



National Parks England's

Business Plan

2018/19 – 2020/21



Lake District  
National Park



## Foreword

England's National Parks are a fantastic resource for the country and local communities. They are inspirational landscapes that support physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. They are rich in wildlife, history and cultural heritage, and the opportunities they afford for learning and engagement with the natural environment. They deliver economic growth through providing high quality environments that are the underpinning for thousands of businesses and home to many entrepreneurs. They provide a wealth of ecosystem services and are for everyone to enjoy.

The National Park Authorities work with a host of local people, businesses, NGOs, and public agencies to support the purposes of National Parks. National Parks England brings the expertise found in each Authority together to the national stage. We help to raise awareness of the work of NPAs to those with an influence to bear on National Parks, and we promote the collective needs of the NPAs. National Parks England provides a forum for learning, co-ordination, collaboration and communication.

We have a long term and ambitious *Vision for National Parks*. This provides a collective focus for our work. Within that, we have prioritised activities that support the delivery of the *8-Point Plan for England's National Parks* that was published in March 2016, and aspects of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan published in January 2018. NPAs have individual priorities and needs, but there is value in bringing this, often pioneering work, together to establish a coherent national picture. And drawing on that experience and by coming together we can be more effective in seeking to influence policy debates that have a bearing on the National Parks.

Brexit will have profound implications for policy making over the period of this Business Plan. It is vital that we grasp the opportunities that Brexit provides for more effective delivery of National Park purposes as well as having an understanding of what the risks are. This represents a significant new piece of work for NPE that has required the lower prioritization of existing programmes. In addition, as Ministers are appointed and leave the Government NPE will continue to work to ensure they have a full appreciation of and support the work of NPAs.

Our new three-year plan remains ambitious and Brexit brings with it new opportunities and risks. We need to recognise the fast-changing world around us. But we will have made progress in this plan if over the next three years we see:

- the awareness and reputation of the work of the National Park Authorities for delivery across a range of policy areas has been enhanced
- policy makers make decisions that protect and enhance the special qualities of the National Parks, and support delivery by the National Park Authorities
- the National Park Authorities are effectively resourced to deliver their statutory purposes and duty and the broader vision
- the need for effective collaboration between NPE staff and the members and staff from across the National Park family is recognized and enhanced

Through this activity, NPE shall help ensure that the nation's National Parks are protected, remain at the cutting edge of delivering sustainable development, are relevant to wider society, and continue to be held in high regard.

The NPAs whether working individually or collectively as National Parks England will work with a range of other bodies where we have a shared interest, including from the public, private, and voluntary sectors. We are committed to effective collaboration. The Campaign for National Parks, National Parks Partnerships, and the National Association for AONBs will continue to remain close partners.

The scale of the challenge, although considerable, is matched by our determination to ensure National Parks remain fantastic places for the country that are valued and supported.

Our National Parks are unique and deeply special to the nation. The Government has described them as one of the greatest achievements in the last 100 years of environmental policy. Through our collective actions and our commitment to care for National Parks over the long term, we aspire to uphold the principles that underpin national park designation and provide a legacy to future generations that all can be proud of.

Margaret Paren  
National Parks England  
Chair

Paul Hamblin  
National Parks England  
Executive Director

Sarah Fowler  
Lead National  
Park Officer

## National Parks England

National Parks England is the successor to the English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) that was formed on 1 April 2006. It became a not for profit company limited by guarantee on 3 March 2008 and rebranded to National Parks England in May 2013.

The Association was created to help the English NPAs to work together collaboratively, to represent the interests of NPAs to a range of policy makers, to facilitate discussion amongst NPAs on issues of common concern, and to work together with other bodies in partnership where this would add value. The objects of the company, as set out in the Memorandum of Association, can be summarised as:

- to promote, support and further the interests and policies of the NPAs;
- to represent and express the opinions of the NPAs members at all levels;
- to act as a forum to facilitate debate about matters of common concern to NPAs;
- to provide information to the public, decision makers and others on the activities of NPAs and any issues of relevance;
- to establish and maintain links with other organisations and partners whose activities are relevant to NPAs; and
- to work alongside other Associations representing NPAs elsewhere across the UK in order to achieve mutual objectives in the interests of all National Park Authorities in the United Kingdom.

