National Parks England

House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy

Written evidence submitted by National Parks England
September 2018

Summary

1.   National Parks England (NPE) is the umbrella body that brings together the views of the nine English National Park Authorities (NPAs) and the Broads Authority. As Authorities we have a significant role as place shapers, working alongside our rural communities. The communities of National Parks are intimately connected to the landscape around them, and NPAs are similarly intimately connected with their local communities.

2.   The statutory framework recognises that our National Parks are national assets for their beauty. Economic activity in National Parks is underpinned by the high-quality environment – more recently referred to as their natural capital. We do not see a conflict between the achievement of environmental and economic objectives; but creating the conditions where nature, people and business flourish requires careful management and a long-term view. The NPAs and Broads Authority (hereafter referred to together as NPAs) have considerable experience of successfully doing this - experience that we believe can be helpful for rural areas beyond our boundaries.

3.   A National Park provides a focal point for recognising the relationship between the quality of the environment and the economy. There are many examples of successful businesses operating in and exporting internationally from bases within England's National Parks. Between 2012-16 the number of businesses in England's National Parks grew by more than 10%, and over 21,000 jobs were created over the same period. The turnover of businesses in England's National Parks in 2016 was £13 billion, with Gross Value Added being somewhere between £5.5-£8.7 billion per annum, making it comparable to those of a smaller city such as Plymouth or Swindon.

4.   Whilst traditional industries such as farming and land management will always be core to National Parks, we have witnessed a general decline over the past 50 years, whilst service sector industries (including tourism) have seen significant growth. We hope the Committee will consider the needs of the visitor economy as part of its deliberations.

5.   National Parks Authorities work closely with communities, businesses and others helping them add value and grow, supporting skills development, investing in infrastructure, and attracting visitors while maintaining a high-quality landscape and environment. The *Government's 25 Year Environment Plan,* highlighted the importance of maintaining natural capital, as a key for underpinning economic activity. The successful rural economy of the future must acknowledge the importance of this natural capital and take advantage of the opportunities it offers.

6.   Lack of accessibility and transport options remains a considerable challenge for rural communities, and for many visitors too. While there are many innovative ideas for transport, these are predominantly urban focused and the experience of many rural residents is one of managed decline in services. National Parks England believes finding solutions requires the active participation of a range of partner bodies and investment. As CNP note in their report on accessibility, *"given that*

the National Parks are national assets, there is a case for providing more public resources to ensure that they are available to everyone".

7.   Poor digital connectivity is another major challenge for rural businesses, the visitor economy and many rural communities. Whilst there are successful examples in England's National Parks of achieving 96% coverage of superfast broadband, many deep rural areas remain with poor provision. Recent welcome announcements from the Government should be supported by a recognition in value for money criteria that delivery to remote rural areas will incur higher initial capital costs. Local organisations and communities should be empowered to be more actively engaged in delivery of both broadband and mobile solutions, with a requirement placed on service providers to work constructively with communities. Government should also undertake a thorough analysis of the implications for different rural communities from the proposal to retire the copper networks in order to stimulate use of full fibre, and to promote convergence between Full Fibre and 5G.

8.   For mobile coverage specifically, the Government should ensure the needs of the visitor economy are embedded into investment decision making processes for 5G infrastructure; ensure opportunities to improve coverage from the roll out of the Emergency Service Network Upgrade benefits rural communities too; and commit in the short term to a 3G universal service obligation to ensure 100% mobile coverage, supplemented by the 95% 4G target.

9.   Brexit means we have an opportunity to reshape how rural development is facilitated in this country. A key part of NPE's vision for environmental land management post Brexit is for local delivery of integrated solutions to deliver a triple dividend: enhanced environment, improved productivity and farm profitability and more vibrant communities. We explain how this might be achieved and the role of NPAs in helping to deliver this in more detail.

10.   Equipping young people with new skills is an essential element of supporting thriving rural economies. NPAs are enthusiastic supporters of apprenticeships and have devoted considerable energy into developing new apprenticeship standards, as well as the number of apprentices. National Parks England would be interested to explore whether suitable employers who are unable to spend their apprenticeship levy funds may wish to transfer funds to National Parks to support the provision of apprenticeships, offering new opportunities for young people in some of our more remote rural areas.

11.   In addition to the new industries and apprenticeships that are required for rural areas, it is also important that traditional skills are not lost that are vital to the maintenance of the countryside and its assets. The maintenance of such traditional features as buildings, hedgerows and walls contribute to the fabric of the countryside which is the underpinning for much economic activity. As one example, we would like the Government to commit to reduce VAT on repairs to historic buildings at the earliest opportunity following Brexit – to deliver tangible benefits for the conservation of the historic environment in National Parks and the maintenance of the traditional crafts and skills.

12.   Affordable housing in National Parks is a key issue where the availability of suitable land is low, land costs are high, and local incomes generally low. Our evidence provides detail on why a market led approach will not deliver affordable housing in protected landscapes, as well as some of the other decisions that have undermined provision in National Parks. National Parks England would encourage future housing policies to be tested for their applicability to protected landscapes with bespoke arrangements made as necessary. NPAs would be happy to work with Government on this in order that NPAs were in a better position to support national park communities' needs.

13.   We propose a number of measures that would contribute towards affordable housing provision in National Parks. We advocate the Government empower NPAs to increase the total stock of affordable housing for families and young people through additional financial support, and associated restrictions on holiday and second homes in order to ensure the future viability and

sustainability of rural communities. Greater support should be given to Community Land Trusts which empower communities to provide solutions to meet their needs. And the Government should introduce a pilot for a Revolving Rural Land Bank to bring forward affordable housing in housing stress areas. The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan included a commitment to test a revolving land bank to promote rural affordable housing and NPAs are working with MHCLG, Homes England and delivery partners to develop pilots in Hampshire, Exmoor, Dartmoor, North Yorkshire and the East Riding and Northumberland. Providing greater support (through a higher level of grant per housing unit) for the delivery of houses that are managed by RSLs in National Parks would also help.

14.   As recent studies have indicated, many of the challenges to housing supply rest outside of the planning system, yet it has often been cited as an obstacle. The NPAs, as local planning authorities, take their planning responsibilities very seriously and this includes balancing sometimes competing needs. The NPAs facilitate housing development and the rural economy by focusing new housing delivery on affordable housing to meet identified local needs; resisting inappropriate development in the open countryside which may impact upon the special qualities of the national park; promoting high quality and more sustainable design; and supporting the delivery of community infrastructure through planning gain. Through a particular emphasis on proactively supporting clients with pre-application advice, and working in partnership, we have been able to get to a position where the likelihood of approval for a planning application is higher in a National Park (at 90%) compared to the English average.

