



Northumberland Coast National Landscape

Northumberland Coast National Landscape Partnership Meeting
28th October 2025, 3pm
Howick Village Hall

In attendance

Patrick Norris (Chair)	PN	Special Interest Member – Recreation
James Barber	JB	Special Interest Member - Farming and Land Management
Hugh Clear-Hill	HCH	Special Interest Member - Nature
Colin Barnes	CB	Special Interest Member – Local business and tourism
Jude Leitch	JL	Special Interest Member – Local business and tourism
Bridie Melkerts	BM	Special Interest Member – Access for All
Martin Shingler	MS	Special Interest Member – Local Communities
Cllr Guy Renner-Thompson (Vice-Chair)	GRT	Northumberland County Council
Cllr David Swinhoe	DS	Northumberland County Council
Cllr Jane Scott	JS	Parish Council Rep (North)
Cllr Adrian Hinchcliffe	AH	Parish Council Rep (South)
Heather Harrison	HH	Environment Agency
James Porteous	JP	For Special Interest Member - Heritage
Also in attendance		
Rob Murfin (for part of the meeting)	RM	Northumberland County Council
Iain Robson	IR	National Landscape Manager
Sarah Winlow	SW	National Landscape Officer
Members of the Public		Three members of the public in attendance

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

PN welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially new members – Bridie Melkerts, Special Interest Member for Access for All and Martin Shingler, Special Interest Member for Local Communities and James Porteous, deputising for Andrew Poad.

Apologies were received from: Kristof Fatsar, James Robertson and Zoe Charge.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising (not covered on the agenda)

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and approved as a true and accurate record.

3. Questions from members of the public

John Howell, Chathill Railway Action Group, asked if the National Landscape had any response from the Mayor's Office about letter sent about additional rail services at Chathill. PN confirmed that no response had been received. It was agreed to issue a second reminder and to copy in members of Combined Authority. IR to identify relevant members. PN will keep John Howell informed.

4. Management Plan review - Adoption

IR outlined the Management Plan review process and consultation to date, noting that the Plan was out for consultation for longer than required due to the consultation period falling during the summer holidays. Consultation responses have been incorporated into the Consultation Response Report, that sets out each issue raised and, where relevant, the action taken to address the issue.

Relatively few responses were received from members of the public, and only four out of 16 parishes responded. Discussion ensued about the causes for this, concluding that the Plan is sound and therefore did not generate numerous responses.

The revised timetable was outlined. Going forward, the Plan will be presented at the following: NCC Extended Management Team 13th November; NCC Strategic Leadership Team 18th November; and NCC Cabinet for final adoption 9th December. The adopted Plan will be professionally designed and published in January/February 2026.

The Partnership agreed to the recommendations:

1. The Partnership agree the revised timetable
2. The Partnership agree the Consultation Response Report
3. The Partnership agree and endorse the final draft plan to go to NCC for adoption.

PN gave thanks to members of the Partnership who have contributed to the Plan.

5. Staff team update

5.1. Dark Skies

SW reported success in securing £227,247 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for 'Northumberland Coast Dark Skies: Conserving and connecting the nocturnal heritage of the Northumberland Coast National Landscape'. The total value of this project is c £285,000 and will include employment of a full-time Project Officer. The process for recruiting has begun with the aim of the new staff member to be in post in January. Work has begun to contract a lighting design consultant to work on the lighting case studies.

Simon Rushton (member of the public in attendance) was invited to give an update on the installation of a dark sky-friendly streetlight as a pilot in Alnmouth, that has been well received. SW noted Alnmouth Parish Council keen to work with National Landscape on extending dark-sky friendly streetlighting on Northumberland Street.

5.2 Welcoming Visitor Project

The Rural Asset Multiplier Pilot (RAMP) Programme has awarded £72,659.50 to the National Landscape for a suite of projects to improve visitor welcome at 19 sites, improvement of public realm at six locations, as well as installing new benches at 10 locations and new cycle racks at 3 locations.

RJ Smith of Beal Farm was successful in securing c £41,000 from the RAMP Programme to reopen the Causeway End car park. The National Landscape continue to support this project, working on the interpretation and bus pull-in elements of the scheme.

PN noted that Glen Valley Tours now running an improved bus service to Holy Island.

5.3 Farming in Protected Landscapes

The year 25-26 allocation is £259,009 of which £172,122 is capital funding to grant to farmers with a further £12,584 funding for revenue schemes.

IR noted that whilst FiPL has been successful, it is unknown as to whether it will be extended past March 2026. DEFRA have confirmed that they will fund project officers for a further 18 months from March 2026. The majority of the 25/26 budget has now been allocated to projects. Projects include various tree and hedge planting projects, a bespoke wetland creation project at Lee Moor and a wetland enhancement project on Holy Island. Three barn owl sheds will be built by the Conservation Team at Howick, Craster and Warkworth.

5.4 Conservation Team

IR noted the tremendous amount of work put in by Conservation Team lead Emma Wilson, and the volunteers. Since the last Partnership meeting in June, volunteers have given a total of 3489 hours on activities including beach cleans, removal of invasive species, Chick Watch and practical conservation tasks. Demand to join the Conservation Team remains high with up to a half a dozen enquiries per week, and c 60 people on the waiting list to join.