The Association has a small office base in London in recognition that this remains where key decision makers for NPAs continue to be. It employs a small team, and crucially draws on the expertise of the officers in the ten Authorities.

During the last Business Planning period National Parks England:

- successfully made the case for National Park Authority budgets to be protected for four years in the most recent spending review;
- raised the profile of the value of England's National Parks with Ministers across Government;
- co-wrote the 8 Point Plan for England's National Parks with Government;
- co-ordinated NPA's collective input to the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and its welcome emphasis on enhancing beauty and landscapes;
- drew together NPA's collective principles for a new Environmental Land Management System that was referenced in the Government's Agriculture Command Paper;
- agreed an Accord with Public Health England that saw our combined efforts to improve health and well-being through engagement in our inspiring landscapes;
- successfully argued for amendments to draft legislation going through Parliament; and
- achieved enhanced powers for the National Park Authorities.

## National Park Purposes and our shared Vision

England has ten National Parks, nine of which have been designated under *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949*. In addition, the Norfolk Broads was designated under the *Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988* and is managed by the Broads Authority.

National Parks have two purposes, to:

- conserve and enhance their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage; and
- promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public.

In the pursuit of undertaking these functions, the NPAs have a duty to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park. NPAs have a range of other duties placed on them from other legislation.

Work by National Parks England and the Government has led to a shared Vision for the National Parks. This enjoys cross party support, having been included in *English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010*. The Circular remains the main statement of Government policy on National Parks, until revised. The Vision is written as a series of 'destination statements' for 2030. The Circular states, 'the Government wishes to see all relevant bodies with an influence on the management of these special areas working towards the achievement of this vision in accordance with the rest of this document' (para 11).

By 2030 English National Parks and the Broads will be places where:

- There are thriving, living, working landscapes notable for their natural beauty and cultural heritage. They inspire visitors and local communities to live within environmental limits and to tackle climate change. The wide-range of services they provide (from clean water to sustainable food) are in good condition and valued by society.
- Sustainable development can be seen in action. The communities of the Parks take an active part in decisions about their future. They are known for having been pivotal in the transformation to a low carbon society and sustainable living. Renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, low carbon transport and travel and healthy, prosperous communities have long been the norm.
- Wildlife flourishes and habitats are maintained, restored and expanded and linked effectively to other ecological networks. Woodland cover has increased and all woodlands are sustainably managed, with the right trees in the right places. Landscapes and habitats are managed to create resilience and enable adaptation.
- Everyone can discover the rich variety of England's natural and historic environment, and have the chance to value them as places for escape, adventure, enjoyment, inspiration and reflection, and a source of national pride and identity. They will be recognised as fundamental to our prosperity and well-being.

The Vision is wide ranging and provides a long term direction of travel. It is specific to National Parks, though sits within wider ambitions for the country, as set out in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

Whilst seeking to further the Vision, the NPAs and NPE office seeks to remain flexible in order to address new priorities or influences as they arise. Over the next three-year period, our collective focus will be on delivering those priorities established in the 8 Point Plan for England's National Parks. These are to ensure National Parks:

- remain inspiring natural environments;
- help young people to connect with nature;
- support a thriving rural and visitor economy based on protecting their special qualities;
- are leaders in promoting apprenticeships, and exciting volunteering opportunities;
- recognized as cultural landscapes as well as great food destinations;
- are national treasures, accessible for all;
- are the source of innovative schemes that promote public health and well-being; and
- places of immense opportunity for outdoor recreation.

It is our intention to review the National Parks Vision during 2019 as part of our 70<sup>th</sup> celebration of the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949*, and the Government's Year of Action on the Environment.

### **National Parks England's Mission**

Our Mission is intended to encapsulate what we are seeking to achieve overall. This can be summarised as:

*'Government, partners and stakeholders understand, are inspired by, and value, the work of National Park Authorities in England, and provide sustained support and resources to enable them to further National Park purposes and the Vision'*

### **Our Aims**

Below are set out our four aims. These provide the strategic direction for the organization over the course of the Plan period. The emphasis placed on one or other of these aims will change to adapt to external influences (including Brexit).