15.   The Committee asks how the rural economy and rural voices might be better heard. We detail in our evidence how this needs a multi-pronged approach, sustained over time in order to deliver systemic change. In the short term we encourage the Committee to examine the extent to which the Government's Single Departmental Plans reflect thinking about the aspirations and needs of rural communities; and would advocate greater support be given to facilitating visits by officials to rural areas to better understand the issues facing rural communities and public bodies operating within these areas.

16.   Fundamentally, the Government has an important role in supporting a change in emphasis towards a rural economy which protects and enhances the natural environment – in common with the goals in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. To do this requires flexibility in policy, and a degree of devolution to allow for the diverse situations facing different rural areas to be recognised. We recommended, therefore, that implementation of national frameworks be devolved to local areas to ensure the best approach can be shaped to suit local circumstances.

17.   The Committee ask what is being done by local government and LEPs to support rural economies. In our view, supporting our rural economies is not a task for one organisation: if we are to provide coherent, effective support then councils, LEPs and others must work together in a co-ordinated manner. We would recommend the Government's policy statement on the development of Local Industrial Strategies makes an explicit requirement to consider the needs of different rural areas and size of businesses in setting policies and allocating resources; that these strategies are rural-proofed; that some of the funds being given for capacity building amongst LEPs be used to enhance understanding of the needs of SMEs in rural areas; and for LEP Boards to include rural businesses and in some places those knowledgeable in the visitor economy. National Parks England has prepared an offer to LEPs which has been designed to increase the impact of the LEPs' rural economic development programmes in a way that is fully compatible with the statutory purposes of National Parks. Given National Parks cover almost 10% of the country, including some of our remotest areas, we hope the Committee might endorse this initiative.

18.   Finally, National Parks England would recommend the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund be rural proofed given it could be the source of funding for many support structures and networks to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Introduction

1.   National Parks England (NPE) supports the policy-making process by co-ordinating the views of the nine English National Park Authorities (NPAs) and the Broads Authority. It is governed by the Chairs of the ten authorities. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. Our response represents the collective view of officers who are working within the policies established by the NPAs and Broads Authority and follows internal consultation amongst officers.

2.   The National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority (hereafter referred to together as NPAs) welcome the latest inquiry into the Rural Economy. As Authorities we have a significant role as place shapers, working alongside our rural communities. Approximately 326,900[1] people live within England's National Parks, and many millions visit. Below we set out what we see as our role in this area, before answering a number of the questions posed by the Committee where we have most experience.

The role of the National Park Authorities and our Vision

3.   National Parks are known for being our finest landscapes, with iconic archaeological and historical sites and valuable wildlife habitats. They are visited by millions of people every year and are home to strong communities who care passionately about these beautiful areas.

4.   The statutory purposes of the National Parks are to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the areas; and
- Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Parks by the public.

5.   In addition, the National Park Authorities (as distinct from the National Parks) have a duty, in pursuing these purposes to seek to foster the social and economic well being of their local communities[2]. As Local Planning Authorities for their area, the NPAs also have a statutory duty to promote sustainable development[3].

6.   The communities of National Parks are intimately connected to the landscape around them, and NPAs are similarly intimately connected with their local communities. In 2010, the NPAs collectively worked with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to prepare a Vision for National Parks. This was set out as a series of destination statements, to be achieved by 2030 and was included in the Government's *Vision and Circular for England's National Parks 2010*[4]. The Vision is set out below. It includes an ambition in which "*Sustainable development can be seen in action. The communities of the Parks take an active part in decisions about their future*". But it is crucial to recognise that the achievement of all of the other aspects of the Vision require the involvement of local communities, farmers, land owners and businesses.

7.   The statutory framework recognises that our National Parks are national assets for their beauty. Economic activity in National Parks is underpinned by the high-quality environment. We do not see an automatic conflict between the achievement of environmental and economic objectives; but it requires careful management and a long term view. The NPAs have considerable experience of doing this, and we elaborate on this in answer to question 2 asked by the Committee. We believe

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[1] Source: ONS October 2017
[2] Section 11A of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
[3] See Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
[4] This remains extant and is available on the Government website

this experience can be helpful for rural areas beyond our boundaries. Indeed National Parks England specifically asked for the NPAs to benefit from having a *Functionally Specific Power of Competence*[5], to enable to them to work more effectively over their boundaries.

Vision for the English National Parks and the Broads

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.

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8.   Supporting the rural economy requires investment and dedication to the people and businesses operating inside the National Parks, linking to those businesses that are not located within but reliant on the produce of the National Parks; and working in partnership with others whose area may cover all or only part of the National Park yet who can make key decisions that will influence their future. The most obvious example is the Local Enterprise Partnerships. We develop this point in answer to Question 15 by the Committee.

9.   In 2015, National Parks England published *National Parks Open for Business – An offer to the Local Enterprise Partnerships from National Park Authorities in England*[6]. Just over three years on, this remains relevant in setting out where we believe NPAs add value, and what can be achieved through working together. It also explains what we hope to achieve in more detail than the Vision quoted above. Specifically, it suggests that together, NPAs and LEPs can:

- create more, good quality jobs in some of the most remote rural areas;
- make National Parks better for business by improving infrastructure and skills;
- help entrepreneurs and local businesses to become more sustainable and resilient;
- grow a high quality, more resilient visitor economy by linking world class environmental assets with world class customer service;
- give a major boost to land-based industries and markets, including by supporting the development of supply chains;

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[5] This was included as Section 22 of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2015
[6] Available on National Parks England's website and [here](#).

- use the National Parks' superb landscapes to enhance people's quality of life and attract new businesses and the highly skilled workforce they require; and
- demonstrate how distinctive high-quality environments can be a driver and inspiration for thriving businesses.

10.   The Committee's Inquiry is wide ranging and we have, therefore, focused on those issues where NPAs have greatest experience or contribution to add.

Lines of Inquiry

Q1.   What do you understand by the "rural economy"? How has it changed over recent years, and what has been the impact of these changes?

11.   Whilst policy making processes might refer to "the rural economy", in practice it is a number of "rural economies" operating within a space. Making sure public and private bodies have a good understanding of how these operate and inter-act is important for sound decision making. Individual NPAs undertake monitoring to support the development of their State of the Park Reports and to inform statutory National Park Partnership Plans and Local Plans. In addition, in 2013 National Parks England published a report examining the economic profiles of the English National Parks collectively. This work, undertaken by Cumulus and ICF GHK consultants revealed that:

- While tourism, recreation, farming and forestry make a large contribution to National Park economies, other sectors are still significant and provide around 50% of National Park employment overall.
- There are around 22,500 businesses in the National Parks with a combined turnover of £10.4bn employing 140,000 people.
- Over 90 million people visit the English National Parks each year – this compares with 5 million visitors a year each to the British Museum, Tate Modern, the National Gallery or the Natural History Museum – the four most popular free visitor attractions in England.
- Visitors to the English National Parks spend at least £4bn, contributing about one third of the spend from rural tourism in England.
- Public spending on National Parks via the National Park Grant is less than £1 per person per year. National Park Authorities increase the value of this spending by bringing in around 50p per person in funding from other sources.

