

Report to	<b>Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>
Date	<b>21 September 2023</b>
By	<b>Strategy Lead – Climate Change and Net-Zero</b>
Title of Report	<b>SDNPA Climate Change programme: Update on the UK Parks ‘Race to Zero’ application.</b>

**Note**

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**Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to receive and consider an update on the SDNPA’s collaboration with the UK National Park family on Climate Leadership.**

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**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 On 26 March 2020 the SDNPA approved its first Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. This affirmed the Authority’s commitment to addressing the climate and nature emergency by;
- Setting a target for the South Downs National Park Authority to become a ‘Net-Zero’ Organisation by 2030;
  - Agreeing to work with constituent Local Authorities in the South Downs National Park (SDNP) and other partners, in particular local communities and landowners, to deliver actions that respond effectively to the climate and nature emergency;
  - Working towards the SDNP becoming ‘Net-Zero with Nature’ by 2040.
- 1.2 The SDNPA’s current Strategy and Action Plan focusses on areas where the NPA could add the most value in terms of delivering and supporting climate action through both its Countryside Policy and Planning functions.
- 1.3 The Policies and Resources Committee maintains oversight on the delivery of this work as it progresses as part of its role monitoring the implementation of the Corporate Plan.

**2. Policy Context**

- 2.1 National Parks have a critical role to play in addressing the climate crisis, this is a challenge that requires large-scale collective action. The SDNPA is committed to developing a leadership role and accelerating the pace of action.
- 2.2 The Authority is currently working with sector partners, stakeholders, and all levels of national government within the countries of the UK to meet this challenge together.
- 2.3 Climate Action is one of the priority programmes within the Authority’s current Corporate Plan. Officers have been through a process of reviewing the Action Plan and have identified priority programmes and projects that need to be progressed during 2023/24.
- 2.4 SDNPA also has policies and outcomes within its Local Plan and Partnership Management Plan that seek to deliver on climate change adaptation and mitigation. In delivering these, the SDNPA relies on its ability to advocate, to deliver through partnership working – as well as

direct mechanisms such as grant-making programmes.

2.5 A copy of the current SDNPA Action Plan is included as an Annex with this report.

### **3. Priorities for the Action Plan**

3.1 The Action Plan maintains a strong emphasis on working with local communities, working with constituent Local Authorities in the SDNP, and supporting the rural economy/green growth. In summary the priority areas for the Action Plan are:

- Work with the wider National Parks family to establish the NPAs as leaders in meeting the challenges presented by Climate Change;
- Delivering 'Net Zero with Nature' – Linking our work programmes on both Nature Recovery and Climate Action;
- Delivering emission reductions and high sustainability standards through the Planning System;
- Supporting the Land-based sector to transition to a low-carbon future;
- Working with local communities in the SDNP – supporting them to become more resilient;
- Collaborating with Local Authorities in the SDNP and Sector Partners to deliver positive action;
- Support rural businesses to adapt their business operations and benefit from the transition to a low-carbon economy.

3.2 These priority areas focus on the areas where the NPA can have the greatest impact.

### **4. Net Zero Targets for the National Park**

4.1 There are two separate Net-Zero targets, the first around the carbon performance and sustainability of the National Park Authority and its operations, and the second for the National Park as an area. The Corporate Services Directorate leads on monitoring and reporting on the NPA target, the National Park wide work is co-ordinated through a new cross-directorate working group.

4.2 The main challenge for delivering on climate action and nature recovery is ensuring decisions are based on the best available data and evidence. Landscape scale approaches are needed that support climate adaptation and balance that with the need to protect the landscape and restore nature.

4.3 The SDNPA previously commissioned Small World Consultants to produce a carbon baseline assessment for the National Park. This consumption-based assessment was an essential piece of evidence work to help the Authority understand the implications of our Net-Zero targets.

4.4 The assessment covers greenhouse gas emissions attributable to residents and visitors to the park, in terms of energy use, food systems, purchase items and travel to and from the National Park. It uses these emission calculations to produce a set of targets for transitioning to a low-carbon future.

4.5 The final version of the assessment was published in June 2022. It provides a comprehensive review of the carbon footprint of the National Park across key sectors and a trajectory for the National Park to achieve Net-Zero by its target date.

4.6 This methodology has subsequently been applied for all 15 of the UK National Parks as a common approach. All UK National Parks now have a shared set of metrics and clear targets and trajectories to meet Net Zero targets.

