England’s National Parks / 8 Point Plan / Progress Report
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Foreword

England’s 10 National Parks are some of our most iconic landscapes not only in this country, but across the globe. They are also engines of the rural economy, home to a rich array of wildlife, and have a vital role to play in connecting people with nature and fostering wellbeing. They are embedded in our culture, national identity and heritage.

The 8-point plan for England’s National Parks recognised these special qualities and set a framework to unlock their full potential.

Much has already been achieved. We extended the boundaries of the Yorkshire Dales, increasing the park by 24 per cent. The Lake District National Park – which also expanded through designation – successfully bid to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site, affirming this cherished landscape as an international treasure. The target of enabling 60,000 young people to visit the parks has already been surpassed.

Delivering the 8-point plan is a long-term project and we are only at the beginning. There are a wealth of opportunities for farmers and producers in National Parks to promote the provenance of their high quality food and drink. Work is underway to create more apprenticeships, helping more young people on a path to employment. Innovative plans to harness the parks’ potential to improve health and wellbeing are also being developed.

Amidst our enthusiasm for the history and beauty of our National Parks, we must not forget that they are living, working landscapes. Farmers and land managers are vital to maintaining and enhancing these historic places. National Parks will be an important part of our pledge to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it.

I feel honoured to be the Minister responsible for National Parks. Travelling the length and breadth of the country I have been heartened to meet the volunteers, farmers, National Park authority staff and local communities who are at the forefront of conserving and enhancing these precious landscapes. Working together, I am not only excited by, but very positive as to, what we can all achieve.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble
Defra Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity

A year ago the Government, working in partnership with National Parks England and supported by others, published an 8 Point Plan for England’s National Parks.

The Plan demonstrates an enduring commitment to National Parks and recognition that they are at the heart of our national identity, providing a vital source of wellbeing, inspiration and adventure to current and future generations. It is ambitious in its scope, seeking to strengthen and deepen the benefits that National Parks provide for people, nature and the economy. The National Park Authorities are working with Government departments and local communities to take the Plan forward and as this report shows, in just over a year we have achieved a great deal. Over the course of the next few years we will continue to track our progress, working together as a network of National Parks and partners to achieve the full range of ambitions set out within the 8 Point Plan. In doing so we will be building a bright future for our National Parks and making the most of these treasured national assets.

Margaret Paren OBE
Chair, National Parks England
Connecting Young People to Nature

For a young person, a visit to a National Park can be a life-changing experience that inspires an enduring connection with nature. National Parks are places to wander and wonder, and have the power to open a door to unlimited possibilities for learning, exploring and adventuring. At a time when many children are at risk of increasing disconnection from the natural world, it is more important than ever that they have the opportunity to experience National Parks first-hand.

Already the National Park Authorities have surpassed the target of engaging directly with over 60,000 young people a year through school visits. Indeed, we are on track to achieve closer to 100,000 visits – each one a fantastic opportunity for a young person to appreciate the benefit of being in our most inspiring landscapes. In addition, many organisations, like the John Muir Trust, YHA and local schools, also undertake activities for young people in our National Parks, independently of the NPAs. The South Downs National Park’s Annual Teachers Conference in March 2017 attracted over 140 teachers and education providers, all interested to hear how they could make the most of the opportunities presented by using the National Park. Our National Parks are a vital resource to help Learning Outside the Classroom and we welcome the involvement of others.

"NCS continues to support the target of doubling the number of young people experiencing a National Park by 2020. We are committed to the vision of connecting more young people to the natural environment as a life long source of wellbeing, identity, adventure, and pride. Together we are building bridges between our experience and these incredible places." 

National Citizen Service Trust

Supporting close to 100,000 visits by young people to National Parks

We are also in exciting discussions with the National Citizen Service Trust about how the National Parks can support their programme of activity by creating opportunities for adventure, reflective time, learning and service to local communities.
The Government is committed to handing on a better environment to the next generation, and careful management of the environment – in all its forms – will be essential for this. National Parks take a holistic approach that brings together those with an interest in wildlife, landscape, cultural heritage, recreation, health, the economy and rural communities life chances.

Working with landowners, public bodies, local businesses, farmers, communities, NGOs in partnership is the bread and butter of what NPAs do. As place-based organisations, they have 60 years of experience of working in this way. These insights should be helpful as the Government develops its 25 Year Plan for the Environment.