12.   Many businesses within the National Parks comprise small firms. In the Peak District National Park, for example, 90% of firms employ fewer than 10 people. Whilst data is not available across all the National Parks, it would appear that traditional industries such as farming and land management have seen a decline over the past 50 years, whilst service sector industries (including tourism) have seen significant growth.

The Visitor Economy

13.   An area that is not covered within the Committee's questions but which nevertheless is very important to rural economies, and particularly in National Parks, is the visitor economy. Our latest data[7] shows that:

- each year there are 94m visitors to NPs and surrounding areas each year; and
- they spend more than £5 billion and support 75,000 FTE jobs

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[7] Source: National Parks England, *National Parks National Assets* 2017

14.   In March 2016 the Government published an *Eight Point Plan for England's National Parks* in conjunction with National Parks England. This includes a number of ambitions connected to drivers of the rural economy (as it was expressed). These were to drive up international tourism, support the creation of apprentices, and promote the best of British food sourced from the National Parks.

15.   Recent data obtained suggests the number of visitors to all ten National Parks has increased from 90m in 2012 to around 95m in 2016, after areas of influence have been accounted for. The economic value of this increase in visitor traffic is affected by the proportion who are day visitors. Research[8] commissioned by the UK National Parks Tourism Officers Group suggests that average spend across the 15 National Parks is £66.42 per trip, though there is wide variation between the National Parks. That same research found that the scenery and ability to enjoy the countryside was by far the main reason for visiting. And within England, the study found 17% of visitors to England's National Parks were new (rather than repeat) visitors.

16.   An important issue is managing visitor flows in order to avoid environmental damage. This can be achieved through careful recreational management and dispersal techniques; supporting sustainable transport and visitor behaviour; and encouraging visitors during the shoulder periods. The latter is particularly important in providing an income for local businesses for more of the year, as well as managing environmental impact.

17.   Work by NPAs on local food and drink promotion and events, cultural events and the expansion of Dark Sky activities across all the National Parks is helping extend the tourist season. Figures received from VisitEngland show that overnight staying visitors for 2014-2016 has increased from 4% for all visitors to 9% and this increase was driven mainly by The Broads, North York Moors and Peak District. Overnight staying visitors tend to contribute far more to the local economies than day trippers. The two examples below illustrate how NPAs are supporting rural businesses *and* enhancing people's appreciation of the natural environment.

CASE STUDY: Peak District National Park – Pedal Peak

In terms of the visitor economy, one of the things that has proved particularly important in the Peak District has been the investment in new / improved cycle routes that the Department for Transport provided to NPAs in 2010 and 2013.

In 2010, The Peak District NPA received £2.5m in 2010 from Cycling England and the DfT. The project centred on the reopening of four railway tunnels along the Monsal Trail to create an 8.5 mile multi-user trail. Following the reopening of the Monsal Trail in May 2011, there was an increase in cyclists using the route of more than 400% - representing a large increase in people getting active outdoors. In addition to the infrastructure element, a key part of the project was marketing and awareness raising, including encouraging new and returning cyclists. The success of the Pedal Peak project and the increase in popularity of cycling both locally and nationally led to a desire from a number of partners including the Peak District NPA to extend the trails.

In 2013, the creation of a partnership, led by Derbyshire County Council, supported by the NPA led to additional funding – Pedal Peak II. This project has seen cycle networks enhanced, a marketing campaign that has reached over 100,000 people, and hugely popular routes for both local residents and visitors. In 2015 it was voted the nation's favorite short trail. The NPA has continued to build on this, hosting a project aimed at encouraging businesses to provide cycle friendly infrastructure to boost their trade.

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[8] Source: Team Tourism Consulting (2017): *UK National Parks Visitor Characteristics*

CASE STUDY: Northumberland National Park – Dark Skies extending the visitor shoulder periods

 The key to improving the visitor economy of our National Parks is to see them as year-round visitor destinations; able to offer an appealing and accessible range of unique authentic experiences to as wide an audience as possible.

Because of their rural nature and frequently being sparsely populated, all our National Parks are fortunate to have dark skies relative to the urban areas in England, where most of our visitors live, and where light pollution prevents them from seeing the stars above. Northumberland National Park happens to have the darkest skies in England, and since securing International Dark Sky Park Status in 2013, it has literally become a 'game-changer' with recent developments making a tangible and positive impact to the local rural economy, as well as to residents' quality of life. Exmoor National Park has experienced a similar effect since it secured International Dark Sky Reserve status in 2011.

Kielder Observatory is regarded as being the jewel-in-the-crown of the Northumberland International Dark Sky Park. In 2015, more than 18,000 visitors from the world over flocked to this unique award-winning facility and its continuing success has spurred other local businesses to improve their offer. The owners of the Battlesteads Hotel, located on the edge of the Dark Sky Park, responded to the zeitgeist and built a new observatory in their own back-yard. Battlesteads was busy in summer, but much quieter in winter. Long nights are a bonus for stargazing – the owners saw that astronomy could draw in visitors year-round, nature tourists as well as amateur astronomers. Winter bookings for 2016 were said to exceed expectations of 70% occupancy. Smaller self-catering and cottage lets elsewhere in the National Park are also welcoming visitors who come from all over the UK to experience something special and unique in the depths of winter, and they love it.

Northumberland Tourism has now developed new criteria for accommodation providers (Dark-Sky Friendly & Stay & Gaze) that will help them minimise light pollution around their properties and market their businesses to new interested audiences. To date, more than 40 businesses have signed up for accreditation.

Other English National Parks are recognizing the growing potential of astro-tourism. 2016 saw the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks hosting their first joint Dark Skies Festival in February, and Dartmoor is hosting its own dark Skies Exhibition at the High Moorland Visitor Centre at Princetown.   Meanwhile, the South Downs National Park also successfully received dark skies reserve status.

Creating lasting memories is what the National Parks are about, and star gazing in places of darkness and tranquillity is one that people want to experience. English National Parks could be regarded as gateways to our Universe, providing enhanced learning opportunities that will inspire the next generation. In addition, it has increased staying visitors and income to some of our remotest rural communities.

Q2.   Could you give examples of notable success stories and good practice in the rural economy? How might rural successes be replicated and better promoted?

