

**Committee**     **AUDIT AND REVIEW**  
**Date:**           **12 July 2016**

**Report:**         **LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE USE OF VOLUNTEERS ACROSS  
AUTHORITY WORK PROGRAMMES**

### **Purpose of report**

1. To provide an assessment of the ways in which volunteers have been involved across the Authority's work programmes over the past five years, and to identify lessons learned to be taken into account in the development of volunteering.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

2. That Members note the variety of work undertaken through volunteers and agree the recommendations for development of volunteering set out in the **Annex paragraph 35**.

### **Strategic Planning Framework**

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:
  - **Corporate Plan Objectives for 2016/17:**  
*Plan and manage all aspects of the National Park Authority's business to make the most effective use of our resources.*  
*Give people from all backgrounds an opportunity to enjoy and make a difference to the National Park by providing at least 5,000 volunteer days per year.*

### **Background**

4. Reports on lessons learned from 'major projects' provide Members with an opportunity to hear from the officers about what has been achieved; what worked and what didn't, and make recommendations for future project development and management across the Authority. In April, Members agreed that 'Volunteers – looking at the way in which volunteers have been used across the range of the Authority's work in recent years' should be one of the 'major projects' that should be reviewed and reported this year.
5. It is important to note this paper is not a review of the whole volunteering programme. It is focused on particular aspect (project) of that programme. In 2001, the Authority created 'Dales Volunteers' (a dedicated network of committed volunteers who could contribute across the range of the Authority's work). In 2011, a revised strategy was

adopted that expanded the Authority's vision for volunteering and provided a framework for its development across the full range of the Authority's work programmes. The purpose of this project review is to look at the way in which volunteers have actually been involved, and to identify any lessons that should inform the development of the volunteers programme. As such, it concentrates mainly, but not exclusively, on our Dales Volunteers Service, which provides 70% of volunteer days in the National Park.

## **Achievements**

6. On the whole the Volunteering Strategy has been successful:
  - a. Volunteers have contributed significantly to the achievement of our objectives.
  - b. For some areas of work, we have achieved substantially more than would have been achieved with paid staff alone, with some activities such as events delivered solely by volunteers.
  - c. Individuals and groups of people have had the opportunity to make a difference to the National Park.
7. These achievements are the greater because over the last five years the Authority has experienced a 40% reduction in its core grant in real terms; forcing dramatic changes to its staffing and budgets. Despite these challenges, volunteer numbers and days contributed during this period have remained constant, with an average of 5,500 volunteer days each year between 2011 and 2015. This level of volunteering has been maintained alongside measures to increase our efficiency (e.g. recruiting volunteers only from within specified mileage limits), and good volunteer management by staff.

## **Findings**

8. Over the past five years the ambition to develop volunteering in new fields of the Authority's work has not been wholly realised. This review identifies a number of reasons for this, and suggests areas for further development in the Authority's approach to volunteering. The findings (see **Annex**) will be taken into account in reviewing the Volunteers Strategy later this year, and the staff reorganisation.

## **Conclusion**

9. For many work areas Volunteers are an integral part of how the Authority's programmes are delivered. Volunteers have been helping us look after the Yorkshire Dales National Park for over 50 years. However, integration and involvement of volunteers is patchy when taken across the Authority's work as a whole.

**Kathryn Beardmore**  
**Director of Park Services**

28 June 2016

## LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE VOLUNTEER PROJECT

### INTENTION OF THE PROJECT

#### Why was the project set up?

1. Volunteering provides individuals and groups of people with opportunities to make a difference to the National Park. It enables people to contribute to the long-term conservation, enhancement, understanding and enjoyment of the Yorkshire Dales. From the Authority's perspective volunteers enable the Authority to achieve more, with its limited resources, than could be achieved with paid staff alone.
2. In 2011, the Authority adopted a revised Volunteer Strategy. Over the previous 10 years volunteers had been involved in a wide range of activities, but there was recognition during the Strategy's development that volunteers had expertise, skills or interests in a wide variety of relevant subjects and that the volunteer resource could be applied more effectively across a greater range of programmes and activities. To that end a proposal to test an 'action plan' was included in the revised Strategy. This was a plan to identify how volunteers would be deployed to help with specific activities across different programmes together with the staff time and resources required. It was recognised that there were challenges ahead and that new ways of working needed to be found. Volunteering could be expanded into new activities because there was an un-met demand for conservation volunteering across Northern England at that time.

