

Supporting rural communities and economies



Briefing / June 2015

England's ten National Parks are living, working landscapes notable for their natural beauty and cultural heritage. They are visited by millions of people every year and are home to strong communities who care passionately for the places in which they live and work.

National Park Authorities (NPAs) are uniquely placed to support sustainable economic growth in National Parks. They aim to maintain thriving, living landscapes, where natural assets are conserved and enhanced and where businesses and communities can prosper, now and in the future.

Making a contribution locally and nationally

England's National Parks cover more than 1.2 million hectares (9.3% of England's land area) and 321,000 people live in them (0.6% of England's population). Our National Parks generate around £6 billion of Gross Value Added (GVA) a year. This is comparable to a city such as Plymouth or Sunderland.

The economies of our National Parks are reliant on tourism, agriculture and other land based activities. These activities depend on the high quality environment of National Parks and in turn can help maintain and enhance the special qualities of National Parks.

Key sectors in National Park economies include:

- **Farming and forestry: 24% of all businesses and 10% of total employment.**
- **Tourism and recreation: England's National Parks attract over 90 million visitors a year. Visitors spend around £4 billion in National Parks. This is**



Cheese shop at the Wensleydale Creamery, Yorkshire Dales National Park © VisitEngland

estimated to support 48,000 FTE jobs, around 34% of total employment in National Parks.

There are 22,500 businesses from all sectors of the economy located in England's National Parks, providing around 141,000 jobs. They are mainly small businesses and sole traders, but some national and international companies also operate in National Parks. Because diversity is the key to strong economies, NPAs support innovation and diversification in rural businesses by providing training, grants, advice, provision of starter units, and business networks.

Supporting local economies: innovation and sustainability

National Park Authorities lead and support initiatives with communities, businesses and other partner organisations to address specific challenges and opportunities in their local economies. These include dispersed populations, and access to services and transport.

Overleaf are some examples of initiatives in National Parks.

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- **Sustainable tourism and travel projects** providing information to visitors and residents. NPAs find funding for and deliver infrastructure such as new or upgraded routes, attracting thousands of walkers and cyclists and supporting local businesses.
- NPAs lead **branding and marketing initiatives** that attract more visitors, such as Dark Sky Park or Reserve designation. They promote local produce and food businesses and local artists, marketing distinctive quality experiences.
- NPAs provide **training and skills development** through apprenticeships and support rural businesses directly. The Hexham Enterprise Hub on Northumberland NPA's premises provides serviced workspaces for start-up, micro- and small businesses.
- Initiatives to improve **broadband and mobile phone coverage** include a national accord with operators, and public WiFi connections in visitor centres. NPAs work with broadband providers to identify 'not-spots', and champion community bids for investment.

Surveys of businesses in individual National Parks show that over 50% felt that their business was dependent on a high quality landscape and environment, and positively impacted by the National Park designation. Businesses in nearby towns and cities also felt a positive influence.

Healthy environments, healthy communities

NPAs invest in projects and facilities that contribute to environmental awareness and education; promote healthy outdoor recreation; and enhance social inclusion. For example, the 'Moor to Enjoy' programme, where GPs can prescribe outdoor activity in Dartmoor or Exmoor National Parks, will improve health and save the NHS money. NPAs provide volunteering opportunities that engage thousands of people in enjoyable, worthwhile activities which benefit their well-being.

NPAs also protect and enhance the delivery of ecosystem services, the benefits from the natural environment that are valued by society. Ecosystem services in National Parks:

- **underpin economic activities such as farming, forestry, tourism and recreation;**
- **reduce costs to society by improving health, storing carbon and purifying water;**
- **enhance well-being by providing recreational experiences, tranquillity, beautiful views and inspiration.**

NPAs work to reduce the impacts of flooding and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, amongst other conservation initiatives. These help to maintain a healthy environment, in which people can live, work and do business.



Above top:
Blagdon Cross, Exmoor International Dark Sky Reserve
© Adrian Cubitt

Above middle:
Hexham Hub business units © Northumberland NPA

Above bottom:
WiFi hotspots have been installed at Dartmoor visitor centres © Kerenza Townsend/Dartmoor NPA



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