18.   The special qualities that can be found in our National Parks underpin the economic activities– from traditional farming to tourism, food and other businesses. National Parks provide an excellent example of thriving rural economies based on sustaining a high-quality environment. For example:

- Between 2012-16 the number of businesses in England's National Parks grew by more than 10%
- Between 2012-16 over 21,000 jobs were created
- The turnover of businesses in England's National Parks in 2016 was £13 billion, employing 140,000 people
- Gross Value Added for England's National Parks is (depending upon the methodology adopted) somewhere between £5.5-£8.7 billion per annum, making it comparable to those of a smaller city such as Plymouth, Coventry, Swindon or Sunderland.[9]

19.   There are a range of exciting SME and entrepreneurs who are thriving within National Parks, and exporting their goods and services. See for example – *Business Meets Beauty in Britain's National Parks* [10].

20.   National Parks Authorities work closely with communities, businesses and others helping them add value and grow, supporting skills development, investing in infrastructure, and attracting visitors while maintaining a high-quality landscape and environment. Some examples follow that illustrate how this is done and what has been achieved.

- The involvement of the Broads Authority in the development of Strong Roots, New Growth – The Norfolk Rural Strategy 2017-2020 which highlights amongst other things the need to develop links between distinctive Norfolk landscapes and tourism, food and cultural development.
- Supporting businesses coming together through a private/ public partnership *Business Peak District* that supports the sustainable growth of the area's economy, including through the use of the *Inspired By the Peak District* branding. The latter saw an increase from 54 to 366 businesses using the brand within its first 15 months.
- The Green Halo Partnership involving the New Forest National Park Authority and a host of other partners. This initiative aims to be a global exemplar of how our most precious landscapes can work in harmony with a thriving, economically successful community, integrating the National Park into its surrounding areas: environmentally, economically and socially. This is summed up as "where nature, people and business flourish" and is a good example of the local economy finding ways to benefit from the National Park's advantages while retaining its special character.

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[9] Source: National Parks England, National Parks National Assets 2017 and Cumulus Consultants *Gross Value Added of England's National Parks – Update* (2017)
[10] See: https://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2016/jul/24/business-meets-beauty-uk-national-parks

CASE STUDY – The Dartmoor & Exmoor Economic Prospectus, and Rural Productivity Networks Proposal

Published in Autumn 2015 the prospectus demonstrates the pioneering role National Park Authorities have played to support rural economic development and further outlines investment opportunities that will help to deliver sustainable rural growth in the future. The Prospectus identified 4 key areas of economic potential that offer opportunities for growth:

- Improve Connectivity – broadband, mobile and road and rail infrastructure
- Promote Place and Product – recognise the value of NPs as quality destination brands
- Support for key sectors such as tourism and farming
- Sustain the resource – essential foundation for future sustainable growth

A summary is available, as well as a full copy of the prospectus here.

Following publication of the prospectus, the two NPAs developed a **Rural Productivity Networks** (RPN) proposal and submitted it to DEFRA in 2016. The RPN proposal builds on the strongest assets: the people, communities and spectacular environment of the National Parks. Their current networks (eg the Dartmoor and Exmoor Hill Farm Projects) are pioneers of collaborative approaches and the NPAs want to extend this approach to all rural businesses. It offers the opportunity to pilot a new approach that will help demonstrate how:

- Rural productivity can be improved through, for example, collaborative action to foster entrepreneurship, promote innovation and knowledge transfer
- A high quality, resilient environment and cultural heritage can be at the heart of rural growth and productivity
- New models of service provision and delivery can be developed to ensure the long-term sustainability of our rural communities
- Rural areas can provide effective and economic services to other areas (for example, health and water management)
- Traditional land-based industries can be developed to improve productivity and growth but also to deliver a range of environmental services

The ambition is for the initiative to become a recognised model of good practice that others can learn from. The proposal has the potential to fill a 'market gap': many of the examples of potential productivity and growth opportunities identified by local businesses are unlikely to happen without the capacity to support micro and small enterprises and help them to work together. The Network would provide capacity to do this.

Q3.   How do you see the future of the rural economy? Where is the greatest potential for growth, and what might be the impact of technological and other changes?

21.   The *Government's 25 Year Environment Plan,* highlighted the importance of maintaining natural capital, as a key underpinning for economic activity. The key is to recognise the contribution that nature makes through the ecosystem services it provides to society. The successful rural economy must acknowledge the importance of this natural capital and take advantage of the opportunities it offers. There will be, for example, opportunities to create new businesses and jobs by investing in the management of natural habitats to protect and enhance natural capital. We believe this aspect of the rural economy should be supported.

22.   In addition, we believe the findings of the South West Rural Productivity Commission[11] (2017) will be particularly pertinent to the inquiry. The Commission found huge potential for economic growth if key opportunities are seized and challenges addressed and the report shows examples of tangible projects that will deliver benefits throughout the 4 LEP areas. Many are replicable throughout rural England. The most important themes that emerged from the work are:

- Digital connectivity presents a game changing opportunity but without further urgent action businesses and communities will become left behind
- Smart technologies have the potential to create solutions to many of the challenges faced by rural areas and the development of an innovation platform on a regional scale has the ability to create higher value jobs
- The rural South West hardworking and entrepreneurial culture, coupled with its stunning natural environment, with the right support, can become a hothouse of enterprise
- The agri-food-tourism economy is a strength upon which we can build globally recognised propositions as THE place to start and build and grow a food business
- There are genuine concerns that our rural communities are spiralling downwards towards 'fossilised retirement villages' unless Government and local leaders take prompt action. Local and national policy must move away from the 'one size fits all' approach that fail to recognise that rural areas are different.
- Brexit has the potential to shake the foundations of our rural economy – providing either a much-needed boost or sudden economic shock, both scenarios requiring swift action.

Q4.   How can access to transport be improved in rural areas?

23.   There are no shortage of suggestions for how transport is going to be improved over the next ten years plus. These include autonomous, connected and ULEV options. However, in reality much of this innovation will be focused on urban areas and the strategic road network ahead of rural areas.

24.   Whilst there are a number of good initiatives to promote public transport and the use of more sustainable modes, these tend to be small scale and/or temporary in nature. The more familiar picture for many communities is of declining opportunities caused by a managed decline in public transport provision. This can be a particular problem for young people.

25.   As an example, the Peak District National Parks is surrounded by urban areas, all with commercial bus services operating in and around them. There are some commercial bus services operating in the Peak District, but loss of subsidy for some services can make operators disinclined or unable to run other services, often withdrawing them at short notice. This clearly has a substantial impact on the resident communities of National Parks and the options open to them, but it also inhibits people visiting.

