

# Position Statement

## Working in Partnership to Achieve National Park Purposes



### Introduction

England's National Parks are national treasures for their wildlife, landscapes, cultural heritage. For millions of people they offer wonderful opportunities to appreciate the natural environment. The National Park Authorities protect the special qualities of the National Parks and encourage people to understand and enjoy them. Critical to success is working in strategic partnership with other organisations. We need public, private and voluntary sector bodies to further National Park purposes when they set policies, make investment decisions and take actions that could affect National Parks. In turn, the work of National Park Authorities can make an important contribution to the achievement of shared policy objectives and the priorities of others.

### England's National Parks

Over 209,000 people live in England's National Parks, and whilst our National Parks are a truly national treasure, they are also living landscapes peopled by farmers, others who manage the land and people living in rural communities. Each of the nine National Parks in England has a National Park Authority. These are independent bodies funded by central Government and have the following two purposes:

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

In carrying out these purposes, they also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park. Strong partnerships geared around delivering shared objectives are critical to achieving success – and an important facet of all NPAs. The National Parks and NPAs can bring many benefits to a partnership; enabling a range of objectives to be achieved. These include (but are not limited to) assisting in carbon storage; flood prevention; the provision of high quality cultural and tourism experiences; support for rural communities; and the engagement of young and other sections of society with the natural environment.

### Delivering National Park Purposes: the challenge

National Parks have been designated because they exhibit special qualities which are of national (and frequently international) significance. These include outstanding landscapes; rich cultural heritage; abundant and rare wildlife; and plentiful opportunities for the public's enjoyment of them. Protecting and enhancing these special qualities depends on the actions of many organisations, communities and individuals.

National Park Authorities are small organisations – typically employing around 125 people. They play a big role, however, in helping bodies work together through partnerships. These partnerships include:

- Government departments (such as Defra, CLG, DCMS, and DCFS amongst others)
- other public bodies (such as parish councils, Local Authorities, Housing Associations, Natural England, the Forestry Commission and English Heritage);
- organisations representing land managers, industry and other sectors (such as farming and commoning organisations);
- regional and sub-regional partnerships;
- local communities who live and work in or around National Parks; and
- the voluntary sector (such as the National Trust, CNP, RSPB, Ramblers Association, and National Park Societies).

These partnerships exist both within the boundaries of the National Park, and beyond. Frequently they will cross the above sectors. Indeed, there are excellent examples of strong strategic partnerships that break down barriers between institutions and land managers and that deliver real benefits on the ground for all parties. They enable NPAs to work with people and organisations at a grass roots level; to help test NPA thinking against others with different cultures and perceptions; and for pooling financial and other resources (both capital and revenue). Because the statutory responsibilities of NPAs overlap in some cases with the responsibilities of other bodies (like Natural England and English Heritage) effective partnerships and communication are essential to secure best use of public money by avoiding duplication of effort or bodies working at cross purposes.

Unfortunately, there are also examples of threats to National Parks from public and private sector interests: large scale infrastructure and major developments; and damaging incremental change brought about by thousands of relatively small decisions. Celebrating the good and preventing the bad is increasingly important.

We recognise that to deliver improvements in carbon management and broader eco-system services, we must work with others, and on a landscape scale. The challenge is to maximise synergy between organisations, furthering National Park purposes on their own, and in partnerships with National Park Authorities and other bodies; and avoiding and minimising the threats to National Parks. The Section 62 duty (outlined later) is an important mechanism which we believe should bring organisations together to deliver shared priorities.

### **Facilitating local bodies in working for National Parks**

There are a wide range of bodies who work within National Parks, and further National Park purposes and who do so often without reference to the NPA. Parish Councils, local community groups, businesses, tourism operators, farmers all contribute in a myriad of ways.

Sometimes National Park Authorities work closely with other bodies who want to support National Park purposes. This might be through facilitating community action, engaging in community planning processes or funding discrete projects through the Sustainable Development Fund. The nature of support and engagement will depend on whether this is a strategic partnership, or one of a myriad of relationships that NPAs have with others. National Park Authorities have, for example, worked with local communities to identify needs and delivery of high quality affordable local housing.

## **ENPAA's Position**

ENPAA is seeking the visible support at national, regional and local levels for National Park purposes, which is demonstrated through good working relationships and focused actions.

### The National Park Management Plan

A shared Vision for the National Park can provide the foundation for policies, decisions and actions for every organisation that has a stake in a National Park. It can provide the basis for complementary Business Plans, joint action plans and Local Area Agreements. National Park Management Plans are for the National Park, not just the National Park Authority. Common ownership is vitally important and NPAs put considerable effort in ensuring effective early engagement with partners in their preparation. If the Plan is to succeed, other bodies have to be involved in its development, and publicly sign up to a shared set of policies, specific targets and programmes of action.

It is important to have mechanisms in place to ensure that after the Management Plan is adopted, other bodies and the NPA work together and support each other to follow through on their commitments. The National Park Management Plan is a statutory document. ENPAA believes it should enjoy that status and be referred to in a wide range of fields of policy. We welcome the status given to the Plan in recent CLG Guidance. We would aim to work with CLG, Defra, the LGA and Natural England to further explore how local authorities might further the objectives of the National Park Management Plans. We believe, however, that all public bodies should have regard to the aims of the National Park Management Plan as well as National Park purposes if their activities have the potential to affect a National Park.