4.7 The delivery of nature-based solutions, to draw down and sequester greater amounts of carbon will be the main mechanism that will drive emissions reductions and get the SDNP to the Net-Zero target. The Action Plan will seek to deliver on this:

- Through our work on Nature Recovery, and ambitious targets for habitat restoration and creation;
  - Through encouraging woodland management and new woodland planting;
  - By encouraging land-management practices that protect soils and increase their ability to sequester carbon;
  - By supporting the transition to low-carbon for the land-based sector – in line with their own Net-Zero ambitions.
- 4.8 The full [South Downs Carbon Baseline Assessment Report is available on the SDNPA website](#).
- 5. UK National Parks ‘Race to Zero’**
- 5.1 The SDNPA currently act as the convenor for the UK National Park Climate Change & Energy Group. The group helps to co-ordinate the UK National Park collective response.
- 5.2 The group has also worked to develop a national delivery plan for ‘Climate Leadership’. This seeks to demonstrate the value of investing in the UK National Park family, and in the SDNPA, to accelerate the pace of Climate Action and delivery of Nature-based solutions.
- 5.3 As part of a package of work developed on the run up to COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, the UK Parks Chairs and Chief Executive group pledged to collectively apply to join the UN’s Climate Initiative ‘Race to Zero’. This UK National Park Climate Change & Energy group is the first group of National Parks to put in an application, so this is a significant statement.
- 5.4 The group has recently had confirmation that the application has been successful, based on the work done to define Paris-aligned Net Zero targets, and making a public pledge to work towards meeting this goal. This strongly validates the approach being taken on climate action.
- 5.5 In summary, the main benefits of joining Race to Zero are:
- It provides an international badge of recognition for taking a leadership role in taking climate action;
  - As the first national parks to join the programme it enhances the profile of UK Parks internationally;
  - It provides a common framework for collaboration, notably with our Local Authority partners;
  - The monitoring and reporting requirements are consistent and demonstrate the collective and individual contribution the UK Parks can make to Net Zero targets;
  - It makes a strong case for further investment in UK Parks to accelerate progress towards Net Zero;
  - It means our Net-Zero targets can be incorporated within our Management Plans in a consistent way, this pre-empts new guidance from Defra that will make this a requirement in the future.
- 5.6 A more detailed briefing document that provides a full summary of the initiative is attached at **Appendix I** to this report.
- 6. Options & cost implications**
- 6.1 Race to Zero is free to join, membership provides additional support in terms of sharing best practice, knowledge exchange and reporting to a high standard – in compliance with the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP).
- 7. Next steps and timings**
- 7.1 At present, along with the SDNPA, 5 other National Parks have fully met the membership criteria. The key next step is for the remaining national parks to commit to Paris Agreement-aligned decarbonisation goals calculated by Small World Consulting.

- 7.2 The aim is for all UK national parks to join-together as soon as possible this year. This is being discussed by National Park Chairs and CEO at their September meeting in the Lake District National Park.
- 7.3 The national parks who have not yet met the membership criteria are being encouraged to publicly commit to work towards the Small World Consulting decarbonisation goal. This can happen in a variety of ways including:
- In their Partnership Management Plan.
  - In a published climate change strategy.
  - As a public NPA decision.
  - In a public press release.
- 7.4 There is no fixed deadline but ideally all UK national parks joining Race to Zero would happen as soon as possible this year, and by August 2023. UN Climate Week is in September, and UK National Parks joining could inspire others around the world to join.

## 8. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	Not at this stage.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	A review of the Climate Change Action Plan was undertaken in 22/23 in the light of the organisational changes. This included an assessment of the level of staff resource to deliver each element of the work programme.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The current Corporate Plan review and budget exercise includes 'Climate Action' as a priority area of work, with high level targets for delivery. This will ensure the work is mainstreamed as much as possible.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	<p><b><u>OUTCOME 2: INCREASING RESILIENCE</u></b></p> <p>There is increased resilience within the landscape for its natural resources, habitats, and species to adapt to the impacts of climate change and other pressures.</p> <p><b><u>OUTCOME 8: CREATING CUSTODIANS</u></b></p> <p>More responsibility and action is taken by visitors, communities and businesses to conserve and enhance the special qualities and use resources more wisely.</p>
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Details of projects and partners linked to this programme of work are given in Annex I – Climate Change Action Plan 2023 to 2024.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	The SDNPA Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan was produced specifically to deliver on the Authority's climate change objectives.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	<p>No adverse implications have been identified. Individual projects were assessed as they were developed.</p> <p>Projects that support community-based action on Climate Change will help to make those communities more resilient and deliver positive social value. Resilience is a key factor in</p>

<b>Implication</b>	<b>Yes*/No</b>
	ensuring community cohesion.
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	No adverse implications have been identified. Individual projects were assessed as they were developed.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Human Rights implications arising from this proposal.
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None.
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	The existing climate change risk assessment, highlights a number of health & safety and welfare issues that may result from not adequately adapting our policies and working practices.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None.