26.   The Campaign for National Parks (CNP) has produced a report, *National Parks for All – Making Car Free Travel Easier* [12] (2018). This highlights that improved access will assist those who don't own a car, as well as increase options for resident communities. It also indicates that it will boost rural economies, citing evidence that "*buses generate between £2 and £2.50 in benefits to local communities for every £1 of local authority spend*". Increasing the availability and frequency of sustainable transport options is proposed, as is ensuring it remains affordable. Providing more and better information about the existing options is advocated, as is developing integrated ticketing, real time information, and incentives. National Parks England believes there is merit in many of these proposals. However, they require the active participation of a range of partner bodies and

[11] See: https://heartofswlep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/HotSW-14332-A4-Overview-report-digital-doc-FINAL.pdf
[12] See: https://www.cnp.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploadsfiles/National_Parks_car-free_travel_HIRESDPS.pdf

investment. We note that CNP say in their report, "*given that the National Parks are national assets, there is a case for providing more public resources to ensure that they are available to everyone*". The case study of the Peak District (see earlier) clearly shows what can be achieved when funding is available.

Q5.   What barriers to growth are created by poor digital connectivity? How can connectivity be improved across the board?

27.   The problem of poor connectivity for rural businesses and communities has been well rehearsed, see for example the latest report, *Recharging Rural* (2018) by the Princes Countryside Fund. This identifies poor connectivity as among the top three challenges for rural areas. A rural business survey by Rural England and the SRUC (2018)[13] found high rates of dissatisfaction with connection speed and reliability amongst rural businesses. National Park Authorities too, see poor digital connectivity as a key challenge. Business surveys, for example in the New Forest National Park identify improving digital networks as a key business requirement. Given our National Parks contain some of our remotest rural areas, they can often be the least attractive when it comes to commercial decision-making. Decisions by private companies based solely on number of residences will tend to steer investment to urban areas. Yet this can undermine the many exciting entrepreneurs who wish to base themselves in National Parks, and also overlooks the huge temporary population generated through the visitor economy.

28.   We recognise that Government programmes have sought to address the inequality of broadband provision. National Parks England welcomes, in particular, the recent announcement on 29 August 2018 to allocate £95 million from the Local Full Fibre Networks Challenge Fund, with an emphasis on rural areas[14]. We also welcome the announcement by Defra Minister Lord Gardiner of £11m funding for North Yorkshire[15] and his clear message that "rural areas should not be left behind in the connectivity slow lane". DCMS's *Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review* (2018) also contains welcome commitments to ensure the needs of rural areas are addressed. For example, it says *"..rural areas, must not be forced to wait until the rest of the country has connectivity before they can access full fibre networks*" (page 8). To reinforce this point, the strategy includes an "*outside-in approach to deployment"* to ensure no areas are systematically left behind.

29.   In order to support these welcome commitments and build on existing programmes, we believe there are a number of other things that the Government could do to improve the current situation facing rural areas:

- Securing provision for the remaining ' 5%' and future proofing network provision will be a game changer for rural areas, not only for businesses but also for service provision. Fundamental to achieving this will be a review of 'value for money' criteria, building in a recognition that delivery to remote rural areas will incur a higher initial capital cost.

- Local organisations and communities should be empowered to be more actively engaged in the delivery of both broadband and mobile solutions, with a requirement placed on service providers to work constructively with communities. Confidentiality, state aid and competition issues have prevented community engagement with broadband programmes reducing confidence and acceptance of infrastructure and technological solutions. In our

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[13] See: https://ruralengland.org/unlocking-the-digital-potential-of-rural-areas-research/
[14] The DCMS announcement can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/95-million-full-fibre-broadband-boost-for-local-authorities and indicates that rural areas is one of the key criteria for allocation.
[15] See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/45-million-investment-in-rural-broadband

view community schemes, crowd funding, voucher aggregation, grants and other alternative financial models all have the potential to deliver cost effective innovation.

- Undertake a thorough analysis of the implications for different rural communities from the proposal to retire the copper networks in order to stimulate use of full fibre, and the policy of promoting convergence between Full Fibre and 5G.

CASE STUDY – Reaching the parts other programmes can't in our National Parks

The National Park Authorities are proactively seeking improved connectivity for their residents, businesses and visitors. A good example comes from the South West.

Dartmoor and Exmoor NPAs (working with Connecting Devon and Somerset) are helping to deliver superfast broadband to bring coverage up to 96% of all premises in the two National Parks; delivering enhanced coverage before much of Devon. For those areas that could not be reached by the more traditional fibre to the cabinet provision under current financial caps, a new wireless network engineered by Airband has been deployed connecting around 5,000 premises. The technology and products being used for this network were researched and designed by Cambium Networks who are based in Dartmoor National Park and employ almost 90 people at their base in Ashburton. They are a global company with offices in the USA, India and the Ukraine. They sell to over 150 countries with a turnover in excess of $150m.

Mobile Connectivity

30.   NPAs recognise (as the Government does) that it will not be practically possible to get 100% broadband coverage through fibre. NPAs have been working with mobile operators for some time to seek to ensure the needs of communities, businesses and visitors in our remoter parts of National Parks are not overlooked (see above case study). There can be challenges brought about by pressure for new masts and larger infrastructure. NPAs are keen, however, to find pragmatic solutions through quality design and early dialogue with operators. The Peak District NPA has, for example, worked with mobile phone companies in the past to approve over 90% of masts in the National Park[16]. And earlier in 2018, National Parks England agreed a new Accord with Mobile UK[17] to facilitate closer shared working.

31.   The DCMS *Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review* notes that deployment of 5G will be *"in phases rather than a big bang, and will likely vary be geography"* (page 11). It goes on to describe a realistic scenario that sees a low capacity layer covering the country, with higher capacity in areas of high demand *"such as towns and cities"* (page 11). This rather suggests a divergence in service provision between urban and rural areas in the future and a scenario where rural areas are continually playing catch up. At the very least, National Parks England would look to the Government to ensure the needs of the visitor economy are embedded into future decision-making processes for investment decisions for 5G infrastructure. The population of some towns and cities within National Parks and other attractive areas swell significantly as a consequence of visitors and their needs and those of the businesses that rely on them should be addressed.

32.   As a safety net, and in the shorter term we believe the Government should also commit to a 3G universal service obligation to ensure 100% mobile coverage, supplemented by the 95% 4G target.

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[16] Source: Peak District National Park Authority – *Peak District National Park Management Plan Topic Papers*
[17] See: National Parks England and Mobile UK Joint Accord 2018

33.   NPE believes there is an opportunity to improve connectivity through the current upgrade programme by the Home Office of the Emergency Services Telecommunications Network and have met with officials to discuss this. The provision of new or larger masts as part of the upgrade, particularly in our most beautiful landscapes obviously has the potential to spark controversy. We have agreed an Accord with the Home Office that seeks to support the network upgrade sensitively through early dialogue between the agents working for Home Office and the NPAs as the relevant Local Planning Authorities. The upgrade of the emergency service network provides an excellent opportunity to ensure the infrastructure can support both the emergency services and publicly available services for local communities.