5.5 Accessibility

The grant for the 2025/26 capital access for all capital programme is £58,442. Planned projects include disabled parking bays, path and beach access improvements at Low Newton, access to five dark-sky discovery sites, new Accessibility website and accessibility improvements and barrier removal on the Northumberland Coast Path.

5.6 Capital Uplift

IR spoke to the report, noting difficulty of spending the uplift of £150,805 in such a short timescale and meeting criteria of '30x30' and 'invest to save'. Much time was wasted pursuing the purchase of land at Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI.

Roughly a third of the uplift will be spent fencing the area of dunes at Warkworth in adverse possession to facilitate grazing by cattle to bring the SSSI into favourable condition. IR to attend Warkworth Parish Council meeting in early November to explain the benefits of the scheme. The briefing note for the Parish Council was circulated prior to the Partnership meeting.

The repair and renovation of the Rocket House, Bamburgh to form a workshop for the Conservation Team is progressing, with plans agreed, services reconnected and work to start in early 2026. The estimated cost of this work is approximately £50,000.

IR is working to secure a scheme near Spindleston to improve whinstone grassland through removal of gorse and introduction of grazing with the remainder of the grant.

5.7 Other work streams

Other work streams recorded in the Staff Activity Report were noted. The Empower Her Wild! grant of £6900 from National Trails was welcomed. BM gave a short presentation of the project that aims to engage 16/17-year-old girls in discovering the landscape, building a deeper connection with nature and boosting their own confidence and mental well-being. JP and PN suggested women that could inspire the girls and would like to be involved. DS noted importance of pilot for getting young people engaged.

6. Staffing

PN commended Ellie Saunders on her new role as Ranger, progressing from Countryside Apprentice. Ellie is now working for her Level 4 Apprenticeship in Countryside Management, which is equivalent to a foundation degree-level qualification.

Elanor Johnson (Project Officer) and Helen Wilson Beevers (Comms Officer) left the National Landscape in August and September respectively. PN thanked both Elanor and Helen for their contribution and wished them well in their new posts at English Heritage and the Independent newspaper.

IR reported the difficulty he is finding recruiting into the Comms Officer position via NCC. GRT offered to help if needed.

7. Budget 2025/26 and 2026/27

Spending for 25/26 is on course. The budget for 26/27 is unknown, however DEFRA have had their settlement from the three-year comprehensive spending review.

8. Partnership recruitment and Working Groups

The Special Interest Member for Climate - the remaining vacancy on the Partnership has been advertised and one person has expressed interest. Working groups for Nature, Climate, Access and Recreation, Engagement and Historic Environment will be set up in the New Year.

9. Parish Council reports

JS and AH had nothing to report from the parishes. They will visit each parish in 2026 once the Management Plan is adopted. Potential for SW / IR to accompany them.

10. Partners' updates

CB – Northumberland Estates can provide advice regarding the experience of grazing cattle in a similar context to Warkworth Dunes, if required.

HCH – Recently met with Mark Middleton to discuss the Local Nature Recovery Plan.

JL – whilst it has been a busy and successful year for tourism, it has not been overwhelming. Noticing larger holiday lets on the market for sale. Larger proportion of European and American visitors. The coast still suffers from a lack of serviced accommodation.

HH – heavy pressure on Environment Agency budgets, with capital projects preferred. Coastal Streams and Coquet Estuary projects remain funded and are starting up. South Low has been removed from Coastal Streams. Environment Agency are aware of sewage pollution from Belford CSO and Belford Burn STW. HH will provide IR with sewage figures for 2025 and a contact in the EA's Environmental Management team.

MS – expressed thanks for the opportunity to serve on the Partnership. Stressed sheer diversity and immense brief of the Partnership, and ideal to start now with the new Management Plan. Noted that the plan includes much that is inspirational and of direct relevance to local communities.

JP – National Trust budgets also under pressure. Lost one out of three rangers on the coast however Farne Island staffing levels remain protected. National Trust to work with partners on anti-social behaviour at Druridge Bay. Works to the offices and accommodation at the old MOD buildings, Newton Point are now complete. Archaeological research comprising geophysical survey taken place on Inner Farne. The Farnes will feature on Hidden Treasures of the National Trust, to be aired on BBC over the winter.

DS – a new 80-bed hotel is being constructed at Blyth, as well as the creation of a park on old colliery land, making the town much more attractive. Asked HH about reporting sewage – HH responded that sewage spills and any other water pollution should be reported via the Environment Agency hotline (0800 80 70 60) or online, making sure to ask for follow-up of the report.

GRT – Noted that The Kilns housing estate in Beadnell is now complete. Significant as this is the first development that requires primary occupancy i.e., cannot be used as a second home. Following reports that some residents may not be following this clause, NCC Legal is to take action. It is important that action is taken given the population decline on the coast, e.g. Seahouses' population has fallen by 10% in the last decade.

JB – Threat to FiPL also mirrored in threat to nature-friendly farming. Neither nature nor water recognizes boundaries. Continued need for funding for the nature-friendly farming above and beyond FiPL, as well as focusing on water pollution upstream from the National Landscape. IR responded that ELMS will be key though noted the Government has not yet put anything in place other than Higher Tier Stewardship (which is accessed by invitation).

11. Dates of next meetings

Wednesday 25th February 2026 – Bamburgh/Belford
June tbc