#### What was the project intended to achieve?

3. In 2011 the revised Volunteer Strategy expanded the Authority's vision for volunteering. The ambition of the strategy was specifically to:
  - a. Further develop volunteering through innovative approaches in *existing* fields of work
  - b. Develop volunteering in *new* fields of the Authority's work.
4. The broad intention of the project was set out in the National Park Management Plan (2013-18) objective B8:

*Give people from all backgrounds an opportunity to enjoy and make a difference to the National Park by providing at least 5,000 volunteer days per year.*
5. This review examines our progress against the two ambitions set out in the Volunteer Strategy as described in paragraph 3 above.

#### Original timescale

6. Volunteering is a long-established and ongoing activity for the Authority, stretching back over 50 years. However, the timescale for the revised Volunteer Strategy was five years (2011-2016). This review looks at progress over this period.

## Original resourcing

7. The budget allocated to the volunteers programme was:

*Table 1: Budget for volunteers out of pocket expenses, training and clothing:*

| 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| £80.8k  | £61.8k  | £61.8k  | £61.8k  |

8. This budget does not include staff time required to manage the volunteering programme. In 2012, the volunteer action plan estimated that 558 days, i.e. 2.1 FTE of staff time was required to facilitate the programmed volunteering activity alongside a further 1.3 FTE required for general administration of volunteering by the Area Ranger (Volunteers) and the Volunteers Support Officer. This excludes 'corporate' staff costs such as the finance team processing expenses.

## Means of delivery

9. Following the restructure of the Authority's workforce in 2011, an Area Ranger took over as Volunteers Coordinator (this was expected to take up a third of their time). They were to provide strategic leadership and coordination of the Authority's Dales Volunteer service; with the Volunteers Support Officer providing administrative support.
10. Dales Volunteers are the Authority's dedicated network of volunteers who contribute to activities across a range of programmes. The Dales Volunteers service was structured into four area teams each works closely with the respective Ranger teams to support area-based activities. For example: public rights of way maintenance, path surveying, visitor management and events. In addition to these four area teams there was also a team of volunteers working at the Dales Countryside Museum. Dales Volunteers also provided help to specialist officers to support programmes that were to be organised on a park-wide basis. For example: Buildings at Risk surveys, outreach activities, woodland surveying and species monitoring. Each area and specialist team of volunteers had a designated coordinating/key volunteer who provided one point of contact and worked alongside paid staff to deliver the area and park-wide activities.
11. On the ground volunteering opportunities would be delivered by a range of staff. This included any officer whose programme of work did, or had the potential to include actions which could be delivered with the support of volunteers. In particular:
- Area Rangers would lead the management of the Dales Volunteer area teams;
  - Specialist Officers (e.g. Learning and Engagement Officer, Building and Wildlife Conservation Officers) would lead on park-wide activities.

The level of individual staff involvement would be dependent upon the suitability of each particular activity for volunteers. The action plan outlined the staff time required.

12. Outside the Dales Volunteer structure, the Authority also aimed to engage with other volunteers (both individuals and groups), by:
- a. Continuing to provide work experience and work placements;

- b. Working with community organisations and other organisations;
- c. Engaging with people from 'under-represented groups';
- d. Engaging with other individuals and groups.

## THE REALITY

### Actual achievements to date

13. Over the five year period of this project volunteers have given a total of 28,137 days of their time to help look after the National Park (a day is on average 7.5 hours or more including travel time). Annually, between 600 and 1,000 individuals have volunteered with the Authority. Of these, approximately 200 volunteered regularly as part of the Dales Volunteers service and provided 20,138 of these volunteer days.