34.   Currently EE, as the contractor, are tasked with building the infrastructure for the ESN after which they and other commercial operators can make a case for using it for public service. This may also involve some enhancement of the infrastructure to facilitate this. Where this is economically advantageous to providers they will no doubt seek to do so on the back of this publicly paid for infrastructure. However, this potentially still leaves large swathes of our National Parks without coverage, despite the infrastructure effectively being put in place, because of decisions over economic payback. The Conservative Government's manifesto committed to improving high speed broadband to the whole country, and 5G coverage for the majority of it. The rugged landscape of many of our National Parks means this can be challenging and mobile satellite technology can help plug the gap. We have therefore suggested to the Home Office that in not-spot areas, the infrastructure to enable a public service element is installed, and providers are then obliged to take it up. This would serve National Park communities and have the benefit of reducing the need for additional infrastructure by different providers.

Q8.   How can rural businesses be helped to thrive, and how can new industries and investment be supported? How might labour and skills shortages be overcome?

35.   As set out above, we believe that land owners and managers should be supported where they deliver "public goods" in the form of protection and enhancement of the environment. A key requirement, therefore of support programmes for rural businesses should be a demonstrable benefit to the natural environment from that investment in public money. A National Park provides a focal point for recognising the relationship between the quality of the environment and the economy.

36.   High value jobs are also important for rural communities and will reduce the very high levels of out-commuting and travel to work movements across the national park which put a strain on our rural road infrastructure. This will require action on two fronts: creating (and protecting) more employment space within our boundaries and supporting the growth of the knowledge economy which is weak and could potentially decline as the high growth areas nearby in towns and cities continue to attract the higher value, high tech companies.

37.   We would also like to draw the Committee's attention to two areas in particular: the next rural development programme, and apprenticeships.

The Next Rural Development Programme

38.   A significant mechanism for shaping rural development to date has been the England Rural Development Programme. A criticism that NPE (and many others) would make of the current system, is how the funding streams have been silo-based and poorly integrated. The architecture of the Common Agricultural Policy and its two 'Pillars' has shaped our delivery arrangements: environmental payments separate from farm productivity and wider rural development. A key part

of NPE's vision[18] for environmental land management post Brexit is for local delivery of integrated solutions to deliver a triple dividend: enhanced environment, improved productivity and farm profitability and more vibrant communities. Too often England has developed a linear, top-down approach to rural development. Our collective experience of delivering the Sustainable Development Fund, facilitating partnerships to agree a vision for each National Park and a management plan to deliver that vision, demonstrates the value of networked rural partnerships.

39.   National Park Authorities are well placed to facilitate community-led local development programmes that link environment, economy and community. These programmes could include grants but should also include loans (ie a revolving fund rather than one-off injections of capital). There should also be the opportunity for revenue spend. In terms of farm businesses and the farmed landscape this means having the ability, capacity and funding to 'make the connections', for example:

- Farm business innovation groups that bring together farm businesses, research institutions and other businesses; making sure that the high environment value of many National Park farming systems is of market value.
- Programming of spend to maximise the local economic impact eg. programmes for the restoration of stone walls, hedgerows are linked to an apprenticeship/skills programme to ensure there is local skilled labour.

40.   In our experience, the isolation of rural communities and dominance of time poor micro businesses requires a bespoke intervention of skills support focusing on local place-based facilitation.

Apprenticeships

41.   National Park Authorities within England are very positive about the prospects of apprenticeship programmes to equip young people with the skills they need for work. Our experience has been that in addition to helping their own development, they contribute significantly to the working of the NPA and are an excellent addition to the team.

42.   The Government's 8 Point Plan for England's National Parks (co-written with National Parks England) included a target to double the number of apprenticeships within the National Parks by 2020, and to bring forth new apprenticeship standards. Latest figures for March 2018 suggest there has been a 91% increase in the number of apprenticeships, and that the number of NPAs hosting an apprentice has doubled since 2016. In addition, the Institute for Apprentices (IFA) has recently approved a new *Countryside Worker* apprenticeship – that has been developed by an employer group led by the North York Moors NPA. NPAs are also involved in supporting groups working up an *Outdoor Activity Instructor* standard; an *Archaeological Technician* standard; and an *Assistant Historic Environment Advisor* standard.

43.   As of the 6 April 2017 any employer with a pay bill over £3 million each year must pay the apprenticeship levy. It is possible for a group of companies to pay the levy together, and pool the levy funds, by setting up a single shared apprenticeship account. From April 2018, it has been possible for levy-paying employers to transfer funds to other employers, through the apprenticeship service. Employers receiving transferred funds will only be able to use them to pay for training and assessment for apprenticeship standards. National Parks England would be interested to explore whether suitable employers who are unable to spend their levy funds may wish to transfer funds to National Parks to support the provision of apprenticeships, offering new opportunities for young people in some of our more remote rural areas.

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[18] For more details on NPE's views on the next Environmental Land Management system, see *Farming in the English National Parks* 2017

Q10.   How can more young people be encouraged to stay in or return to rural areas and contribute to their communities?

44.   National Parks have a much older age structure than the rest of the population. This can impact on communities where services are no longer provided locally, and vulnerable people may struggle as they can't travel to get them easily. The culture/social life of villages is often dominated by the interests and needs of older people. It is generally older/retired people who run village clubs and institutions, including parish councils. Some NPAs are interested at looking at whether there could be initiatives to encourage younger people (aged 30 and below) to get involved in community life.

45.   The demographics of the National Parks differ between National Parks and this is shaped, in part, by their geography, accessibility and the services available. Some National Parks, such as the Yorkshire Dales, are facing de-population and the NPA has been working with others to address this. The solution to some of these challenges requires the involvement of a wide range of partners who have either access to funding or other levers. The *Attracting Families initiative* includes the Yorkshire Dales NPA, the County and District Councils covering the area and involves the Chief Executives and Leaders working through what they can do to reach agreement on a joint programme of activity to attract more families and people of working age to move to the National Park.

Q11.   What can be done to address the challenges associated with an ageing rural population, such as social isolation and social care provision? What opportunities are there for the older retired population to help support the rural economy?

46.   This topic has been examined by a number of bodies, notably recently by the Office of National Statistics in a publication *Living longer - how our population is changing and why it matters[19].* The ageing population is important for National Parks too. The ONS publication*, Small Area Population Estimates in England and Wales: Mid 2016 [20]*, highlights that:

- National Parks have an older age structure than the wider population of England and Wales.
- In mid-2016, the median age for National Parks within England and Wales varied from 48.3 in the South Downs to 56.4 in Exmoor. In contrast, the median age for England and Wales as a whole was 39.9.
- In mid-2016, the population of England and Wales aged 65 or over was 18.0%, compared with 23.5% in Northumberland, 33.9% in Exmoor and 33.4% in The Broads.
- Conversely, 19.0% of the population in England and Wales were aged 0 to 15 compared with only 10.7% in The Broads and 11.5% in Exmoor.

