REPORT 8: Climate Change – Future Action

1. Purpose of Report

This report seeks the Authority’s agreement that a global climate emergency exists and outlines the approaches in which the Authority will look to take action to reduce its own carbon emissions in order to reach net-zero by 2030. In addition, the report sets out a proposal for how the Authority will work with land managers and key stakeholders to take forward climate change mitigation and adaptation work in the National Park and will promote and encourage responsible climate related decision making from members of the public visiting the National Park.

2. Recommendations

a. Northumberland National Park Authority acknowledges that a climate emergency exists;

b. Members agree to the production of a fully costed Action Plan that will identify what steps are needed to commit the Authority to reaching a net-zero emissions target from its own activities by 2030, subject to resources and agreement as part of the Authority’s future priorities;

c. Members agree that The Authority will work with Northumberland County Council to assist in the delivery of the County wide Climate Emergency Action Plan;

d. Members note the bid to Defra that, if successful, will enable the Authority to engage with key stakeholders and land managers in order to inform the new Environmental Land Manage System that will replace the current countryside and environmental stewardship grant systems post Brexit. This work will include a focus on whole farm carbon accounting and identifying steps to be taken to move towards carbon neutral upland farming systems.

3. Implications

a. Financial: As our previous experience in this area of work has shown, (see Authority report, Item 11, 10/07/2019) in order to reach a net-zero target by 2030, significant resources will have to be identified, acquired and set aside now, necessitating a change in the priorities of the current 2016-2021 Business Plan and then embedded within the subsequent Business Plans.

b. Equalities: There are no equality implications from this report.

c. Business Plan: The recommendations in this report will contribute to Aim 2 ‘Contributing to a Distinctive Place’, Aim 3 ‘Contributing to a Living Working Landscape’, Aim 4 ‘Contributing to Thriving Communities’, Aim 5 ‘Contributing to a Thriving Asset’ and Aim 6 ‘Maintaining and Excellent Organisation that is Fit for the Future’.

Subject to resources being identified, the implementation of the above recommendations will see a significant reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that arise from the Authority’s own activities, declining to net-zero by 2030. In addition, future work with key stakeholders will see existing carbon stores within the National Park conserved and enhanced whilst greenhouse gas emissions arising from land management practices and visitor activities and associated infrastructure reduced. Infrastructure and businesses will become more resilient to the impacts of climate change.
4. Background

a. In 2015, the UK Government signed the Paris Agreement as part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It marked a major step in tackling climate change by strengthening the commitments to limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This went further than the current UK Climate Change Act and makes a national low carbon economy an absolute necessity to comply with the Agreement.

b. The latest report (06/10/2018), from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) advised that carbon emissions must be reduced globally by at least 45% by 2030 (from 2010 levels) and reach net-zero by 2050 if we are to avoid the worst effects of climate change by keeping warming below 1.5°C. Following the publication of this report, numerous towns, cities and local authorities around the country declared a state of climate emergency. Whilst there is no set definition of what a ‘climate emergency’ is or a list of activities that are needed to address it, the aim to be carbon neutral by, at the latest, 2030 is a common theme that runs across many of the public statements.

c. On the 2nd May 2019, the Committee on Climate Change produced a report entitled ‘Net Zero: The UK’s contribution to stopping global warming’ the key findings being:

- The Committee on Climate Change recommends a new emissions target for the UK: net-zero greenhouse gases (GHG) by 2050.
- In Scotland, they recommend a net-zero date of 2045, reflecting Scotland’s greater relative capacity to remove emissions than the UK as a whole.
- In Wales, they recommend a 95% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050.

A net-zero GHG target for 2050 would deliver on the commitment that the UK made by signing the Paris Agreement. It was thought achievable with known technologies, alongside improvements in people’s lives, and within the expected economic cost that Parliament accepted when it legislated the existing 2050 target for an 80% reduction from 1990. However, this would only be possible if clear, stable and well-designed policies to reduce emissions further were introduced across the economy without delay. Existing policy was deemed insufficient for even the current targets. In the same week MPs approved a motion to declare an environmental and climate emergency.

d. On the 12th June 2019 Prime Minister Therese May announced that the United Kingdom will eradicate its net contribution to climate change by 2050 and in so doing would put the UK at the forefront of G7 countries to legislate for net-zero emissions. That means emissions from, for example, homes, transport, farming and industry will have to be avoided completely or - in the most difficult examples - offset by natural carbon capture measures or mechanically extracting and storing CO₂ out of the atmosphere.