### Planning Strategies and Policies

NPAs are looking to ensure that spatial planning and land management further National Park purposes and help deliver the parks' socio-economic duty by facilitating sustainable national park communities. ENPAA believes the National Park Management Plan should have the same status as Sustainable Community Strategies – and as such, spatial planning policies developed by NPAs should further the National Park Management Plan - and be tested on that basis by the Planning Inspectorate.

National Parks represent significant assets as a key component of the green infrastructure in many of the English Regions. National Parks act as areas for piloting new approaches in the regions and NPAs bring specific expertise to a wide range of regional partnerships on for example spatial planning, sustainable development, biodiversity and climate change.

Government Offices, Regional Assemblies (and their equivalents), Leaders Boards and RDAs should work hard to ensure that National Park purposes are upheld in Regional Spatial Planning documents, and by other bodies in their own planning documents.

### Local and Multi Area Agreements

National Park Authorities engage in Local Strategic Partnerships as equal partners. All local authorities have a shared responsibility to make a local area agreement, set agreed targets and work together to achieve them. We look to local authorities to explore the potential for LAAs to further National Park Purposes. NPAs will willingly work with local authorities on LAAs where this can be achieved. ENPAA also supports the establishment of Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) developed to further management on a wider landscape scale where these add value.

## Agreements

National Park Authorities (through the UK Association of National Park Authorities and ENPAA) have a number of agreements at a national level with other bodies. NPAs are involved with many more at an individual National Park level. This includes, for example, sub-regional action plans with Regional Development Agencies in delivering the regional economic strategy. ENPAA believes these can provide assistance in setting out shared priorities, but that good communication between bodies is of greater importance. Agreements should generally be supported by an Action Plan which is regularly reviewed and updated.

## Partnerships

Partnerships exist in many different forms. We believe it is important that any partnership has a role that furthers National Park purposes, rather than consumes resources simply for the sake of joint working. Clarity of purpose, a shared commitment to action, performance measurement, risk management, accountability and trust-building are essential ingredients.

ENPAA wants to see strong, focused, partnerships that deliver their actions and are periodically reviewed to ensure they continue to add value. These partnerships will involve people and organisations based both inside the National Park, and beyond the designated boundary.

## Section 62 Duty

Section 62 of the 1995 Environment Act in amending previous legislation requires all public bodies to have regard to National Park purposes when performing any function which might affect a National Park. This includes decisions for activities that might affect a National Park's special qualities even though they are located outside the designated boundary.

ENPAA believes Section 62 should be the springboard for joint action. Some partners demonstrate this through their contribution to implementing the National Park Management Plan, but it is important to remember that the duty is broader and covers all activities. While all public bodies have a statutory obligation to have regard to National Park purposes, it seems too often to be necessary to remind them of their responsibilities. We look to Defra and Natural England to champion National Park purposes in those circumstances. During 2009, ENPAA will be looking at the Section 62 duty with a view to considering how its effectiveness could be improved and strengthened.

ENPAA looks for a greater transparency in how Government and other bodies report on their implementation of the S.62 duty. This might include Corporate Plans and other high level documents setting out how they have considered National Park purposes during the year.

## Monitoring and review

ENPAA will review this Position Statement on an annual basis.

## **Supporting Action**

National Parks need the support of everyone. National Park Authorities will play a leading role and support all those wanting to further National Park purposes. Often there are synergies between the

achievement of National Park purposes and the achievement of other public benefits and priority objectives. ENPAA believes, therefore, that there is much to be gained by working together.

Sometimes it will be necessary to stand resolutely firm in defence of the special qualities of the National Park. More often it will involve working closely together on a shared vision, a joint programme or new project to deliver mutual benefits. We look to all arms of Government (from national, regional to local) to support National Parks.

Specifically, within central Government, we look to:

- all Government departments whose activities influence the domestic agenda to consider how their policies, priorities, and spending decisions might affect National Parks – and whether there are exciting opportunities to enhance National Park purposes through joint activity;
- all Government departments to demonstrate how they have considered National Park purposes in draft legislation, White Papers and other key documents;
- Defra to champion National Parks publicly and with other Government departments and Agencies;
- Defra to name new bodies like the Infrastructure Planning Commission and the Leaders Boards (following the Sub National Review) in the Defra Guidance on Section 62;
- CLG to ensure that the need to implement the Section 62 duty is made an explicit requirement in preparing National Policy Statements;
- BERR and CLG to ensure the statutory role of NPAs in the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategies is retained in the new arrangements following the Sub National Review; including through ensuring NPAs have a seat on the new proposed Leaders Boards; and
- Government Offices to support training amongst senior staff into National Park purposes.

We also look to

- Natural England to champion National Park purposes through its own work;
- Regional Development Agencies to actively engage and enter into partnerships with National Park Authorities;
- the LGA to explore how the relationship with NPAs might be strengthened;
- Other local authorities within and beyond the National Park boundary, including in their role as planning authorities, to robustly defend the special qualities of National Parks and the public's experience of them through their own planning policies and development control decisions; and
- the Audit Commission to consider (where relevant) how a local authority has met the legal requirements relating to protected landscapes as part of the new Comprehensive Area Assessments.

The English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) provides a collective voice for the National Parks. This statement sets out their shared position on working together to further National Park purposes. Each Authority works to implement the Management Plan for its area and so each National Park Authority will need to implement this and other policies in ways that are compatible with this plan and appropriate to local circumstance.

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