Report 7: Breamish Valley Future Vision

1. Purpose of the report

This report on the progress of the development of a future vision for the Breamish Valley and seeks members support for the key concepts to be used to shape a future vision for the Valley and Ingram and the phasing of the project.

2. Recommendations:

The Members are recommended to:

- Note the focus of development of a partnership branding opportunity which drives business out from The Sill: National Discovery Centre into the wider park, establishing safe and tested routes for new and defined audience areas;

- Note the progress of the development of a vision for the Valley linked to the opportunities realised by the Cheviot Hills Heritage Project; and

- Support these concepts and the proposed phasing as the basis on which to begin to move forward public and partner engagement in establishing a cohesive vision which develops the potential of the Valley as a whole.

3. Implications:

a. Financial - £100,000 of philanthropic funding was secured in 2018 to help take forward improvements in the Breamish Valley and to support the development of a cohesive vision.

b. Equalities - None

c. Link to Business Plan – The development of a future vision for the Breamish Valley relates directly to:

AIM 1: CONTRIBUTING TO A WELCOMING PARK

- Develop Two Sill Satellite sites, prioritising locations in the north of the National Park to greatly enhance the visitor welcome and attract more visitors to all areas.

- The project will also contribute to:

AIM 2: CONTRIBUTING TO A DISTINCTIVE PLACE

- Develop a new project to enhance access to, understanding of, and community engagement with the unique historic environment in the Cheviot Hills.

AIM 4: CONTRIBUTING TO THRIVING COMMUNITIES

- Support sustainable local businesses and employment.

4. Background

a. The Breamish Valley is one of the most significant landscapes in our National Park, containing the remains of past human settlements and activity over 5,000 years. The Valley includes England’s largest scheduled monument - 570ha of fell on Ingram Farm. A landscape scheduling which includes the remains of settlement, burial and farming from the Bronze Age (2,500BC – 700BC) to Medieval times (circa 1600 AD).
b. The Breamish Valley has a long history of visitors to the National Park seeking both active pursuits and passive recreation. As such it offers a great opportunity to fulfil our aim of engaging more and different people with the Park and as such provides the opportunity for the Authority to extend the impact of The Sill into this area of the Park.

c. If we are to make the valley more accessible to future generations we must ensure protection and preservation of the precious assets and a relationship of positive and proactive local support, consensus and participation from the communities who live, work and visit its diverse landscape currently.

d. In July 2017 the Estates Development Strategy concluded in relation to the Breamish Valley that;

“To consider the land holding we have within the greater valley context and develop the concept of a Sill Satellite that encompasses the potential of the valley as a whole”.

The development of a vision for the Breamish Valley was identified in a report to the Authority in December 2017 as a wider ambition within the Business Plan which would require additional resources and capacity to deliver.

Some resources from philanthropic funding were made available in 2018 to help explore the existing position in the Valley and to undertake an internal SWOT analysis and this is summarised below.

5. Existing provision and use

a. We currently have an infrastructure presence in the valley with a café and exhibition site, 3 car parks, parking at Ingram café, Bulbys’ Wood and Ingram Bridge, 2 public toilet sites and 4 promoted visitor walks, 35 footpaths, bridleways and byways including footpath access high in the valley at Hartside and on to Linhope Spout.

b. Staffing resource for the area is limited to Ranger support as required and Farming Officer support to farmers and landowners.

c. Other visitor infrastructure connections are available within easy reach of the valley for example: Wooler town and its’ services to the north, Branton Lakes Nature Reserve on the edge of the valley and the Sandstone and Pennine cycle ways closely linked.

d. A traditional and historic visitor link is still apparent in the summer months as families’ predominantly from the north east still travel on day trips to picnic on the haughland beside the river.

e. The Ingram Valley is a promoted destination from our website and literature and is actively promoted as a destination through The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre. Currently we do not have information to define users and visitors to the valley and its current amenities.

