

Report on NNPA by Andy Saunders

Note the comments and opinions are my own and not those of the NNPA.

Firstly, I would remind you that the NNPA has a Small Grants Fund that will give up to £2000 to assist Community as well as small businesses in or around the Park. So, if you have a community activity that could do with a grant get in contact as if you don't ask you won't get. I believe the process is not complicated and relatively simple.

The Sill.

The Sill is up and running and the grant aided activity around the Sill runs out in the Financial Year. The visitor numbers are strong at around 140,000. However, the NNPA are struggling to convert that into an income stream to cover the costs of the building. My best estimate is that the building will operate with a deficit of between £100,000 and £200,000 per annum. The NNPA team are obviously looking on how to either improve the income stream or manage the cost base.

They are improving the educational offer with the aim that every child in Northumberland has at least one organized visit to the National Park during their school career. This is hard and probably needs more funding from external sources to make this into a reality. They are getting more school visits but the window that schools want to visit is narrow and hence it difficult to meet all their requests.

Planning

The new local plan is nearing completion. It is with regret I doubt there is much movement in allowing more development in our part of the Park as we have no centres of population (villages) actually in the Park. This means that as farm consolidate, we are likely to see the residents of the Park become more socially exclusive, elderly with little opportunity for younger people to acquire or rent property in the Park. This is a direct result of the planning policies of the NNPA. I would have preferred to have seen some farm buildings be available for conversion to residential units with strict controls on size and future extensions etc. that could have produced a number of smaller homes in perpetuity with no impact on the landscape.

Glover Review

Michael Gove when Environment Secretary appointed Julian Glover to review all the National Parks. His report is expected in September but maybe delayed by a General Election. There have been a few hints at the direction he is taking. He is critical of the governance of the National Parks, thinks not enough emphasis of the work is on Nature, wants a lot more rangers to interact with visitors, is critical of the total funding levels (at £45m per annum nationally is less than is spent on subsidizing Opera in London!). He seems to want a National ranger service but how this then relates to the individual Park Authorities is not clear. It may, in my opinion, result in these being abolished. What happens to the planning control and how the interests of the residents of the National Park are considered was not clear. One to watch.