In undertaking these aims, the NPAs, through National Parks England shall:

- seek to facilitate implementation of the Vision for National Parks;
- promote shared learning and working across the National Park family and beyond; and
- ensure we work well together and deploy NPE resources effectively and efficiently.

This is broken down into more detail in the pages that follow.

## **NPE's Strategic Aims**

### **AIM 1 POSITIVE REPUTATION**

**Enhance NPAs reputation and profile for inspiring work and delivery across Government, and amongst key partners and to the public**

### **AIM 2 SUPPORTIVE POLICY**

**To proactively lead and influence policy and legislation where this impacts on National Parks/ NPAs ability to deliver Park Purposes, the Duty and Vision**

### **AIM 3 RESILIENT RESOURCES**

**To secure and enhance NPAs income from the public sector through collective action; collaboration, and be the catalyst to support smarter working and the use of resources amongst the National Park family**

### **AIM 4 STRONGER TOGETHER**

**To work in ways that maximise the effective collaboration between the team of NPE staff and the members and staff from across the National Park family, recognising people are our greatest and most important asset in achieving impact as a collective**

## **How National Parks England operates**

The Company comprises a small office base in London and employs three staff. Crucial to the success of NPE is working closely and collaboratively with the nine National Park Authorities, and the Broads Authority. Below describes the constituent parts of National Parks England that work together to achieve the company's objects.

### The NPE Board

The Board is made up of Directors, each of whom is the Chair of an English National Park Authority or of the Broads Authority. The role of the Board is to champion the purposes of National Parks and provide effective strategic leadership to the Association in partnership with Chief Executives, and NPE staff. Meetings of the Board involve Directors who are supported by CEOs (see below) and NPE staff. NPE's Executive Director is the Secretary for the Company.

### The Chief Executives/ National Park Officers Group (E-NPOG)

This group is made up of the CEOs of the ten Authorities. It acts to provide expert support and advice to the Board and the NPE staff. As the group with responsibilities for the Executive function of NPAs, it exists to help deliver the agreed NPE Business Plan and decisions of the NPE Board. The group also provides a forum for peer to peer support. Meetings of E-NPOG involve the CEOs of the ten Authorities, supported by the NPE staff. The outcomes of these meetings are reported back to the Board. One Chief Executive acts in a lead capacity each year, by rotation, whilst all CEOs take responsibility for leading/ sponsoring NPAs collective thinking on a range of policy topics.

## NPE Staff

The NPE Office comprises:

- An Executive Director (FT)
- A Senior Policy Officer (PT)
- An Administrator (PT)

NPE may employ others on a temporary basis, host a volunteer, and can enter into contracts. The staff provide a central conduit for information exchange; monitoring activity in Parliament/ Whitehall for NPAs; facilitating communication between policy makers and NPAs; help develop and articulate collective positions agreed by the NPE Board; and can act as a first point of contact for national policy stakeholders with the NPA family. In 2018, NPE are reviewing the staff complement to ensure it best meets the needs and collective aspirations of the NPA family.

## All Parks Professional Working Groups

A vital part of ensuring NPE is able to punch above its weight is the links made to the standing All Parks Professional Working Groups. These bring specialist teams from across the NPA family together (at England and UK levels). They vary in their format but generally help share best practice, provide support, develop collective thinking, and work with the NPE staff on delivering the NPE Business Plan. Close working relationships and mutual support is provided between NPE staff and the professional groups. NPE staff are committed to helping support the work of the groups, and effective dialogue across the family.

## **Commitment to collaboration**

The NPAs can be stronger and more effective through working together. NPAs (as independent bodies) may develop their own positions on the basis of their own priorities, but there is also a recognition that there is value in coming together. Collaboration enables, for example, access to senior decision makers to be increased; for the voice of NPAs to be more coherent and heard more loudly; for partnerships to benefit the entire NPA family, and for NPAs to be able to draw on the expertise and experience of others.