Table 2: Total number of volunteering days facilitated each year (all volunteers)

| Total          | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 | 2015/16 |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| volunteer days | 5715    | 5076    | 6129    | 5562    | 5655    |

14. Volunteers have contributed to a wide range of different activities across many areas of the Authority's work, from surveying archaeological features to leading events. However, the majority of this volunteering activity is around rights of way survey and maintenance and open access patrols.

Table 3: Percentage of Dales Volunteer days by activity/programme over the last five years

| Activity or Programme             | % of Volunteer Days |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Rights of Way                     | 45%                 |
| Volunteers coordination           | 11%                 |
| Open Access (patrols)             | 11%                 |
| Dales Countryside Museum          | 7%                  |
| Events                            | 6%                  |
| Trees & Woodlands                 | 4%                  |
| Biodiversity                      | 4%                  |
| Building Conservation             | 2%                  |
| Archaeology                       | 2%                  |
| Car Parks                         | 2%                  |
| Authority/General/Community/Other | 2%                  |
| Outreach                          | 2%                  |
| Education                         | 1%                  |
| Geology / Geodiversity            | <1%                 |
| Communication                     | <1%                 |
| Sustainable Tourism               | <1%                 |
| Interpretation                    | <1%                 |

NB For the number of Dales Volunteer days over this period 2011/2012 to 2015/16 see Table 6

15. The number of days given by volunteers, across the five years of this review, has a notional value of £2,110,275. This is based on a volunteer day valued at £75 a day and is the figure used by National Parks England.

### Actual timescale

16. The ambition in the Volunteer Strategy (the project), has been in place for five years.

### Actual cost

17. The actual expenditure has been below budget for all five years. The main reason is the volunteers' travel expenses expenditure, which have reduced during the project. This is because the number of Dales Volunteers not claiming travelling expenses has increased from 47 out of 204 (23%) in 2011/12 to 91 out of 217 (42%) 2015/16.

Table 4: Actual expenditure for Dales Volunteers 2011/12 - 2015/16

|                     | 2011/12        | 2012/13        | 2013/14        | 2014/15        | 2015/16        |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Mileage Expenses    | £43,364        | £42,559        | £46,779        | £39,595        | £35,247        |
| Clothing            | £1,189         | £993           | £240           | £800           | £598           |
| Equipment           | £532           | £2,002         | £1,916         | £2,101         | £1,885         |
| Training            | £3,013         | £2,535         | £3,992         | £3,192         | £2,016         |
| Meetings            | £2,100         | £2,287         | £2,309         | £2,453         | £1,876         |
| <b>Actual Total</b> | <b>£50,198</b> | <b>£50,376</b> | <b>£55,236</b> | <b>£48,141</b> | <b>£41,622</b> |

18. The staff time involved in coordination and administration has increased slightly to 1.45 FTE from 1.3 FTE. Other staff time involved in facilitating Dales Volunteer activity on the ground has also increased from 2.1 FTE to 4 FTE (based on the 2015/16 work programme figures). This is largely because of the staffing of the Parish Wildlife Project is now included and the increase in use of volunteers by the Ranger Service.

### Actual means of delivery

19. The actual means of delivery was as originally envisaged. Over the last 5 years Dales Volunteers have provided the majority of volunteer support to the Authority, providing on average 71% of volunteer days every year.

Table 5: Number of volunteering days by type 2011/12 - 2015/16

|                                    | 2011/12     | 2012/13     | 2013/14     | 2014/15     | 2015/16     |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Dales Volunteers                   | 4193        | 3339        | 4495        | 4212        | 3899        |
| Other Volunteers                   | 1522        | 1737        | 1634        | 1350        | 1756        |
| <b>Total no. of volunteer days</b> | <b>5715</b> | <b>5076</b> | <b>6129</b> | <b>5562</b> | <b>5655</b> |

20. Other volunteers with whom the Authority engages make a smaller but still significant contribution. It is worth noting that a particular growth area in volunteering has been through the Parish Wildlife Project, which has seen a rise from 125 volunteer days in 2011/12 to 664 in 2015/16 with a specific officer to facilitate volunteering activity.

