

National Parks England: Climate Change Position Statement

2019

Introduction

It is now well understood that we are facing a global crisis of climate change and ecological collapse. Urgent action is needed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and mitigate further warming, adapt to the changes we are already seeing, and raise awareness amongst decision makers and the wider public of what they can do to address this challenge. England's nine National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority (NPAs) have a central role to play in each of these areas. NPAs are uniquely situated to lead on addressing the climate crisis. We are place-based and landscape focused, with the passion, knowledge, and public support to deliver.

Climate Change and our National Parks

The climate crisis is a serious threat to England's National Parks, their special qualities, communities, biodiversity, and natural environment. We are already beginning to see the impacts of the climate crisis in our National Parks and the wider countryside, and these effects are expected to increase. They include:

- warmer wetter winters, hotter drier summers, and increased extreme weather events
- increased risk of wildfire and drought, and increased pressure on water resources
- increased risk of flooding, subsidence, and erosion, especially along coasts and river corridors
- declining soil health and loss of critical habitats and species, including through a rise in pests and diseases
- damage to infrastructure, traditional buildings, and archaeological features from extreme weather events
- threats to traditional farming caused by changing growing conditions and weather patterns

The effects of climate change will have a cumulative impact on the National Parks that will go beyond the isolated changes noted above.

However, our National Parks are not just passive recipients of climate change, they can and should be powerful drivers of the solution. Protecting the special qualities of our National Parks from the impacts of climate change and helping them adapt is central to fulfilling our statutory purposes, as is helping others understand how they can help. We see National Parks as a critical element of driving a national step-change in behaviour and inspiring collective action that meets the scale of the challenge we face.

National Parks also play a key role in mitigating the worst impacts of climate change and driving adaptation to the changes we're already facing, and this was acknowledged and supported in the recent Landscapes Review.¹ Through targeted efforts to restore habitats and increase ecosystem functionality, National Parks will be central in providing increased carbon

¹ See: [Landscapes Review Final Report 2019](#)

sequestration, ecological resilience, biodiversity, and other public benefits such as flood mitigation.

Our Commitment to Climate Action

National Park Authorities committed to leading the way on addressing the climate crisis, as outlined in the National Parks Vision and Circular.² We are already tackling the climate crisis in several ways, but we are ambitious to do more.

1. We are committed to achieving carbon neutrality, in line with government net-zero³ targets.
2. We are committed to working across boundaries, with National and Local Government, partners, stakeholders, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Welsh and Scottish National Parks to meet the scale of the challenge before us.

The NPAs are committed to leading on addressing the climate crisis through:

3. **Mitigation** – reducing GHG emissions and increasing carbon sequestration.
4. **Adaptation** – increasing ecosystem resilience, habitat creation, and restoring natural landscape functions.
5. **Education** – increasing awareness among residents and visitors and demonstrating solutions.
6. **Research** – providing a focus for academic and scientific research into pioneering sustainable land management techniques like moorland restoration.

Meeting the Challenge

Reducing our carbon footprint

We are committed to increasing our efforts to mitigate GHG emissions by reducing the carbon footprint of NPAs and operations within our National Parks. NPAs have already taken steps to reduce their carbon footprints through increased efficiency, reduced consumption, and carbon accounting. Through the Sustainable Development Fund, NPAs have also provided vital financial support to schemes that explore ways to reduce GHG emissions.

We will:

- agree a common set of metrics, targets, and methodologies across NPAs to monitor emissions reductions
- further reduce our energy consumption through additional efficiency efforts and the increased use of renewable energy sources
- improve the environmental performance of our vehicle fleet by switching to low and zero emission vehicles
- reduce car mileage through greater use of car sharing, carpools, public transport, and alternative working arrangements

Enhancing and restoring nature

² See: [English National Parks and the Broads – UK Government Vision and Circular 2010](#)

³ We have adopted the [Committee on Climate Change definition](#) of net-zero: ‘the total active removals from the atmosphere offsets any remaining emissions’.

National Park Authorities actively influence the management of almost 10% of England's land area and play an important role in raising awareness of the challenges and opportunities the climate crisis poses to our protected landscapes, and the role they can play in addressing the challenge.

We will continue to work alongside farmers, landowners and land managers to increase climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. This can be done by increasing sustainable farming and land management practices and through nature recovery, including habitat restoration and the creation of large carbon sinks through peatland restoration and woodland creation. In England's National Parks, peatlands alone hold 153 mt of carbon⁴, more than 40% of the UK's annual CO₂ emissions. These ecosystems must be protected and restored so they can continue to sequester carbon.