47.   In our role as Local Planning Authorities we recognise the need for local plans to promote sheltered accommodation, for housing developments to consider the needs for carers within the development, and for community nurses to be able to be based within the community and housed.

48.   It is important to recognise too that National Parks provide many exciting opportunities for people (of all ages) to volunteer. National Parks have benefitted substantially, over the years, from dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers. Many are retired and keen to "put something back", as well as to continue to reap the health and well-being benefits of being in some exceptionally beautiful countryside and doing something worthwhile in the company of others. NPAs promote volunteering opportunities and the Government's 8 Point Plan for England's National Parks says, "*we*

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[19] ONS (2018): *Living longer - how our population is changing and why it matters*
[20] ONS (2018): *Small Area Population Estimates in England and Wales: Mid 2016*

will work with National Park Authorities to make sure that we are doing all we can to promote and enable volunteering" (Defra, 2016, 8 Point Plan, page 17).

Q12. How can the affordability of rural housing be improved? What are the other challenges associated with rural housing and how can these be addressed?
&
Q13. How have recent planning policy reforms affected rural housing and the wider rural economy? What changes, if any, are needed to planning rules?

49.   The National Park Authorities are sole planning authorities for their area. Parliament has granted them planning powers in recognition of this being a vital means by which to further National Park purposes and the duty. They do this by:

- Focusing new housing delivery on affordable housing to meet identified local needs
- Resisting inappropriate development in the open countryside which may impact upon the special qualities of the national park
- Promoting high quality and more sustainable design
- Supporting the delivery of community infrastructure through planning gain

50.   The NPAs take their planning responsibilities very seriously and this includes balancing sometimes competing needs. We place particular emphasis on proactive client centred approaches where pre-application advice is prioritized, and through working in partnership. It may come as a surprise to some to learn that:

- The likelihood of approval for a planning application is higher in a National Park (at 90%) compared to the English average[21].

- For minor development – the NPAs approved a higher proportion of applications (5% more) than the English average.

- For major residential development specifically, the NPAs (despite their constraints) have a higher approval rating (85% against an English average of 81%).

- On average, applications for minor residential development will tend to take longer to determine in National Parks than elsewhere though they are more likely to be approved.

51.   The availability of affordable housing for local people is of significant concern to NPAs. All National Parks attract a premium on house prices – in the New Forest National Park this is 22% above average. In Dartmoor National Park, house prices are currently 12 times average wages. The importance of the environment means that land availability is low, land costs are high, and there is significant demand from those seeking to move into the area with greater financial capacity than many of those working locally.

52.   The primary purpose of land use planning in national parks is the conservation of landscapes for their enjoyment by the nation as a whole so it is not sustainable to increase housing supply to try and suppress house prices and thereby improve affordability. Our National Parks are protected landscapes and there needs to be an appreciation that a market driven approach to housing development is not suitable in a National Park. This requires policy to be developed in ways that test their applicability to protected landscapes. If this does not happen the risk is that either National

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[21] All figures from MHCLG Live Planning Tables as of year ending March 2018

Park and AONB statutory purposes are actively undermined, or alternatively the policy fails to address the specific needs of national park communities, with the young disproportionately affected.

53.   We have seen a number of events or decisions made over the years that have made it harder to deliver affordable housing in National Parks. These include:

- Since 2010 the investment in social housing from central government has been cut to levels that have made it increasingly difficult for some Registered Social Landlords to deliver housing. Many rural housing associations do not have stock to sell under voluntary right to buy schemes and could not backfill houses sold by this method even if they wanted to because the sites to do so do not exist.
- The availability of credit from banks is severely restricted as a result of lender caution post financial crash, and the size of some rural associations means they do not have the reserves to fill the gap in lending.
- The right-to-buy policy which, according to the Rural Services Network (RSN) has reduced the stock of affordable rented properties with the intended reinvestment not replacing those properties lost. RSN estimate that only 1 replacement home was built for every 8 sold in rural areas between 2012-2015.
- The current threshold for affordable housing undermines delivery in small rural communities where most affordable housing is delivered on small sites to meet community needs. This exacerbates affordable housing issues and its associated economic consequences as well as discouraging communities from supporting housing delivery as they cannot see the direct local benefit through affordable housing provision.
- The more limited scale of development in rural areas, combined with the focus upon affordable housing delivery means Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is often not viable. S106 needs to remain sufficiently flexible, through LPA's ability to seek planning obligations and pool funds, to accommodate the needs of more disperse rural development.
- Many communities want or expect sustainable design and build in housing. The government circular and vision for National Parks sees the National Parks as exemplars for sustainable development. However, the inability to require sustainability standards beyond building regulations stymies this and frustrates those who wish to pursue climate change goals and recognise that reduced living costs can contribute to affordable housing aims.

54.   More recently, we have been encouraged by the increasing recognition of the importance of social housing within wider housing policy, and the recognition in the recent Housing Delivery Test Measurement Rule Book that the test is not appropriate within National Parks[22]. Addressing rural housing issues will require alternative and innovative approaches and the flexibility for Local Planning Authorities to deliver locally acceptable and appropriate solutions. In addition, the Letwin Review of Build Out Rates[23] also suggests that there are many other actions, beyond the sphere of planning that need to be addressed in order to increase housing numbers.

55.   Looking to the future, National Parks England hopes that the Government will:

- Empower National Park Authorities to increase the total stock of affordable housing for families and young people through additional financial support, and associated restrictions

[22] See:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728523/HDT_Measurement_Rule_Book.pdf
[23] See:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718878/Build_Out_Review_Draft_Analysis.pdf

on holiday and second homes in order to ensure the future viability and sustainability of rural communities. Looking at limiting second home ownership through taxation may also be controversial, but necessary to save some parts of National Parks from becoming ghost villages in the off-season.

- The Government to acknowledge that National Parks should remain as exceptions to the general planning and regulatory framework when it comes to housing policy and the extension of Permitted Development Rights – with our highest quality landscapes acting as exemplars for design of high quality local needs affordable housing.

- Support Community Land Trusts which empower communities to provide solutions to meet their needs, reflecting and building on the Government's localism agenda. They are particularly suited to meeting housing need in rural areas, delivering resilient innovation in rural housing often utilising local construction SMEs. Some recent examples in Dartmoor National Park can be found at Chagford and Christow.