21. Generally, volunteering activities have been facilitated by many staff across a range of programmes and activities. However, the direct staffing support has changed. In 2013 the Area Ranger who undertook the volunteer coordination alongside their substantive post left the Authority. This created the opportunity to re-establish a dedicated Volunteers Coordinator post, as had been the case before the restructure in 2011, although this was only on a part time basis (17 hours a week rather than full-time).

## **SUSTAINING THE PROJECT**

22. While the revised Volunteer Strategy has a clear shelf-life of five years, (it will be reviewed this year) volunteering is not a typical 'project' with a start and finish date. It is an important part of how the Authority works and one of its priority programmes.

23. Sustaining volunteering provision in the future needs to take into account of the lessons learnt from our experiences over the last 5 years (and all the years before!). The current reorganisation provides an opportunity to act upon the recommendations highlighted in this review. In addition, a revised Volunteer Strategy will provide a framework for the development of volunteering over the next 5 years (2016-2021).

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **What went well, and why?**

24. On the whole the Volunteering Strategy has been successful:

- a. Volunteers have contributed significantly to achieving Authority objectives;
- b. The Authority has achieved more than would have been achieved with paid staff alone, with some programmes being delivered solely through volunteers;
- c. Individuals and groups of people have had the opportunity to make a difference.

25. The Dales Volunteers network is both well-established, and largely self-managing with individual key volunteers providing an interface between staff and volunteers. Some volunteering activities are completely managed and supervised by volunteers.

26. Volunteering and staff have been flexible, with some areas of volunteering being reduced (e.g. open access) while others, (eg rights of way maintenance) have increased in accordance with the Authority's priorities over the past five years.

27. There was concern amongst some staff that they would be replaced by volunteers – given the severe cuts. However, officers have understood that in some areas the choice has been between delivery by volunteers or complete cessation of the work. Austerity measures meant that the Authority had to develop new ways of working.

28. A better handle was gained of the true cost, to the Authority of volunteering. With benchmarking being undertaken of some volunteer activities against using contractors.

29. In 2011, some established Dales Volunteers travelled significant distances to their volunteering activity. Over time, the policy of recruiting only from within 35 (SE / SW) or 40 (NE / NW) miles from the volunteer's work base has brought down the travel element of the cost of volunteering. There has also been a significant decline in the

number of volunteers who choose to claim expenses. This is thought to be the result of volunteers showing their support for the Authority in challenging financial times.

30. For Education and Events activities the Authority was clear that these would only continue through volunteers. This led to a fundamental review of what, and how, these programmes were delivered so they are now cost neutral.

### What went less well, and why?

31. The desire to develop volunteering in new fields of the Authority's work has not been wholly realised. The proposed action plans for volunteering activities were developed, to assist in prioritising work programmes, determining training needs and enhancing effectiveness, but they didn't help in the way expected.
32. Over the last 5 year period the largest area of growth for volunteering has been on rights of way; and now over half of all volunteering is now aligned with Ranger Services. While this has helped the Authority to continue to meet its objectives for this programme, opportunities outside of ranger-led work are still more limited and have not seen any significant growth. In fact in comparison to the preceding 5 years to 2011, there has been an actual drop in number of volunteer days in some work areas.

Table 6: Number of volunteering days from Dales Volunteers and % change over time

| Activity or Programme             | 2006/7–2010/11 | 2011/12–2015/16 | ↑ ↓         |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Archaeology                       | 317            | 392             | ↑ 24%       |
| Biodiversity                      | 1,567          | 838.5           | ↓ 46%*      |
| Building Conservation             | 448            | 495.5           | ↑ 11%       |
| Car Parks                         | 162            | 361             | ↑ 123%      |
| Dales Countryside Museum          | 496            | 1331.5          | ↑ 168%**    |
| Events / Outreach (combined)      | 2,611          | 1591            | ↓ 39%       |
| Education                         | 302            | 242.5           | ↓ 20%       |
| Farm Conservation                 | -              | -               | -           |
| Geology / Geodiversity            | 39             | 79.5            | ↑ 104%      |
| Interpretation                    | 88             | 32              | ↓ 64%       |
| Open Access (patrols)             | 3,548          | 2176            | ↓ 23%       |
| Pennine Bridleway                 | 289            | 0               | ↓ -         |
| Rights of Way                     | 6,086          | 9108.5          | ↑ 50%       |
| Tourism                           | 0              | 32.5            | ↑ -         |
| Trees & Woodlands                 | 794            | 845.5           | ↑ 6%        |
| Volunteers coordination           | 1,971          | 2223            | ↑ 13%       |
| Authority/ Community/Other/comms  | -              | 389             | ↑ N/A***    |
| <b>Total Dales Volunteer days</b> | <b>18,718</b>  | <b>20,138</b>   | <b>↑ 8%</b> |

