



Outdoor Recreation Strategy Consultation

Response by National Parks England

June 2015

Introduction

National Parks England (NPE) supports policy and practice by providing a collective voice for the nine English National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority. It is governed by the Chairs of the ten Authorities. This response represents the collective view of officers who are working within policies established by the National Park Authorities (NPAs) and follows internal consultation amongst the All Parks Access Officers Workgroup.

NPE welcomes the desire to produce a strategy for outdoor recreation and through that to secure improved health outcomes, deliver well-being to the nation and support the local economy. National Parks have an important part to play in this.

Our founding legislation, the *National Parks and -Access to the Countryside Act 1949* includes two purposes for National Parks, the second of which is to '*promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Parks by the public*'. The special qualities of National Parks are many and diverse including their wide open spaces, relative wildness and tranquillity and natural beauty. The outstanding opportunities for all forms of outdoor recreation are an important element of why National Parks exist and what they have to offer the nation.

National Parks cover almost 10% of England and over 50% of the population are within an hour travel of a National Park. English National Parks have a population of 313,000 and collectively account for more than 90 million visitors a year. Many are involved in a range of activities including walking, cycling, horseriding, climbing, water sports, air-sports and events as well as simply 'getting away from it all'.

National Parks are a resource for all to benefit from escape, adventure, enjoyment, inspiration and reflection in high quality landscapes, attracting people from all ages and walks of life. National Park Authorities promoting new access and recreational opportunities. Through working in partnership with others: at an individual level they help to boost confidence and support behavioural change while delivering wider social and economic benefits and developing community cohesion between rural and urban communities.

The Government recognises the benefits that National Parks can provide for the nation in its main policy statement: *The English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010*. In this it refers to the connection between National Parks and health outcomes as:

"In the 1930's the Government National Parks Committee identified the benefit of creating National Parks in England to improve the health of the nation by encouraging more healthy lifestyles for the physical health of the nation's citizens. The need for the National Parks to be the lungs of the nation led in the

1940's to legislation to enable the creation of several National Parks. This was a solution for an industrialised and largely urban society. In the 21st Century we have become far more urbanised and also post-industrial. Today Parks are even more relevant to the health of the present and future generations. They contain some of the last remaining tranquil areas where peace of mind can be achieved in an increasingly busy society" (paragraph 105)

One example of how the National Parks contribute towards improved physical activity is through our work on cycling. Many of the National Parks are heavily involved in the Department for Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund initiative. These schemes are designed to provide walking and cycling experiences in wonderful surroundings which can then help to reinforce behavioural change when people return home.

National Park Authorities (NPAs) have a range of statutory duties and powers relating to access and recreation including managing the public right of Open Access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. In addition, some NPAs have taken on responsibility for rights of way maintenance, delegated from the Highway Authorities. This is because they recognise that a well-managed rights of way network is important to the delivery of the NPA's statutory purposes. A network that can be used with confidence is important to visitors, land managers and residents alike. Many people use the rights of way network for walking, cycling and horse-riding - as a means to enjoy the special qualities of the area. In addition, the network provides the means to gain access for other recreational activities such as climbing, caving and paragliding. Furthermore, the type of responsible access that is encouraged by the provisions for open access is one that has the potential to be extended to other areas including to woodlands, riversides and for water.

NPAs also play an important contribution in outdoor learning and in the year 2013-14 English National Parks reached 54,000 learners, Welsh National Parks 23,000 and Scottish National parks 6,000.

As well as providing infrastructure and information, the National Parks can also be great ways of inspiring the wider public about the benefits of physical activity and can communicate messages that encourage greater take up of activities.

Theme 1 – Happy and Healthy

What is the problem? – There is an epidemic of inactivity and inequalities in health which is not being addressed through a joined up approach between Clinical Commissioning Groups, Public Health England and the outdoor offer.

What does success look like? – Activity which is fun, accessible and sustainable. Consideration given to the target audiences and age groups so ways are developed to engage them in activity that is meaningful for their stage of life such as the 30-40 age group in terms of risk to health ie stroke, obesity, diabetes etc.

What needs to happen? - Need to collate existing evidence, and identify and fill gaps and develop infrastructure and links with organisations to help them change individual attitudes and weave activity into daily routines. Dartmoor National Park Authority have recently embarked on a pilot project which is starting to develop links, build the evidence and test "green prescriptions". Other National Parks, including the Peak District and South Downs National Park Authorities, support and complement local authority health walks and the North York Moors NPA have referrals from local GP surgeries. Evidence from the monitoring of the initial Pedal Peak District project which offered cycle training demonstrated large numbers of new and returning cyclists, often from less represented groups, both resident and visitor.

Evidence

http://www.visitengland.com/sites/default/files/downloads/case_study_-_pedal_peak_district_1.pdf

Theme 2 – Children and young people

What is the problem? – children are becoming disconnected from the natural world leading to health, mental wellbeing and educational impacts. Barriers in schools with an over-crowded curriculum, transport costs, fear of litigation, and misunderstanding of health and safety requirements.

