

Position Statement

Sustainable Tourism



England's National Parks* are national treasures for their wildlife, landscapes and cultural heritage. They are breathing spaces for the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of the nation and provide opportunities for millions of people, every year, to have first class outdoor experiences in first class environments. The National Park Authorities protect the special qualities of the National Parks and encourage people to understand and enjoy them.

The Government's Vision† for the English National Parks states that

*By 2030 English National Parks and the Broads will be places where:
Everyone can discover the rich variety of England's natural and historic environment, and have the chance to value them as places for escape, adventure, enjoyment, inspiration and reflection, and a source of national pride and identity. They will be recognised as fundamental to our prosperity and well-being.*

The iconic landscapes and heritage sites within our National Parks attract visitors from across the UK and around the world. National Park Authorities support the promotion and development of sustainable tourism because it can help to further their statutory purposes and support rural communities. Our aims are that National Parks will be exemplars of sustainable tourism practice and that, as welcoming places, National Parks' value to the nation and appreciation by the public will grow. We want more people, from all sectors of society, to benefit from a deeper experience of the special qualities of National Parks through sustainable tourism.

England's National Parks

Each of the ten National Parks in England has a National Park Authority. These are independent bodies, mainly funded by central Government. National Parks have two statutory purposes, to:

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

In carrying out these purposes, they also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park.

* The English National Parks are The Broads, Dartmoor, Exmoor, The Lake District, The New Forest, Northumberland, The North York Moors, The Peak District, The South Downs and The Yorkshire Dales.

† English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010, Defra, March 2010.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-national-parks-and-the-broads-uk-government-vision-and-circular-2010>

Sustainable Tourism and National Parks in England

Sustainable tourism, as defined by The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, is:

'any form of development, management or tourist activity which ensures the long-term protection and preservation of natural, cultural and social resources and contributes in a positive and equitable manner to the economic development and well-being of individuals living, working or staying in protected areas.' (Europarc 2000)

National Parks England believes that in order to meet this definition, all tourism related travel to and within National Parks must be sustainable.

Sustainable tourism contributes to delivery of the statutory purposes of National Parks, particularly that of promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public. More than 90 million people visit England's National Parks each year. English National Parks are internationally known and the Lake District is one of the UK's top tourist destinations for overseas visitors. Properly managed tourism can bring a range of benefits and help sustain our communities, environment and way of life. Inappropriate tourism development or poorly managed visitor pressure, however, can be damaging. National Park Authorities follow the *Principles for sustainable tourism in National Parks and AONBs* (Countryside Agency, 2004) and put an emphasis on opportunities for visitors both to understand and contribute to sustainable development whilst enjoying National Parks.

The benefits of sustainable tourism include:

- increased and improved education and understanding of the natural environment, rural areas, climate change, sustainable development and National Parks;
- visitors contributing to local and regional economies;
- improved viability of rural services, facilities and communities such as post offices, pubs, shops and cultural and sports facilities;
- support for diversification of farm and rural businesses;
- experience of the natural environment makes a positive contribution to people's mental and physical health;
- support for a range of cultural and community activities including arts, sports and heritage events and contribution to sports and cultural objectives for access and participation;
- making tourism in an area more attractive and competitive by addressing market demands and reducing costs; and
- rising standards in the quality of local goods and services to meet market demands for better quality, especially in terms of environmental standards.

Issues related to tourism include:

- real or perceived conflicts between National Park purposes and tourism such as, access versus nature conservation;
- loss of tranquillity, environmental erosion and pressure on infrastructure;
- transport issues such as vehicle emissions, disturbance or damage caused by numbers of vehicles exceeding the capacity of specific locations, parking issues, charging for access or parking, lack of access by public transport in many areas; and

- negative impacts on local communities such as disturbance to residents, lack of affordable housing or loss of local shops to tourist focused provision.

National Park Authorities are working to prevent, mitigate or manage the negative impacts of tourism. They are also taking action to address current issues and adapt to future trends. National Park Authorities work with businesses and communities to bring about positive developments but sometimes a proposed tourism development cannot be acceptably managed and, following the Sandford Principle, will be opposed.

National Parks England's Position

National Parks England supports the development of sustainable tourism within National Parks.