e. On the 11th June 2019 members of Northumberland County Council’s Cabinet declared a climate emergency and published a statement of intent entitled Responding to Climate Change. The Council is committed to work with the Government to achieve carbon neutrality for the county of Northumberland by 2030, whilst appreciating that this will require a concerted national shift in behaviours and significant technological advancements. In addition, the Council intends to expand the existing officer led climate change steering group that is responsible for developing and delivering the Council’s Climate Change Action Plan, to include representation from partner organisations, including Northumberland National Park Authority.
f. On the 10th July 2019 the Committee on Climate Change published its progress report, ‘Reducing UK Emissions’ to Parliament and recommends that:-

- Net-zero policy is embedded across all levels and departments of Government
- Government policies to reduce UK emissions to net zero are business-friendly
- The public are fully engaged in the UK’s net-zero transition
- The UK strongly leads international action to tackle climate change

g. At the Authority’s Annual meeting on the 10th July 2019 Members received a paper that identified how the Authority, on the back of Government investment and a change in its strategic thinking, was successful between 2008 and 2014 in realising and embedding actions that significantly reduced the greenhouse emissions resulting from the Authority’s operations by 49%. In addition, the Authority successfully engaged with land managers to develop new techniques that help mitigate the impact of climate change on the special qualities of the National Park and this historical activity continues to have a positive ongoing impact today.

h. The actions identified above and recommendations to Members do not link specifically to actions in the current Business Plan as work on climate change was specifically de-prioritised as a result of austerity measures imposed upon the Authority back in 2011.

5. **The Authority’s Statement of Intent**

a. Northumberland National Park Authority acknowledges that a state of climate emergency exists and, based upon past experience and given appropriate resources, it can take a lead in the national and regional response to climate change in order to meet the Government’s goal of the UK achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. This can be achieved by:-

i. The Authority achieving a position of net-zero emissions associated with its own activities by 2030, and;

ii. Working with key partners including Northumberland County Council, land managers and visitors to influence decision making and activity within the National Park to achieve the UK goal of being net-zero by 2050.

iii. Working with key partners we will take action to make infrastructure and businesses more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

6. **Next Steps**

a. Resources, financial and human, are identified and will need to be acquired and set aside to develop a fully costed Action Plan within the next six months to deliver on point (i) above. This is not easy given the wider resource constraints of the Authority and will require clear prioritisation;

b. A comprehensive review of the natural capital of the National Park needs to be undertaken, seeking to specifically identify and maximise the opportunity for conserving and enhancing the existing carbon stores and carbon sequestration opportunities that exist across the National Park;

c. Land managers and key stakeholders need to be engaged over the next 12 in order to develop an Environmental Land Management System to replace the current agri-environment system and in so doing, ensure that carbon storage, carbon sequestration and carbon neutral land management is put at the forefront of a new ‘public money for public goods’ approach to agricultural grant aid. The
Authority is already actively working on this through the bid to the ELMS and T&T programme.

d. Climate Change mitigation and adaptation will therefore need to be prioritised by Members and embedded within the public consultation and drafting of the 2022 – 2027 National Park Management Plan and the Authority's own future Business Plans.

7. Conclusions

Inactivity is no longer an option when it comes to tackling the causes of climate change and the Authority, when resources were made available, has a good track record in adapting and mitigating against the impacts of climate change. Northumberland National Park Authority, through the existing knowledge and passion of its Members, staff and volunteers, and effective use of the resources available to hand such as The Sill National Landscape Discovery Centre, is well placed to become a regional and national lead in the efforts to combat climate change. This paper sets out the immediate actions needed to be taken in order to re-align the Authority’s work with the global climate change agenda.

Contact Officer: For further information contact Robert Mayhew, Head of Conservation on 01434 611539 or e-mail: robert.mayhew@nnpa.org.uk

Background papers:

i) Item 11. Climate Change Update Report – Northumberland National Park Authority Annual Meeting on the 10th July 2019;
ii) Global Warming of 1.5°C - The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) October 6th 2018
iii) Climate Change Statement by Prime Minister Theresa May on the 12th June 2019;
iv) Responding to Climate Change – Northumberland County Council’s Statement of Intent June 2019;
v) Net Zero: The UK’s contribution to stopping global warming - Committee on Climate Change report, May 2019
vi) Reducing UK Emissions - Committee on Climate Change progress report June 2019