f. Ingram café and exhibition centre is currently open all year round and is currently leased to a tenant, 2019 being year 2 of a 3 year lease. The building is owned and maintained by Northumberland National Park Authority within our current Estates budget. The exhibition was installed in 2004 and is limited to the Breamish Valley Archaeology Project which concluded at that time. Some future investment would be required in the medium term to ensure its sustainability as a public engagement space. We are currently not able to quantify visitor footfall through the tenant. There is no current operating cost to NNPA for this facility as resources were reduced following the 2010 - 2016 budget cuts.

g. Through the Traditional Farm Buildings pilot project funded through Countryside Stewardship, we have been successful in working together with local farms and
landowners to secure funding for up to £460k investment in stabilisation and protection of the planned agricultural farmstead at Ingram Farm. Work commences in April 2020 and in 2025 these buildings will be released from restrictions from the funding body allowing for potential changes of future use.

h. Community links in the valley are strong with general support and high personal investment in the heritage of the landscape. The Ingram Valley is home to 119 inhabitants (2011 Census) with mixed dwellings of homes, employment residences and holiday accommodation. The main landholding sits with one landowner, the Linhope Estate with who the Authority enjoys a positive working relationship.

i. It should be noted that some proposed new activities and facilities have met with some local opposition in recent years. Consideration of future development will need to be in close consultation with the local community and engagement early in any future thinking is essential.

j. Some mapping of the current position has been carried out by officers, this has formed a baseline of information gathered regarding the valley and includes consideration of:
   - Landscape and Land Management
   - Communities
   - Wildlife and Biodiversity
   - Historic Environment
   - Visitor Access and experience, recreation and engagement
   This is a useful base of information from which to initiate engagement with the local community and partners.

6. Wider Project Concept and Phasing
   a. The operation of The Sill and development and refinement of the activities and engagement programme is helping inform the role that Ingram can play. Likewise the future role of the Breamish Valley will be shaped by the developing Cheviot Hills Heritage Project (See Report 6).
   b. If accepted this project will form an exploration and study of the archaeology of the Cheviot Hills across the border, including the whole of the Breamish Valley. This project will seek funding from a wide range of funders including the National Lottery Heritage Fund and is expected to run for a period of up to ten years with support to substantial heritage understanding, educational value and visitor engagement and infrastructure opportunities.
   c. It is considered that as this project becomes more developed that it will be important in shaping future needs and potential in Ingram and the Breamish Valley. For this reason it is proposed that the Cheviot Hills Heritage Project should be initially taken forward ahead of the development of the Vision for the Breamish Valley.
   d. This will allow the former to inform the latter but is also necessary given the available capacity to take forward projects on this scale.
   e. The next phase of the Breamish Valley vision is therefore to engage local communities, the public and partners in order to assess the need and support for the initiative.

7. SWOT

A SWOT analysis helps to form our current position verses future considerations.
### Strengths
- Rich heritage value of valley
- Highly engaged visitors
- Tranquility of valley
- Future educational value of offer
- Rich biodiversity within valley
- Partnership links within local community and beyond
- NLHF fundability - (specifically when linked to heritage and community)
- Variety of offer to many sectors of visitor

### Weaknesses
- Current visitor infrastructure
- Need sustainable business model – linked to The Sill

### Opportunities
- Create a heritage interpretation legacy
- Promote better understanding of the landscape
- Build strong community engagement and links to harder to reach communities
- Partnership engagement
- Sustainable community benefits and engagement
- To build sustainable business model which links to The Sill

### Threats
- Lack of community support
- Erosion of rich heritage
- Impact of visitors on biodiversity and tranquility
- Financial/resources sustainability

### 8. Conclusions and next steps and timeframe

**a.** A vision for the Breamish Valley is one of the project ambitions identified in this 2017-2021 Business Plan. Progress has been made in the development of this thinking, which is significantly linked to the future Cheviot Hills Heritage Project.

It is anticipated that significant synergy will link these two concepts together to create a unique and sustainable future vision and visitor offer.

If this concept is adopted phasing would run alongside those discussed in the Cheviot Hills Heritage Project paper (Report 6).

**b.** Members are asked to note the progress to date and agree the concept and phasing as the basis to take forward public and partner engagement.

### Contact Officer:
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### Background papers
- Estates Development Strategy July 2017
- Cheviot Hills Heritage Project paper September 2019 (Report 6)