An important dimension to the work of NPE staff is to service the meetings of the Board, of NPOs and to engage with the All Parks Professional Working Groups. It is this communication which 'oils the wheels' of the network and allows NPAs to work closely together through mutual understanding and respect.

NPE is also committed to working with those other organisations that have an interest in National Parks and NPAs. These include the Campaign for National Parks that provides the voluntary sector voice for National Parks; NP-UK that leads the public promotion of National Parks and the training of members; and National Parks Partnerships that is spear-heading the work of the NPAs on corporate sponsorship. NPE staff will work with these organisations and others to ensure:

- programmes are aligned where relevant;



- where potential synergies and opportunities exist these are understood and grasped;
- any overlaps in activity are deliberate and for productive ends; and
- there is mutual understanding of the role of each organization and the reasons why it may come to a particular position.

## **Signs of success**

Delivery of this Business Plan will require the NPE office and the individual NPAs to be flexible in order to adjust to major issues as they arise. However, the Plan provides a longer term framework in which to make decisions over priorities.

Implementation of our Plan should mean that during 2018/19 we will have reviewed and improved how the different elements that make up NPE collaborate and made a real difference in NPE's capability to communicate our policy messages and the work of NPAs. We will have discussed and agreed our key priorities for the proposed National Parks/ AONBs Review by Government and prepared the ground for engagement with the Spending Review and 2019 Year of Action. NPE will have improved partnership working through signing Accord with Forestry Commission and with Mobile UK and delivering together with Public Health England. Depending upon external events we shall also have engaged with the Government's Agriculture or Environment Bills.

The first quarter of 2019/20 will be dominated by the Spending Review and the proposed date of departure from the EU. We will need to be flexible to respond to proposed legislative changes that result and will want to see NPAs interests reflected in decisions made – particularly around a new Environmental Land Management Scheme. 2019 will also be a Year of Action, and NPE will provide opportunities for Ministers to celebrate the achievements of NPAs during this year. Discussions on reviewing the collective Vision for National Parks should be well underway. There will also be further demonstrable signs of implementing the 8 Point Plan for England's National Parks across the country.

The details of the third year of the Business Plan period (2020/21) are less precise and will probably be governed by implementation of the recommendations of the National Parks / AONBs review. We will also begin to turn our attention to preparing for the next General Election.

## **Monitoring and Review**

The Executive Director will monitor progress in delivery of the Business Plan and will update the NPE Board twice a year. The intention is to commence a review of this plan in June 2019, with the Board approving a new Business Plan in January 2020.

## **AIM 1 – POSITIVE REPUTATION**

### **Enhance NPAs reputation and profile for inspiring work and delivery across Government, and amongst key partners and to the public**

The NPA's have established a high reputation and profile amongst Defra Ministers. Securing a good reputation with Ministers, Officials and with other Government departments remains a key role for NPE. This includes, in particular, making sure that new Ministers get to see what National Parks achieve on the ground. Given the very heavy Parliamentary workload and current political pressures on Ministerial time, we will also investigate other ways to inspire policy makers on the work of the NPAs that do not necessitate travel.

Our aim is to spread this support for NPAs and their work to a wider audience – particularly across Government, within our key partners and (in a low resource way) to the wider public. The Board and Officers will need to keep under review who our key partners are in light of Brexit discussions, the 25 Year Environment Plan, and 8 Point Plan for England's National Parks.

The last General Election was held in 2017 and under the 5-year rule, the next is scheduled to take place on 05 May 2022. This Business Plan, therefore operates under the lifetime of one Government. Should a general election occur, preparation for this will be escalated to a priority so that NPE can work with the Government and its Ministers from day one.

We have a long-standing ambition to showcase to policy makers NPAs as exemplars of best practice and aim to do this in a coherent and consistent way that enables readers to recognise NPAs as a network, and a good source of knowledge and experience for a range of policy areas. This will include promoting NPA good practice through social media and speaking opportunities. The NPE Office will collaborate with the UK national parks communications expertise in taking this forward and use the priorities in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan to help frame our priorities in this area.

Effective collaboration between NPAs on the work they are undertaking, on the innovative approaches they are adopting, or the experience they have gained, will benefit each NPA. The All Parks Professional Working Groups are a key conduit for this knowledge transfer and collaboration; as will be formal and informal meetings of the Board and NPOs.

