Report 2: Quarterly Sill Update

1. Purpose of Report
To provide Members of the Authority with an update on The Sill project for the reporting period.

2. Recommendations
a) The Authority is recommended to note the contents of the report.

3. Implications
a) Financial: The impact of The Sill on the Authority’s finances is discussed in further detail in Report 3.

b) Equalities: None.

c) Business Plan: The Sill contributes directly to all aspects of Aim 1: A Welcoming Park and also to Aims 4, 5 and 6 in a significant way.

4. Background
a) The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre opened to the public on 29 July 2017 and has achieved or exceeded many of its planned activity targets since the beginning of the project in 2015.

5. Operational Update
a) Visitor Numbers: The new visitor target for 2019-20 has been set at 145,000. Visitor figures are at 95% of the target to the end of August. We are currently planning increased marketing for The Sill as a year round visitor destination, launching our new Winter What's On Guide and exploring winter offers to encourage local visits. We also are programming some high footfall, high profile events in the shoulder season.

Table 1: Year to date cumulative trend in visitor figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2019 Forecast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b) **YHA stays:** For the current year to August occupancy is at 59.1% against a target of 58.1%. The YHA received funding for a six National Citizenship Service programme of activities during July and early August meaning regular occupancy during the week and contributing to the delivery of The Sill’s mission. Each week a group of young people from different backgrounds would spend 5 days at the youth hostel and engage in various activities including archery, kayaking and rock climbing.

c) **Retail Performance:** Up to the beginning of August, retail sales are currently 95% of target with an average year to date spend per head of £1.18 against a target of £1.22. The current profit margin for year to date is 43%, the target remains 45%. Sales have increased by 3% in comparison to the prior year and the spend per head has increased by 11p.

The Sill hosted its first food and drink festival in June and this was a great success, bringing in 113% more visitors than the same weekend the previous year and helping to achieve 87% more income in the shop. This was in addition to income collected from stallholder fees. The food and drink festival will become an annual event at The Sill.

Branded products have been introduced for sale during the last quarter, including water bottles, pens, pencils and rubbers.

Planning is underway for the Christmas Fair, which is on 16th and 17th November this year and the Inspired by our Land selling art exhibition will return to the Stell, running from early November until February 2020.

d) **Café:** Café performance for the year to August is 37% below target (target income for this year is 33% higher than 2018/19). Over the last quarter the café has trialled new menus, with open sandwiches offered in spring followed by hot food, salads and pre-packed sandwiches in the summer months. In addition, a new evening dining offer has been available during July and August. A discounted offer to customers living along the Tyne Valley sparked early interest although numbers have not been consistent. A new website, Oncebrewed.com, was launched at the same time. This allows customers to book for daytime or evening dining. The website also promotes the weddings and private hire on offer at The Sill. We are currently working closely with the café providers on the offer.

e) **Car Parking:** For the period to August 2019 income is at 78% of the year to date target. Sales of annual passes continue to grow, with 44 sold in the last quarter. Day tickets are also selling well; 39 during the same period. Car park income is directly impacted by a decrease in visitor numbers and further investigation into current performance is planned to identify the challenges around achieving income targets.

f) **Hires:** During the last three months room hire has performed well, with 163 attendees at 15 bookings generating £2,345 income, compared to 138 attendees attending 7 bookings and achieving £742 income during the same period last year. This area of work is at 96% of the year to date target with planned activity and forward bookings indicating that we should reach target by year end. We have three corporate away day packages booked for September and October.

g) **Visitor Feedback:** We collate visitor feedback both online and on site. We have seen trip advisor reviews slow considerably but a rise in onsite feedback following the implementation of the digital feedback screen.