The Border Uplands Demonstrator Initiative hosted by Northumberland National Park Authority is just one such initiative. The NPA is coordinating this Defra led initiative looking at the future of the uplands on the Anglo-Scottish border where national and local agencies are working collaboratively to develop a genuinely environment-based economy and test new approaches for the future of rural communities and the upland environment.

Another example can be found in Exmoor, where the NPA has been a key body for the Headwaters of the Exe project. A project run between South West Water and Exmoor NPA, the initiative aims to improve the quality of the upper reaches of the River Exe through better land management. The 5 year programme is delivering an integrated programme of advice, expertise and grant aid to ensure water quality remains high or improves across the catchment.

We shall be holding a workshop alongside the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to share the benefits of this integrated approach. And NPE encourages other bodies like Natural England, Environment Agency and Forestry Commission to facilitate a joined-up approach between their joint plans and the National Park Partnership Plans that are produced.
Our National Parks are a huge draw for visitors from the UK and overseas. As well as fantastic landscapes of natural beauty, National Parks are home to many quality British food and drink products, and six Michelin-starred restaurants. National Parks also provide the base for activities as diverse as landscape painting, and abseiling – providing space for quiet enjoyment, inspiration, and exciting new experiences.

The 8 Point Plan seeks to promote National Parks as world class destinations, to increase the number of visitors to the family of National Parks and their contribution to their rural economies. The Broads already has a successful collaboration with the Netherlands for example, whilst the Peak District has been working with journalists and businesses from Australia, China and Germany to welcome visitors to the UK’s first National Park. Recent data suggests that the annual number of visitors to England’s ten National Parks has increased from 90m in 2012 to around 94m in 2015.

The family of National Parks is working together to build on this, to promote our best landscapes and to support the rural economies and communities within them. They have, for example, been successful in securing important funds for this work from Visit England’s Discover England Fund.
4 / Apprenticeships

The 8 Point Plan highlights the importance of apprenticeships as a route to support young people entering the world of work. National Park Authorities are in a unique position to offer a variety of opportunities for rural employment and training.

The NPAs are great places to work and have been supporting apprenticeships for many years. There are successful examples of NPA apprentices heading off to start up rural businesses of their own, join other employers in the area, or continue and find employment with the NPAs themselves in a range of roles from business and finance to practical countryside management.

The North York Moors NPA set up its first Apprenticeship scheme in 2002 and now 14% of its staff are apprentices. The successful programme has been named in the top 100 apprentice employers in the country.

The NPAs want to help build a new generation of countryside managers with the knowledge and skills to look after the National Parks of the future. To this end, NPE has worked with a range of partners to develop and submit a Countryside Management Apprenticeship Trailblazer to the Department for Education. This aims to equip apprentices with a range of practical countryside skills from dry stone walling to habitat management and communication skills to help them explain the work they’re doing and why it’s important. A more detailed Countryside Manager/Supervisor programme is also proposed for those developing their skills further. If successful, the standard will be worked up and rolled out across National Parks and other areas.

Further apprenticeship plans are in development. We are confident that we will exceed the target to double the number of apprenticeships in National Park Authorities by 2020. This far exceeds the target of 2.3% that applies to the rest of the public sector and demonstrates NPAs leading the way in this area.

“We love the life and vitality that our apprentices bring to the workplace and staff really enjoy sharing their knowledge and experience with them. As well as academic qualifications and practical skill, the emphasis we put on team working and other ‘soft’ skills means that our apprentices leave us as well rounded individuals.”

North York Moors NPA
National Parks are the place where the story of world class environments, managed by people on the land, and producing high quality food, can be told. The Government is committed to promoting the best of British food and drink, and NPAs have an important role to play. The 8 Point Plan aims to make National Parks places that are known for, and visited as, great food destinations. Government will celebrate National Park produce, whilst food and drink of Protected Designation of Origin or Protected Geographical Indication produced in our National Parks should continue to be protected.

The NPAs are home to many small businesses, producers, and retailers whose products stem from high nature value farming techniques and excellent water quality. They are also home to some bigger names too and demonstrate that it is possible to have thriving entrepreneurs in protected countryside.