What does success look like? – Outdoor recreation in its widest sense to be given as much weight by the Government as it gives sport leading to material and health wellbeing, curriculum enrichment and pupil attainment. Better understanding of H&S issues on the part of teachers and parents in relation to risk and its management. Young people given the skills and confidence so they can undertake a range of outdoor activities themselves with minimal support.

What needs to happen? - Transition stages important (primary to secondary, secondary to university and/or community). Promote outdoor activity at schools sites as a starting point and through links with outdoor activity centres. The Go Dales project in the Yorkshire Dales National Park helped young people attain skills and to gain basic qualifications in conjunction with clubs so they could organise and undertake activities under their own steam (ie not as a one-off). Participants were also introduced to local outdoor activity clubs to encourage continued participation and progression in an activity. However, many clubs are not geared up to take young people, and this in itself is a barrier to continued participation. Orienteering at schools in Devon. Resources required include clubs, volunteers and individuals willing to facilitate, enable and motivate.

Evidence

http://archive.yorkshiredales.org.uk/outandabout/youngpeople/godales/go_dales_final_report_small-2.pdf

Theme 3 National Economy

What is the problem? - More work to do. Not sure that policy makers and politicians really place the true value on outdoor recreation in terms of the national economy despite this being well documented by a number of research reports in recent years. The management of access and maintenance of infrastructure is currently the victim of hits from a number of angles including squeezing of public sector budgets and associated staffing; discontinuity of landscape scale resource and thinking as facilitated by Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs); demise of the access provision within High Level Stewardship (HLS) which facilitates concessionary access and reduction in available resource through the New Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS)

What does success look like? - Environment and access are interlinked and mutually dependent elements of our rural economy delivering health, water quality, carbon retention, biodiversity, well being and quality of life agendas.

What needs to happen? - Make sure politicians and policy makers understand the value of outdoor recreation to the nation's health and wellbeing and to the economy whether through spending on activities or costs saved to the health service. Investment that effects the best returns from the landscape for all users and interests.

Theme 4 – Demonstrating Economic and Social Value

What is the problem? - More work to do. Reconomics a good start by getting the narrative across. As above – policy makers and politicians don't really place value on outdoor recreation.

What does success look like? – High returns from the visitor economy enabled through high quality protected environments and with access to it, accrue to local communities and underpin opportunities for diversification, particularly in upland and rural areas.

What needs to happen? – acceptance that appropriate outdoor recreation developed sensitively and making the most of a location's USP can be a primary driver for the local and national economy and support sustainable communities because of the jobs that are supported.

Theme 5 – Accessible to everyone

What is the problem? - Barriers in confidence, motivation, transport, information/knowledge all of which are interlinked leading to less use by ethnic minorities, young people, disadvantaged groups, and disabled people. Lack of investment in site infrastructure eg rights of way network.

What does success look like? - people gaining confidence on their doorstep and then, depending on the activity, progressing further afield to our National Parks.

What needs to happen? – Individuals need the right information at the right time in the right format together with investment in appropriate facilities at each site. eg car parks, bike hire, information boards so the venue where they choose to go is 'welcoming' and/or 'packaged' as appropriate to make undertaking a chosen activity easy. For example investment in Miles without stiles (access for the less mobile) schemes across the National Parks, backed up by leaflets, videos and downloadable maps to inspire people. Community based schemes need facilitation at a local level eg Stepping Stones to Nature projects.

Theme 6 - Outdoors is Protected

What is the problem? - resources are required to manage and maintain recreational opportunities to an adequate standard (or better) including the infrastructure of public rights of way and access land, human resource presence for resolution of potential and perceived conflicts, pressure of recreational events in some areas, dissemination of information to users eg impacts of dogs and litter and reduction in public transport.

What does success look like? – Investment and funding for recreational management.

What needs to happen? – Consideration of legislative changes in relation to appropriate access to water and caves. Consideration of how the outdoor industry can help support the management of the resource including visitor giving, sponsorship. Provision of 'people on the ground' at sites and facilities. Investment in infrastructure eg car parking, toilets, information as appropriate.

Overall ambition

People have the confidence and knowledge, through information and opportunities to access and enjoy the countryside responsibly for a range of outdoor activities from their home. They are happy and healthy and feel inspired by the outdoors. They have the knowledge and motivation to expand their horizons and seek new opportunities. They recognise and value the quality of the natural environment on offer in this country, particularly the

outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation that exist in our National Parks. These high-quality environments help provide inspiration when undertaking activity in more mundane settings

There is good access to the countryside for all recognised forms of outdoor activities, with high quality sites and/or appropriate facilities at the right level in the right places. There is mutual respect between users and different interests so conflict is readily managed and minimised. Access legislation is reviewed to provide equality of opportunities amongst recognised activities. Rights of way legislation is reviewed and adapted to meet modern demands.

There is joined up approach between Government, NGBs, organisations, and individuals, it starts with the existing or potential user of the countryside. Walking (including wheelchair users), one of the most basic forms of outdoor activity that anyone can enjoy, is recognised as an activity where participation should be encouraged and funded through the public purse.

National Parks England
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Map of the UK's National Parks

NATIONAL PARKS

Britain's breathing spaces