## **9. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
The UK Government declared a climate change emergency in May 2019. This is in recognition of the existential threat it presents.	High	High	The SDNPA produced a Climate Change Risk Assessment as part of its Adaptation Planning and Reporting role.  SDNPA Climate Change Action Plan also sets out a range of actions the Authority needs to take to mitigate and adapt to the worst of these risks.

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Appendices	I. Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2024
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Business Service Manager [if procurement involved]
External Consultees	None

## Background Documents

UN Race to Zero website including full criteria and members:

<https://climatechampions.unfccc.int/>

Information on monitoring and reporting via the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP): <https://www.cdp.net/en>

## UK national parks and Race to Zero

The latest science shows that climate impacts are happening sooner than climate models predicted just a decade ago. Critical tipping points in the Earth's natural systems are already being breached. The future of civilisation, and the natural world as we know it, rests on delivering accelerated decarbonisation, and nature restoration at scale.

National parks globally have a crucial role to play in this global existential crisis – both through leading nature-based carbon sequestration at a landscape scale, and by being part of the vanguard of decarbonisation in a rural setting. This is a strategic role that no other entities can lead.

UK national parks will be the first national parks in the world to join the UN Race to Zero. The UN Climate Champions that lead the Race to Zero, together with supporting organisations like CDP are keen to support us because they understand the critical role of national parks to the global effort and want others to follow our lead.

## About Race to Zero

Race to Zero is the United Nations' global initiative rallying non-state actors (like cities, local authorities, businesses, universities) to take rigorous and immediate action to halve global emissions by 2030 and deliver a healthier, fairer zero carbon world.

It was initiated ahead of the Paris Agreement to help:

- Shift the debate from long-term 2050, to near-term 2030 action
- Focus on action required to meet the 1.5 scenario, not 2 degrees
- Structure a role for non-state actors that are crucial to deliver decarbonisation in practice
- Introduce greater scientific rigour and transparency to the process

## Work so far towards joining Race to Zero

UK National Parks have been working towards joining Race to Zero for more than a year, following a discussion at the 2021 Chairs and CEO's fora to consider the package of activity in support of our engagement with the CoP26 Climate Conference in Glasgow.

Each national park worked with Small World Consulting to understand the carbon footprint of their area, and the decarbonisation trajectory needed to align with the Paris Agreement. That work is now complete.

Six of the fifteen UK national parks have publicly adopted the Small World Consulting goal (or similar) necessary to join – the 'pledge'.

## The benefits of Race to Zero

- ✓ **The most effective global operation galvanising climate action** – Over 11,000 non-state members have joined Race to Zero, representing 8,307 companies, 595 financial institutions, 52 regions, 1136 cities, 1,125 educational institutions, 65 healthcare institutions and 29 other organisations. In the UK, 50 British local authorities have joined ranging from cities to rural areas – demonstrating it is a relevant framework for UK; as well as almost two-thirds of TFSE100 companies, and 68 universities.
- ✓ **Driving more action at a bigger scale and faster speed** – members deliver three times more climate action because they have clear high ambition plans capable of leveraging the investment needed.
- ✓ **Well-planned action**, rather than piecemeal or reactive measures, secure more benefits for local people and nature.
- ✓ **A compelling local-to-global vision to inspire support and action** – within organisations and with stakeholders and the public.
- ✓ **Robust data, consistency and transparency building trust** in the transition we need.
- ✓ **A coherent and efficient approach to coordinate climate action across different administrative levels and geographical areas** – using the same metrics and accounting methods, with no loopholes, and no double counting.
- ✓ **Access to a huge wealth of knowledge and resources** including relevant to rural areas.
- ✓ **Collaboration, innovation and problem-solving** with other signatories globally.
- ✓ **Formal recognition of effort** by the UN.

## Joining Race to Zero

Membership is free of charge. Each Race to Zero member commits to five ‘starting line’ actions:

1. **Pledge:** to take action toward or beyond a fair share of the 50% global GHG reduction needed by 2030, and to reach net zero by 2050 at the latest.
2. **Plan:** within 12 months develop an evidence-based emissions reduction plan in line with the pledge.
3. **Proceed:** take immediate action towards meeting the pledge.
4. **Publish:** commit to report data and actions in relation to meeting the pledge, publicly and at least annually - feeding into the UNFCCC Global Climate Action Portal.
5. **Persuade:** align lobbying and advocacy activities with net zero by proactively supporting climate policies consistent with the Race to Zero criteria.

## Working together to deliver Race to Zero action

The Climate and Energy working group will continue to function as a community of practice, and where necessary a body to marshal additional resources, to help members to deliver the action needed.