#### **Key to delivering this will be:**

- **NPE office facilitating Ministerial visits to National Parks from key departments or other methods that bring National Parks to Westminster to inspire them (ongoing)**
- **NPE office creating opportunities for the NPE Board to meet Ministers (and for National Park Officers to meet with senior officials) – primarily from Defra and potentially from other government departments where needed to further the aims in this Business Plan**

- **NPAs to deliver NPA's collective commitments in the 8 Point Plan for English National Parks and 25 Year Environment Plan**
- **NPE staff to develop a NPE policy/communications plan in conjunction with the NPUK Communications expertise, to enable better communication of the work of NPAs and collective policy messages**
- **NPE staff to prepare Best Practice Notes, and use of social media to tell the story of what NPAs do to policy and political audiences, drawing on the priorities in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (ongoing)**
- **NPE staff to continue to monitor and support, with NPAs proactively delivering in partnership, against the commitments in our joint Accord with Public Health England**
- **NPE staff to promote NPAs collective messages to Ministerial, Policy and Parliamentary audiences during the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1949 Act and Government 2019 Year of Action on the Environment**

## **AIM 2 – SUPPORTIVE POLICY**

### **To proactively lead and influence policy and legislation where this impacts on National Parks/ NPAs ability to deliver Park Purposes, the Duty and Vision**

This aim draws on the power from NPAs coming together to present a collective case – either to proactively promote a particular initiative or respond to Government or other proposals. We will focus our collective efforts on those policy areas that have most significant impact on National Parks and seek to avoid spreading our limited resources too thinly. In the early days of this Business Plan this will entail focusing on how the process of Brexit is being handled and ensuring NPAs have a voice over new arrangements. The implications of Brexit are far reaching and here we will need to prioritize as well. Given how farming decisions and investment underpins much of National Parks landscape and the conditions for wildlife, NPE attaches particular importance to this area.

This is a dynamic time for the development of policy – with many drivers for change. These include, for example:

- Implementation of the 25 Year Environment Plan (that itself includes 200 actions)
- A 21<sup>st</sup> review of National Parks and AONBs
- The development of a new Environmental Land Management Scheme
- The need for Government to improve how it measures progress in enhancing beauty, landscape and heritage
- Further planning reforms – including a review of the National Planning Policy Framework, pressure for increased house building and development and expansion of the concept of environmental net gain in planning
- increased pressure for new tree planting
- negotiations on Brexit and a wealth of Brexit-related legislation (Agriculture, Environment Bills, Statutory Instruments) and policy statements
- further devolution deals

Although the priorities will fluctuate as the external environment changes throughout the years ahead, responding to these challenges and making a genuine difference to national policy will require sustained activity. This will require NPA and NPE staff to be nimbler in how we engage and communicate collective policy; for staff to be more empowered to deliver collective messages; and to respond only to business-critical consultations. NPE staff will also continue to collaborate with CNP who engage in policy debates from a voluntary sector perspective.

Keeping members of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on National Parks briefed can be important for ensuring the challenges facing National Parks are readily understood and the work and needs of NPAs is supported within Parliament.

**Key to delivering this will be:**

- **Agreeing our intention and method of engagement in, and ongoing involvement in the outcomes of, the 21<sup>st</sup> century review of National Parks and AONBs in order to provide a strong collective voice and a refreshed Vision for the National Parks**
- **Respond to the Government's Farming Command Paper; and share and champion the work of NPAs in environmental land management in order to secure a role for NPAs in the future scheme**
- **Engaging with Brexit related legislation that might impact on National Parks, in particular the Agriculture Bill, the Environment Bill and consultation on Environmental Principles and a new environmental watch-dog**
- **NPE to be part of the cross-government alliance on environment and health and ensure NPAs are eligible for funding through the Government's natural environment for health and wellbeing programme**
- **Working with the Heads of Planning Group during 2018, NPE staff to seek to influence the content of the revised National Planning Policy Framework by advocating NPE's collective priorities for amendment**
- **NPE staff and NPOs to influence government departments/ agencies responsible for supporting delivery of the 8 Point Plan for England's National Parks**
- **Rejuvenate the APPG for National Parks to enhance the reputation of NPAs, address policy challenges, or highlight opportunities for funding of NPA programmes, and review its effectiveness against other Parliamentary engagement in April 2019**
- **NPA Professional Groups and NPE staff to respond only to business-critical Government consultations and Parliamentary Inquiries**
- **NPE staff and NPOs to collaborate with other organisations that have an interest in the future of National Parks and the work of NPAs based on Business Plan priorities**
- **During 2018 gather evidence, facilitate internal thinking and seek to influence the Hobhouse-style review on a new Vision for National Parks, with a view to engaging others and influencing the subsequent Government response during 2019.**
- **The Board to agree new Accords with the Forestry Commission and Mobile UK so as to strengthen relationships with these partners.**

