does include monitoring information on the diversity of National Park residents and visitors.

4. Background
   a. The State of the National Park Report provides a snapshot of the overall health of the National Park and, at its half-way mark, provides an update of the progress in delivering the aims and objectives of the Northumberland National Park Management Plan 2016-2021.

   The Management Plan was developed in close consultation with the communities, businesses and organisations that have an interest in the National Park; these represent the Management Plan Partnership. The plan represents a shared vision for the place and it is important we report on the special qualities of the park, how these qualities are enjoyed and by whom and the economic and social wellbeing of the park.

   b. This is the eighth State of the National Park report which is published when new and updated information becomes available, historically this has been every two to three years, however it should be noted that some information is updated over much longer timescales, such as census data, therefore some information in this report will not have changed since the information published in 2015.

   For the remainder, the increasing pace of digital transformation and web based ‘open source’ data is making it increasingly easy to access public information. This report therefore serves to summarise this content and make it relevant to Northumberland National Park.
c. The 2018 State of the Park report provides an opportunity to assess the progress to date in the achievement of these management plan aims. 2018 also represents what may well be the last opportunity to provide a snapshot of the state of Northumberland National Park prior to some potentially significant changes to national environmental and agricultural policy following Brexit as well as how England’s designated landscapes are managed and administered following the Glover review.

5. Key messages

a. **A Welcoming Park** – The desired outcomes for Aim 1 focus on improving the number of visitors to Northumberland National Park, improving their knowledge of the Special Qualities of the National Park and improving the experience of all those who use the National Park. Together these objectives constitute one of the two primary purposes of National Parks from the Environment Act 1995, ‘Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of national parks by the public’.

b. The Sill has helped to achieve good performance in the three desired outcomes outlined in the Management Plan through high levels of visitor satisfaction, increasing visits and improved education, training and volunteering opportunities. The diversity of the National Park continues to be an area where the Authority aspires to do more and make efforts to attract a wider audience to enjoy the National Park, however this remains an area which has yet to yield results.

c. Northumberland International Dark Sky Park has increased visitors to the Park at different times of year, effectively extending the visitor season of the Park.

d. **A Distinctive Place** – contains objectives which contribute to the foremost purpose of National Parks, namely to ‘Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage’. The four desired outcomes focus on the restoration of habitats, improving biodiversity, restoration and conservation of historic monuments and cultural heritage and the preservation of the National Parks landscape and special qualities.

As part of the core work of the National Park these outcomes are performing well with a wide range of conservation projects ongoing. There remains room for improvement in the management of key habitats and key species as set out in the Authority’s Vision for the National Environment.

e. **A Living, Working Landscape for Now and the Future** – seeks to support economic wellbeing by supporting landowners, tenants and businesses while ensuring that they use sustainable land management and business practices to help achieve the first purpose and second purpose. This is part of the ‘duty’ of National Parks, established in the Environment Act 1995.

In general, Northumberland National Park is doing well with actions which relate to activities which can be achieved through visitor promotion and improving land management. Aspirations relating to improving growth of traditional industries and skills are pushing against global and regional trends and are therefore more difficult to achieve.

f. **Thriving Communities** - is primarily concerned with the socio-economic ‘duty’ and relates to the sustainability of rural communities. Compared to the other areas of the Management Plan this is the aim which is currently underperforming compared to our aspirations. Targets to provide improvements in housing, infrastructure, rural services and renewable generation rely on significant investment from a range of disparate sources. Delivery of much of this infrastructure is led by a range of
external bodies and in recent years, the Authority has made this area less of a priority in the face of significantly reducing resources.

g. **A Valued Asset** – has three outcomes which focus on the National Parks contribution to local, regional and national outcomes. Following the completion of the Sill, there has been a positive impact on the number of visitors using public transport on Hadrian’s Wall, increased total visitor count and improved relationship with local businesses.

Northumberland National Park contribute to a range of landscape scale projects to improve the natural environment, from the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership to Revitalising Redesdale, these projects help to join up wider networks and improve collaboration.

The Authority is also an active member of tourism, farming and historic environment networks in this region and in working closely with the NELEP, and the North of the Tyne and Borderlands growth deals.

Northumberland National Park achieves good progress in meeting these objectives, and it is important that these shared objectives and successes continue to be widely communicated and celebrated.

6. **Conclusion**

   a. The 2018 State of the National Park Report provides an update on the 2015 report where new or additional information is available. It follows the same accessible format as the 2015 report with information presented in bullet points, maps, or graphs.

   b. Overall this year’s State of the National Park report is positive with 81% of outcomes achieving a ‘good’ performance whilst only one outcome is underperforming. Underperforming areas within this report predominantly relate to aspirations for the National Park to attract a wider more diverse audience and to improve the socio-economic future of our communities.

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**Background papers:** Appendix 1: State of the National Park Report 2018