NPAs provide support in a number of ways. The New Forest NPA, for example, supports the New Forest Marque, an accreditation scheme that demonstrates true local produce. The Peak District Environmental Quality Mark is a distinctive award presented to organisations that are helping look after the Peak District environment and its people. Whilst the South Downs Food and Drink Portal has gone from strength to strength in its first two years – providing easy access to hundreds of local food and farm shops, restaurants, pubs and cafes, vineyards, breweries and other food producers selling direct to the public; and helping join up the local food and drink chain so they can better work together.

Early discussions are taking place between NPE and the Great British Food Unit in order to scope out the potential for celebrating National Parks food and drink, and telling the stories behind the products.
Everyone’s National Parks

England’s National Parks are for everyone – people of all ages, from all sections of society, whatever their background or income.

The 8 Point Plan seeks to encourage more diverse visitors to our National Parks; to increase levels of volunteering; and to extend the area given this special status. In August 2016 Ministers launched the extensions of the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District National Parks. This historic moment saw almost 50,000 hectares - recognized for their outstanding landscape and benefit from National Park status. The announcement enlarged the Dales by 24% and Lakes by 3%.

With breath-taking scenery, wildlife and heritage, it’s no wonder that people want to volunteer in our National Parks. Data for 2015/16 shows almost 50,000 volunteer days were given across England’s National Parks. This demonstrates volunteers’ dedication to these special areas, where they work alongside NPA staff building shared memories and keeping our National Parks healthy.

“The Dales and Lakes National Parks combined attract a massive 20m visits every year and generate £1.4bn for the economy. These are immensely impressive figures, providing income for small businesses, jobs for local people and much-needed investment in infrastructure. But the National Parks are not just important for the nation’s economic health. They greatly benefit our physical and mental wellbeing, produce great British food and are havens for our most precious plants and animals.”

Lord Gardiner of Kimble  Defra Minister, at the launch of the extension

*A 5.5% increase in the number of volunteer hours offered in one year*
Many of these projects have been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, who remain a key partner for protecting and enhancing our built, natural and cultural heritage. As HLF reviews its Strategic Plan and priorities, National Parks England will offer our experience and advice on how we can do even more to support the natural and cultural heritage sector.

In July 2017 UNESCO declared that the Government’s bid to see the Lake District National Park attain World Heritage status had been successful.

This significant announcement recognizes the beauty of the landscape and its cultural impact encompassing hill farming, art and literature, and the birth of the modern conservation movement. The bid followed extensive work by the Lake District National Park Partnership – a strong group of public bodies, private businesses, community groups and charities.
8 / Health and Well-Being

There is growing awareness that getting outdoors isn’t just good for the body, but it’s good for the mind and soul too. The 8 Point Plan aims to promote the innovative schemes taking place in National Parks that are making a difference to people’s lives, and to ensure the great potential for outdoor recreation is realised.

Millions of people ‘self-prescribe’ a walk or time in our National Parks every year. For others, a little helping hand may be needed because of their medical condition, isolation or other circumstances. National Parks and their partners are promoting healthy lifestyles and helping people recover from illness or manage long term conditions.

Across the country, the NPAs are working on health interventions to improve the health and wellbeing of specific groups who stand to benefit. These include older people, those with disabilities, refugees, veterans, adults with mental ill-health, those suffering dementia, and children at risk. In Dartmoor, the NPA is working with GP practices to evaluate how prescribing social activity and exercise can achieve health benefits with less, or without medication.

To support these excellent projects, National Parks England has teamed up with Public Health England in an exciting new partnership. Expert teams have been meeting to share knowledge, build partnerships locally, and support each other. A Joint Accord was launched in September that cements that partnership.

The ten National Parks in England offer some of the most stunning and memorable landscapes. They are places where you can experience a range of activities – from adventure, sports through to a gentle stroll and picnics – and are less than an hour away for over 50% of people. They contain our finest and most inspirational walking and cycling routes. National Parks England is developing exciting plans to use accessible and well-maintained networks to get more people more active, more often; drawing on the extensive experience of NPAs in managing accessible routes.

“"At PHE, we recognise the important role that National Parks play as part of our wider environment to keep people healthy... now we want to unlock and maximise this potential through supporting investment in National Parks and encouraging local partnerships between individual NPAs and public health teams. We’ve been privileged to see some of these examples first hand during a number of visits to National Parks across the country. We have seen programs that have been truly transformative for their participants.

Public Health England""
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