\* Does not include Parish Wildlife project figures (see paragraph 20 for details of increase)

\*\* Growth of volunteering at DCM partly a result of better recording of duties

\*\*\* Recording of duties different between 06/07 – 10/11



33. While the Dales Volunteers area-based structure works well in supporting Ranger-led activities the ambition to further develop volunteering through innovative approaches in existing fields of work has been limited. Potentially, the lack of flexibility within the current Dales Volunteer structure, with volunteers required to be part of an area team and commit 10-15 days a year does not encourage innovative approaches.
34. This review has identified a number of barriers preventing further expansion of volunteering:
- a. Limited staff capacity to engage with and supervise volunteers
  - b. Limited staff confidence in identifying suitable tasks for volunteers
  - c. Lack of experience amongst many staff as to how to manage and motivate volunteers
  - d. Finding the right volunteers for the right tasks
  - e. Lack of appropriate volunteering structures or flexibility
  - f. Expectations – of staff and volunteers
  - g. A lack of training and support for staff working with volunteers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

35. The Authority has a very strong commitment to volunteering, but to make the next step change requires a commitment across the organisation to improve and further embed volunteering. The current reorganisation offers an opportunity to do this and to build on our existing volunteering experiences and how we engage with volunteers. This review has highlighted specific areas for development:
- a. Further develop volunteering in existing fields of work.  
The current resource situation, including the challenges of the boundary extension, will require more officers to think about how best to involve volunteers in delivering their areas of work. There is always the opportunity to refine how we engage with volunteers in existing fields of work to ensure the best outcomes for both volunteers and Authority. Officers need to have the time to think carefully about their actual and potential engagement with volunteers, and the Volunteer Coordinator needs time to give them sufficient support. The proposal within the current staff reorganisation of the Volunteer Coordinator (renamed Volunteer Development Officer) and becoming a full-time post should help as a first step.
  - b. Better involve volunteers across more areas of the Authority's work  
Volunteers have the potential to contribute to all of our work programmes. In theory, there is no limit to the skills and expertise that a volunteer can bring, and there is an obvious opportunity to involve volunteers in delivering objectives across the whole of the Authority's work. It is suggested that each directorate assess how volunteers are currently involved in delivering different areas of work within their sections, and how they could be better involved in delivering Authority objectives in the future.
  - c. Fully integrate volunteers across the whole organisational structure  
There is an opportunity to make volunteering central to how this Authority works, with staff working more closely with volunteers to deliver objectives. Fully integrating staff and volunteers depends on more of our staff being able to work

with volunteers, and creating a culture where this is the norm. It's about volunteers being perceived and treated in much the same way as staff, by staff. It's also about staff being confident and capable of working with volunteers and volunteers feeling confident and capable of being fully involved. This means establishing the support and training required to enable staff to work successfully with volunteers, and implementing it to achieve common goals.

d. Develop more innovative and flexible approaches to volunteering

Dales Volunteers are the mainstay of volunteering at the Authority and their role should not be diminished. However, there is an opportunity to also develop new ways of volunteering that complement the existing structure, and allow for other innovative and flexible approaches to volunteering. It is suggested that for different areas of work different volunteering structures may be helpful; this will enable the right volunteer to be found for the right task. Volunteers should no longer have to belong to an area team, but could be involved in different ways. For example: new volunteer teams aligned to specific areas of work, one-off volunteering linked to specific projects or short term volunteering opportunities.

36. The review of the Volunteering Strategy will take these points on board.