Promotion of sustainable tourism is not itself a specific purpose or duty of National Park Authorities, however, sustainable tourism contributes to National Parks' two statutory purposes. As tourism is one of the main economic drivers of rural economies in National Parks it also contributes to the duty to foster the socio-economic well being of local communities. National Park Authorities seek to influence tourism and visitor management by working with partners to support and enhance the provision of information and the activities offered in National Parks.

National Park Authorities:

- want everyone to come and enjoy the special qualities of National Parks, put something back into the local economy and environment, and leave with a better understanding and appreciation of what National Parks are about;
- are keen to encourage quality and good design, and a scale of building, facilities and activities which respects the landscape and its communities;
- would like to see a tourism sector which supports National Park purposes and where there is an emphasis on quality, environmental best practice, use of local labour, skills, materials and produce, and the re-use of buildings;
- will embrace changes that will deliver sustainable tourism and achieve a high quality visitor experience; and
- want to provide the conditions for sustainable tourism businesses to flourish and for visitor stay and spend to increase.

Throughout their work, National Park Authorities promote opportunities to increase the understanding, awareness and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks. In order to achieve the aims above National Park Authorities:

- Work in partnership with Destination Management Organisations and others to put sustainable tourism actions into practice. Dartmoor First, Visit Peak District, Nurture Lakeland are all examples in this respect.
- Promote the principles of sustainable tourism through our own work and in partnership with others.
- Will continue promoting National Parks, through National Parks UK and the *Britain's Breathing Spaces Brand* and *Love Your National Parks* celebration as places for physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.
- Work with communities and businesses to raise awareness and promote action on sustainable tourism for example, through Community Tourism Groups, Tourism Associations and Tourism Business Improvement Districts.

- Work to help businesses take actions that promote excellence in sustainable tourism.
- Work with other organisations and communities to promote (and occasionally provide) sustainable transport options and encourage greater awareness of travel options and their environmental impacts.
- Recognise the importance of working with partner organisations, businesses and communities in areas around the boundaries since visitors may be staying in accommodation outside the National Park and making one or more day trips into it.
- Work directly and with others to provide public realm services and improvements that enhance the visitor experience, for example in relation to amenities and transport.
- Facilitate and promote improvements in rights of way provision and access including way-marking for accessible trails and cycle trails. Some authorities also manage waterways and have navigation duties.
- Oppose tourism development and activity that is not sustainable or would damage the special qualities of a National Park if the development/activity cannot be made sustainable or its negative effects avoided or mitigated.
- Reduce barriers to accessing the National Parks and to provide opportunities for all.
- Develop, promote and put into practice policies that facilitate diversification of businesses and help them to adjust to changes in market conditions or tourist preferences.
- Use planning policies and practice to try and ensure a mix of accommodation is available for visitors on all budgets. For example, several NPAs have supported innovative schemes for low cost and low impact forms of accommodation.
- Monitor visitor numbers and activities using National Park Authority surveys and data from other organisations in order to inform visitor management strategies.
- Some National Park Authorities have or are working towards European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Landscapes status. Others are involved with other international schemes that recognise excellence in sustainable tourism, for example Exmoor National Park is Europe's first International Dark Sky Reserve.

Areas for further action

Increasing the value of the visitor economy - National Park Authorities are encouraging people to stay longer in National Parks. They are working to improve the overall visitor experience so that visitors will stay overnight and thus contribute more to the local economy. This will also give them more opportunity to visit places away from the main 'honeypots' and try new activities or experiences. Some National Park Authorities are engaged in activities that increase visitor spend through enhancing the value of 'products' (intangible products such as the landscape and tranquil surroundings and tangible items like locally grown food) to visitors.

Marketing sustainable tourism - The current proliferation of green/sustainable tourism standards and schemes can confuse tourists and put off businesses from taking simple actions or registering for accreditation. National Park Authorities will work to communicate effectively nationally recognised schemes and best practice while supporting local initiatives that promote excellence in sustainable tourism.

Developing activity-based holidays - National Park Authorities will work with others to ensure appropriate adaptation to the changing nature of tourism and recreational activity. More people are seeking active pursuits in National Parks such as climbing, kite surfing, off-road cycling, via ferrata walks, sailing or horse riding. While these still account for only a small proportion of activity within National Parks (walking, sightseeing and tranquil enjoyment of the

landscape still make up the major proportion of activities), National Park Authorities are working to support and encourage active recreation in ways that do not damage the National Parks' special qualities or detract from their enjoyment by other visitors.