- Introduce a pilot for a Revolving Rural Land Bank to bring forward affordable housing in housing stress areas. The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan included a commitment to test a revolving land bank to promote rural affordable housing and NPAs are working with MHCLG, Homes England and delivery partners to develop pilots in Hampshire, Exmoor, Dartmoor, North Yorkshire and the East Riding and Northumberland. NPAs believe that such an initiative could ultimately be self-financing, and improve the quantity and speed of delivery of a range of different tenures of housing that meet local needs in rural communities. This could include self and custom build and mixed developments that provide homes for those on low incomes currently excluded from the housing market.

- Providing greater support (through a higher level of grant per housing unit) for the delivery of houses that are managed by Registered Social Landlords in National Parks to enable them to let or part sell the properties at prices that are affordable to those who are in housing need.

Q14. **Do the Government and other public bodies pay sufficient attention to the rural economy and if not, why not? What might be done to ensure that Government and other public bodies hear and act on rural voices?**

56.   The Committee's question is one that has been frequently asked. This is indicative of the fact that, despite many efforts and initiatives from Governments of different political persuasions, it is not yet embedded in Government thinking.

57.   Many are quick to rush to the process of 'rural proofing' to provide an answer. Whilst this undoubtedly has a role to play, it can end up being a tick-box exercise that lacks depth of understanding or purchase on the decision-making process. In NPE's view, it needs to be part of a wider framework that seeks to integrate the needs of rural areas (environment, economy and society) into decision making. This requires '6Ps':

- Political leadership – consistently applied to move things forward
- People – with the necessary expertise
- Place based approaches to decision making with sufficiently flexibility
- Pounds – ensuring investment is available to address long standing inequalities

- Processes – to hard-wire a consideration of rural areas into decisions by Ministers and officials
- Partnership – to bring people and institutions together to make progress and learn from the experience

58.   Success in the long term requires action on all these fronts simultaneously. Progress will be hampered if only some are addressed at any one time (eg. processes are put in place but resources are unavailable to respond to what the assessment says is needed). There is a tension too, between breadth and depth. A lack of resources in this area means that those responsible for rural proofing have focused on one or two areas in order to make tangible progress. Whilst this is probably the right thing to do in the circumstances, it doesn't lead to systemic change.

59.   In addition to evaluating whether progress has been made against the 6Ps outlined above, National Parks England would:

- encourage the Committee to examine the extent to which the Government's Single Departmental Plans[24] reflect thinking about the aspirations and needs of rural communities;
- recommend greater support be given to facilitating visits by officials to rural areas to better understand the issues facing rural communities and public bodies operating within these areas. Whilst (almost by their definition) remote rural areas can be hard to reach this should not mean policy makers are blind to their needs.

Exciting opportunities for the rural economy from nature require devolution

60.   National Parks England believes there are exciting opportunities for the rural economy to build new, innovative enterprises by recognising the economic opportunities the goods and services nature provides offer. The Government has an important role in supporting this change in emphasis towards a rural economy which protects and enhances the natural environment. National policies such as those outlined in the 25 Year Environment Plan and the Health and Harmony Command Paper are essential in setting a framework. However, national policy must recognise the diversity of England's environment. The natural capital of an area such as the New Forest is very different from that in the Lake District or Peak District uplands. There must be flexibility in policy, and a degree of devolution to allow for this diversity to be recognised. It is recommended, therefore, that implementation of national frameworks be devolved to local areas to ensure the best approach can be shaped to suit local circumstances.

Q15.   What is being done in local government to support rural economies? How effectively do other public bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships operate in rural areas, and how might coordination between bodies be improved?

61.   Supporting our rural economies is not a task for one organisation: if we are to provide coherent, effective support then councils, LEPs and others must work together in a co-ordinated manner. In addition, the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan calls for natural capital to be integrated into decision making. It is important to recognise that natural capital is not constrained by administrative boundaries, and this requires all sectors with an interest in place making to work together to achieve the best environmental, economic and social outcomes for our communities.

62.   That said, as mentioned in paragraph 8, the NPAs do see LEPs as vital partners in supporting the rural economy within National Parks and beyond. The nature of National Parks and our more remote rural areas means that providing support to small and micro businesses is crucial to create

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[24] The Single Departmental Plans have been prepared by each Government department and set out their objectives, actions and indicators of progress. They can be found here.

the jobs, growth and prosperous, resilient and sustainable rural communities that are grounded in the wonderful landscapes they rely on. In our experience the nature of rural areas means that traditional economic interventions are rarely a good fit. This is illustrated by current LEP approaches where the desire to reach more impressive numbers and focus on a few projects has drawn LEPs to rely heavily on major infrastructure projects, often within urban areas. The argument is that a level of trickle down will permeate to reach rural areas, yet in practice this is rarely realised. Growth in rural areas is more often likely to be achieved through multiple interventions as opposed to a single 'big bang' opportunity. Local place-based initiatives that respond to the fine grain of businesses evident in rural areas will be a more effective mechanism to enable sustainable rural growth.

63.   We appreciate that the pressures on LEPs come from many quarters – but to date we believe rural communities have been overlooked, and access to finance to grow local businesses remains an issue. On the 9 August the MHCLG issued a written ministerial statement on Local Growth. This covered changes to strengthen the Governance and operation of LEPs[25], and a little more detail on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Committee may wish to explore how do these changes further the rural economy?

64.   NPE would recommend that consideration be given to:

- ensuring the policy statement on the development of Local Industrial Strategies that the Government says will be published over the summer makes an explicit requirement to consider the needs of different rural areas and size of businesses in setting policies and allocating resources;
- in providing £20m for capacity building amongst LEPs to ensure some of this funding addresses enhanced capacity for understanding the needs of SMEs in rural areas in places where the geography of the LEPs makes this significant, or where the LEP may currently lack the expertise;
- MHCLG/ BEIS in reviewing the Local Industrial Strategies (that are to be prepared for all areas by 2020) to have rural-proofed them;
- in asking the Boards of LEPs to be representative "of the businesses and communities they serve", the Government should ensure this includes rural businesses and in some places those with knowledge of the visitor economy; and
- rural proof the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund which alongside any future rural development programme could be the source of funding for many support structures and networks to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas.

65.   In addition, NPE's offer[26] (that attracted the support of Lord Heseltine at the time of its launch), has been designed to use the strengths and the structures already in place to increase the impact of the LEPs' rural economic development programmes in a way that is fully compatible with the statutory purposes of National Parks. Given National Parks cover almost 10% of the country, including some of our remotest areas, we hope the Committee might endorse this initiative.

66.   Finally, despite the many challenges that undoubtedly face rural economies and their communities, it is reassuring to know that residents continue to enjoy living in National Parks. For example, 90% of residents in the latest survey by the Peak District NPA said that the Peak District National Park was a good place to live.

NPE
September 2018

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[25] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strengthened-local-enterprise-partnerships
[26] NPE, National Parks – Open for Business (2015)