UK National Parks have already worked well together on **Pledge:** Working collectively with Small World Consulting to develop analysis of each national park carbon footprint and Paris-aligned decarbonisation pathway has involved joint problem-solving and enabled us to generate economies of scale. We now have a science and equity-defined decarbonisation target specific to each national park.

We will now work together to deliver the remaining actions:



**Plan:** Developing evidence-based plans for each national park to achieve the decarbonisation goals pledged. We will draw on the best practice from around the world, as well as within our own UK national parks network. Where useful we will identify further efficiency savings and economies of scale. We will be a collective voice to attract further funding to support the planning work where needed. Having robust evidence-based plans using best-practice methodology will help UK national parks to make a strong case for public and private sector funding.

**Proceed:** Each UK national park is at a different stage of proceeding with climate action, and as a community of practice we can learn from each other, avoiding re-inventing wheels and accelerating to the speed of the fastest. Whilst we are the first national parks to join Race to Zero, there will be much we can learn from other members. There may be some initiatives we can proceed with collectively across UK national parks.

**Publish:** The methodology designed with Small World Consulting is now being adapted into a tool to help us monitor changes in the carbon footprint in each national park. This will be available at minimal cost. We will work with CDP (formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project) to report to the UN our carbon footprint, plans and actions. CDP is a free platform. There are no minimum reporting requirements, but the more information we share about our plans and actions, the more robust the process is, and the more we will be able to learn from other Race to Zero members facing similar decarbonisation challenges. Verified climate action makes organisation attractive to investors. The CDP reporting framework is aligned to a range of government and organisational reporting requirements which means duplication of effort is avoided.

**Persuade:** Many UK national parks are already active advocates for Paris-aligned climate action within local partnerships, UK and devolved governments, and with the public. We can share best practice in how to make the case effectively with different stakeholders. We can also identify where a collective voice will bring bigger impact.

National Park	Pledge?	Where is it public?
Bannau Brycheiniog	Yes	Management plan
Broads	Yes	In board paper
Cairngorms	Yes	In board paper
Dartmoor	No	
Eryri	No	
Exmoor	No	
Lake District	Yes	Partnership Plan
Loch Lomond and the Trossachs	Pending	Yes – Partnership Plan due in December
New Forest	No	
North York Moors	Yes	York and North Yorkshire route map to carbon negative
Northumberland	Yes	Management plan
Peak District	No	
Pembrokeshire Coast	No	
South Downs	Yes	In Climate Action Plan
Yorkshire Dales	Yes	York and North Yorkshire route map to carbon negative

## UK Race to Zero members (as of May 2023)

**Nations:** Wales and Scotland

**English local authorities**

Birmingham Council  
Bradford Council  
Brighton and Hove Council  
Bristol Council  
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council  
Calderdale Council  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Cheltenham Council  
City of London Council  
Cornwall Council  
Cotswold District Council  
Gloucestershire County Council  
Greater London Authority  
Greater Manchester Council  
High Peak Council  
Leeds Council  
Leicestershire County Council  
Liverpool Council  
Liverpool City Region  
London Borough of Camden  
London Borough of Enfield  
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham  
London Borough of Lambeth  
London Borough of Lewisham  
London Borough of Southwark  
London Borough of Waltham Forest  
Manchester Council  
Newcastle Council  
Nottingham Council  
Oldham Met Borough Council  
Oxford Council  
Oxfordshire Council  
Plymouth Council  
Reading Borough Council  
Royal Borough of Greenwich Council  
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council  
Sandwell Council  
Sheffield City Council  
Somerset West and Taunton Council  
St Albans City and District Council  
Staffordshire Moorlands Council  
Stevenage Borough Council  
Stroud Council  
Sunderland Council  
Swale Borough Council  
Warwickshire County Council  
West Midlands Combined Authority  
Westminster Council

Wiltshire Council

**Scottish local authorities**

Aberdeen Council  
Dundee Council  
Edinburgh Council  
Glasgow Council  
Perth and Kinross Council  
West Dunbartonshire Council

**Northern Irish local authorities** Belfast

**Welsh local authorities** on a path to join:

- Blaenau Gwent Council
- Bridgend County Borough Council
- City of Cardiff Council
- Caerphilly Council
- Merthyr Tydfil Council
- Monmouthshire Council
- Newport Council
- Rhondda Cynon Taf Council
- Torfaen Council
- Vale of Glamorgan Council
- Powys County Council

**UK Businesses**

Almost two-thirds of FTSE100 (Britain's biggest) companies

Many water companies; SMEs and B-corps.

**68 UK universities**