### **AIM 3 – RESILIENT RESOURCES**

**To secure and enhance NPAs income from the public sector through collective action; collaboration; and be the catalyst to support smarter working and the use of resources amongst the National Park family**

National Parks England will continue to be the main vehicle for National Park Authorities to present their collective case to Government for funding (particularly core funding). The Government will announce its overall public spending envelope in November 2018 and undertake a Spending Review during 2019. This will be a significant focus of activity.

We also want to create the right conditions (drawing on NPA's high reputation (aim 1) and policy expertise (aim 2)) for NPAs to be funded for specific projects from other Government departments, and grant making bodies.

NPAs shall, working through NPE, also support smarter working across the National Park family in how resources (human and financial) will be deployed so that NPAs can continue to be cutting edge, effective, public bodies. This will include supporting smarter working, deeper collaboration, and making better use of data across the National Park network.

We shall achieve the above working alongside National Parks Partnerships that is driving forward corporate sponsorship opportunities for the UK family of Parks.

#### **Key to delivering this will be:**

- **The Board agreeing a strategy for feeding into the 2019 Spending Review, informed by NPOs and NPE staff**
- **NPE staff to monitor funding programmes and provide advocacy (when appropriate) to enable NPAs to be eligible for funding**
- **Complete the launch of the *Love Your National Parks* print-on-demand shop on a self-sustaining footing and evaluate its effectiveness for collective merchandising**
- **The NPE Executive Director will maintain close contact with NPPL's Development Director in order to make the most of policy/ funding synergies**

## **AIM 4 – STRONGER TOGETHER**

**To work in ways that maximise the effective collaboration between the team of NPE staff and the members and staff from across the National Park family, recognising people are our greatest and most important asset in achieving impact as a collective.**

The experience and commitment of the staff that work in National Park Authorities/ the Broads Authority and in National Parks England is profound. NPAs will work together to support the development of their staff and their capabilities. This aim seeks continuous improvement with regard to how the NPAs/ NPE work together, and therefore supports (and is indeed critical for) the achievement of the first three aims.

An important dimension to this is improving the capability to communicate collective policy priorities and good practice to NPE's audiences. This will be achieved through working alongside NPUK's communications expertise.

**Key to delivering this will be:**

- **Drawing on the NPUK Communications expertise in 2018 to review NPE's needs and options for improving effective communications to policy-makers/ public on policy priorities.**
- **To raise awareness of how NPA's come together through NPE through providing standardized information that can be included in new National Park Staff and Member Induction Courses as UK and individual NPA level.**
- **To review the current mechanisms that support collective working (current NPA All Parks Officer Groups, NPO Policy Lead roles, Board and E-NPOG meetings) to ensure they meet people's and organizational needs; are effective, efficient and proportionate in terms of joint working commitments.**
- **Subject to the review above, NPE staff to co-ordinate and support the meetings of the NPE Board and National Park Officers (3 a year of each).**
- **NPE staff to consider how current internal communications could be improved, both in terms of sharing policy updates more widely amongst NPAs; and explaining what NPAs are achieving collectively through NPE.**
- **NPAs to consider how they can recognize and support staff contributions to the collective effort, acknowledging that this can provide benefits and added value to the NPA as well through valuable learning opportunities and individual development.**

**- ENDS -**