**Online:** We have several accounts online where the public can rate and review The Sill:

- Trip Advisor - Current rating 3.5
- Google Business – Current rating 4.3
- Facebook Pages (both NNPA and The Sill) – Current rating 4.5
On Site May to August:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback details</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Okay</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit to the Sill</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main exhibition</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yours Since 1949 exhibition</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>café</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome team</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Activity Programme

a) Activity Days: For the year to August of 2019-20, there have been an additional 9,745 activity days; this takes us to 81% of the full project total. We expect to meet the HLF activity day target.

![Cumulative Number of Activity Days](image)

Table 3: Cumulative activity days from the beginning of project to date

Income for the activity programme continues to improve, over the 12 month period average income has increased from less than £1,000 a month in 2016-17 to more than £3,000 a month in 2018-19. In 2019-20 the income continues to improve with like for like income increasing by 57%. Year to date activity income is £15,064; this is 74% of the £20,460 target.
Table 4: Average activity programme income throughout the project

Although we are showing growth, the income target for end of project is challenging but we have a plan that we submitted to NLHF that we are in the process of delivering. We are in the process of a full forecasting exercise to enable us to minimise the risk of under achieving on income where possible by reducing expenditure.

Education and Engagement Programmes

Education Programme: Up to August 2019-20 has seen continued improvement in growth with like for like engagement increasing 28% year on year.

Table 5: Like for like education activity day comparison

In addition to our regular schools programme highlights have included:

- We delivered the Discover Arts Award in conjunction with Glendale Children’s Day, the children’s work has been displayed at The Sill over the summer.
- Our first Ranger School holiday programme for children aged 11-14. Children could join for the day or the full week. Six young people who were involved in the entire week of activity gained their John Muir Award.

- Work in partnership with Newcastle University, Historic England, and English Heritage. The aim was to work with children from Year 9 from three secondary schools across Northumberland, using the heritage links between the four organisations to inspire the students to be creative, and to explore how a sense of place and learning about heritage enhances art and literacy. The three schools that took part in Sense of Place were Haydon Bridge High School, Bedlington Academy, and Prudhoe Community High School.

**Education Development work moving forward**

- Work with Tyne and Wear Museums exploring a partnership model to co – deliver work at their Sedgecumum site. This will hopefully offer a way to take Northumberland National Park out to engage with urban based schools more easily.

- Long term partnership models with FE providers including Newcastle University, Northumbria University, Northumberland College and Education Partnership North East

- Attending the Schools North East Summit 2019

**Education Programme Feedback**

95% of respondents rated their experience as ‘Excellent’.

A small sample of responses:
- ‘they really enjoyed the week, and even the weather didn’t affect their enjoyment too much!’
- ‘getting into the outdoors helped me understand the landscape more.’
- ‘Students were inspired by the new landscape… the whole day was fantastic. This has been a brilliant experience for all of us.’
- ‘Both the introductory session in school and session at The Sill were fabulous and interactive for all of the children.”
**The Public Engagement Programme:** The year to August 2019-20 has seen like for like event engagement increase 16% year on year. Some additional ‘light engagement’ figures have yet to come in for 2019/20 as these will include active engagement with the public in the Yours Since 1949 exhibition, it is estimated these numbers will be in line with last year’s Digital Landscapes engagement.

![Number of Event Activity Days](image)

Table 6: Like for like public engagement activity days

**In addition to our regular schools programme highlights have included:**

- ‘Weaving Across Borders’ a collaborative exhibition curated by Northumberland Basketry group and Scottish Basket Makers Circle. In addition to the 80 plus objects on display throughout the building, there were also free demonstrations for the public to enjoy, most of the pieces were available to purchase through the shop and a programme of paid activities was on offer.

- Walltown Warrior large scale participation event will take place in September. The events team have worked closely with Marketing to ensure successful marketing and promotion of the event.

- Partnership work with Hexham Forum for two showings of the 1974 film The Living wall as part of the Tyndale Film Festival.