Developing sustainable events - Large sponsored and sporting events have been increasing in popularity in recent years. For example, the Great North Swim in Windermere, the Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge, the Iron Man competition on Exmoor, the Tour of Britain Cycle Race and many others. As the numbers of competitors and spectators at these events increase year on year, so do the impacts. National Park Authorities are working with event organisers to minimise impacts, enhance the events and in many cases also obtain some participant/visitor payback. Similar negotiations are increasingly taking place for cultural and arts events that take place in the National Parks.

Developing local distinctiveness & improving quality - One of the biggest challenges for National Park Authorities is closing the circle between farmers, landowners and managers and visitors so that the benefits of visitor activities are passed on directly to local communities e.g. payback schemes and working holidays. There is a further challenge in ensuring that money stays and circulates within local economies. All National Park Authorities are working to use sustainable tourism to drive rural regeneration and on economic policies and projects that help retain and recirculate money locally. An example is Northumberland National Park Authority which uses a bottom-up approach to the development of sustainable tourism with community, land management, business and tourism sectors working together.

Increasing visitor diversity - Widening participation in outdoor activity especially for disadvantaged community groups and young people is a goal of all National Park Authorities. Outreach programmes to attract wider audiences to enjoy the special qualities of National Parks exist in all National Parks. Many of these programmes are run in partnership with other organisations for example ex-offender charities and schools. National Park Authorities are working to reduce or remove barriers to visiting National Parks for all sectors of society.

Deepening understanding and increasing appreciation of our special qualities – National Parks England would like more people to visit National Parks but also to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the National Parks so that they can get more from their visits and over time to enable their behaviour to become more sustainable. An informed visitor will get more from their experiences in National Parks and is more likely to engage in behaviours and activities that enhance National Parks rather than detracting from their special qualities.

Supporting action

Within Government, we look to:

- Defra to continue to work to promote sustainable tourism where this falls within their remit. For example, promoting and supporting programmes which promote rural businesses and sustainable tourism such as the Rural Growth Networks and RDPE.
- The Department for Transport to continue to help make National Parks more accessible by sustainable transport options and encourage modal shift for trips to and within National Parks. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund and Cycling in National Parks fund have provided opportunities for NPAs to work with local partners in making improvements to sustainable transport options in and around their areas but DfT can also assist by highlighting and encouraging opportunities for better coordination

amongst transport operators and for innovative public private partnerships such as the New Forest Tour.

- DCMS to recognise the tourism offer of National Parks both nationally and internationally and support the work of NPAs with VisitEngland and VisitBritain to promote National Parks to potential visitors.
- All Government departments to recognise that tourism or recreational activities which conflict with National Park purposes for conserving and enhancing the environment have to be actively managed and in some cases restricted.

We also look to:

- VisitEngland to continue to work with National Parks England, National Parks UK and individual National Park Authorities to:
 - **Collaborate** at the national and local level to support understanding of the growth potential of England's National Parks. This to specifically include the development and promotion of the tourism offer of the National Parks in order to encourage visits to, and overnight stays in, National Parks from the domestic market.
 - **Support the development of good destination management** by encouraging collaboration between NPAs and Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to ensure that National Park Management Plans and Destination Management Plans are connected, are mutually supportive, and encourage a shared understanding and appreciation of the special qualities of National Parks that will enhance the visitor experience.
 - **Deliver sustainable growth in the visitor economy**, where economic growth is delivered responsibly with an approach reflecting the needs of visitors, the environment, communities and businesses. Promoting National Parks as exemplars in the development and marketing of sustainable economic growth.
 - **Market our National Parks** to consumers effectively to deliver the biggest return on investment. This to be achieved through promotional activities that promote all year round experiences for visitors in England's National Parks, identifying potential growth segments and developing joint messages that help to reflect the distinctive nature of England's National Parks.
 - **Implement activities** outlined in the three year National Parks England/ Visit England Partnership Statement, including identifying opportunities to align objectives and influence future funding streams.

National Parks England provides a collective voice for the National Park Authorities. This statement sets out their shared position on Sustainable Tourism. Each Authority works to implement the Management Plan for its area and so each National Park Authority will need to implement this and other policies in ways that are compatible with this plan and appropriate to local circumstance.

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