- The Engagement team have been able to welcome 3 urban BAME groups to the Sill: JET (Jobs, Employment & Education); ID on the Tyne (growing confidence in BAME women through the outdoors) and The Comfrey Project (a growing project for refugees & asylum seekers).
Development

- We are working with the Ranger team to develop a Fairy Door Trail that will link with the Duergar Story and we plan to link this with merchandise in the shop.

- We are planning a walk with MIND to mark World Mental Health Awareness Day (to be held on 12th October), and are working with them on a celebration of the end of RED January, MIND’s push for people to do something active each day in January.

- We exploring third party delivery models of regular activity across our sites.

- The Engagement Team are now building into planning how to work together with the retail arm of The Sill on wider building based events with a clear customer message, resulting in increased sales both in retail & activities.

Public Events Feedback

- Ugly Bug Ball: “Wonderful activities, super venue!”
- Swedish Basket Making “The setting was wonderful and I’m delighted to take home my basket.” “Whole day was a pleasure, tutor was knowledgeable and enthusiastic”.
- Print Workshop: “All good – from reception meet and greet and throughout” “Enjoyed the mixed content also emphasising the geography of area by Chris and Duncan”.
- Sill Sunday – Spiders: “Children liked getting up close to the spiders” “I really liked the spider hunt - now I am more interested in spiders and I know lots of facts.”

7. Exhibitions

April saw the installation of an external exhibition designed specifically for The Sill by Discover our Land (Northumberland County Council) to showcase their photography competition winners and runners up. We also supported Northumberland County Council by supplying them with a VR experience and headset design and National Park contact to deliver their engagement programme and extend our own reach.

The current exhibition is Yours Since 1949, an exhibition telling the story of National Parks in the UK. It opened to the public on 22nd July. Reviews have been very positive with many comments being left in the visitor book, the interactive feedback tree and roller banner. They include “I never knew the story behind the creation of National Parks, this is something that everyone should know about” and “What a wonderful exhibition and beautiful design”. The exhibition has attracted press coverage from interviews on Hexham TV, Tyne and Wear TV, articles in the Journal and Hexham Courant as well as national social media coverage. The next temporary exhibition will be the return of Inspired by Our Land a selling exhibition featuring local artists responses to landscape.

Improvements to the permanent exhibition continue to be designed, created and implemented. We are working with a textile artist to tell the story of the different types of farmed landscape from upland to arable and creating a farm themed learning through play activity. Aspects of Yours Since 1949, digital landscapes and other digital content including the BGS film will be inputted.

8. Volunteers:

In the year to August 2019/20 we recorded 1,115 volunteer days, representing 64% achievement of the 1,737 year to date target. However, project to date volunteering remains at 106% of target to date and is at 95% of the project total volunteering figure, 12,144.
Headlines for volunteering in the year to July include:

- The employment of 2 (now former) volunteers into The Sill staff team;
- The establishment of relationships with Blyth Star Enterprises and the Hextol Foundation to provide volunteering opportunities for people with learning and mental health conditions;
- The establishment of a corporate volunteering relationship with Sage plc with a group helping to maintain the boardwalk at Greenlee Lough;
- A 'Digital Archive Project' delivered by a Masters student and volunteers to establish the Authority’s digital image library which has provided content for the ‘Yours Since 1949’ exhibition;
- An intern and volunteers recruited, trained and supporting the ‘Yours Since 1949’ exhibition;
- Volunteers recruited, trained and supporting the new ‘Ranger e-bike tours’;
- A seasonal summer intern adding capacity to the Ranger team;

9. Conclusions

1) Visitor and outreach numbers remain either on or close to the year to date target.
2) We are working with a wide demographic of visitor and from schools, BAME and SEND, dementia charities to families and individuals.
3) Income generation remains key with particular focus on the café, the activity programme and fundraising, but overall The Sill achieving its objectives, with much more potential yet to be realised.

Contact Officers: For further information contact Rosie Thomas Director of Business Development, email rosie.thomas@nnpa.org.uk

Background papers: None