We will:

- support appropriate woodland planting and peatland restoration projects
- support landscape scale habitat restoration and nature recovery efforts, following the Lawton Report⁵ principles of more, bigger, better, and connected habitats
- support farming practices in upland and lowland landscapes that protect and deliver climate benefits
- promote local food produced to high environmental standards to reduce the need to import food with high carbon footprints

Planning for a low carbon future

National Park Authorities are planning authorities, and through this role have been encouraging renewable energy schemes, sustainable housing and transport, and low carbon land management. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) includes meeting the challenge of climate change as a major priority⁶, and NPAs will continue to use their planning role to address the climate crisis. Through planning, NPAs will also continue to support the energy hierarchy, seeking to reduce consumption, improve efficiency, and increase use of renewable energy.

We will:

- actively support the development of renewable energy generation in National Parks where appropriate
- support projects that promote energy conservation and efficiency
- support and encourage the use of sustainable and efficient design, materials, and locations in new development
- seek to reduce the need to travel and increase access to sustainable forms of transport
- support community inspired schemes that reduce emissions, including through renewable energy and increased efficiency
- support initiatives that deliver economic benefits to rural economies from low carbon practices and technologies

⁴ See [Landscapes Review: Final Report](#) 2019

⁵ [Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network](#)

⁶ See: [NPPF 2019](#)

Raising awareness and demonstrating solutions

Over 90 million people visit England's National Parks and their surrounding areas every year. Through our visitor centres, guided walks, education programmes, and outreach efforts, NPAs are informing visitors and residents of the impacts of climate change on our National Parks, and what they can do to help.

We will:

- support sustainable tourism practices that limit GHG emissions
- explain to visitors and residents how National Parks are impacted by climate change and what they can do to help
- provide opportunities to get involved in mitigation and adaptation projects
- continue to encourage the use of public transport by visitors and local communities
- collaborate on research and demonstration projects to pioneer new approaches

The Tools to Deliver

Meeting our ambitions and tackling a challenge of this scale will require the resources, tools, and powers to deliver.

National Park Management Plans

National Park Management Plans are a key mechanism for driving action and collaboration on climate change, both within and beyond National Park boundaries. These should be strengthened and given statutory weight.

We will:

- include clear, ambitious targets on climate change mitigation, adaptation, and nature recovery in National Park Management Plans
- work with partners to provide robust assessments of the effects of climate change on the special qualities of the National Parks within State of the National Park Reports
- report annually and transparently on progress made to deliver targets

Environmental Land Management Schemes

Agri-environment schemes, particularly the forthcoming Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) are a critical tool to protect and enhance National Park landscapes, increase sustainable land management, drive carbon sequestration, and promote low carbon agriculture.

We will:

- work alongside our farming community to deliver emissions reductions and habitat improvements through the delivery of ELMS agreements

Nature Recovery Network

The forthcoming Nature Recovery Network will be key to increasing habitat connectivity and resilience, ecosystem functionality, and biodiversity across our protected landscapes. NPE believes National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be at the centre of

the future Nature Recovery Network and we are ready to work with Government to deliver nature recovery across our landscapes.

NPAs play an important role in supporting the implementation of local nature recovery strategies, supporting decision making that prioritise climate adaptation and mitigation using the best available data and evidence. NPAs also work closely with Local Nature Partnerships to develop and deliver local nature recovery strategies through our Local Plans.

We will:

- develop clear assessments of the changes required to protect the special qualities of National Park landscapes
- implement landscape scale approaches to managing habitat and wildlife that supports adaptation, connectivity, increases biodiversity, and minimises losses
- play a proactive role on the Nature Recovery Network Steering Group

Planning Structures and Standards

It is important that existing planning tools and standards support action on the climate emergency. This can be done in several ways, through Local Plans, National Green Infrastructure Standards, and green infrastructure planning frameworks, which have already proven to be an important mechanism for delivering climate change action in National Parks.

Working Together

While we know that NPAs and National Parks have a critical role to play in addressing the climate crisis, this is a challenge that requires large-scale collective action. We stand ready to work with our partners, stakeholders, and all levels of Government to meet this challenge together.

We look to Government to:

- recognise the valuable contribution of National Parks in climate mitigation and adaptation, through sequestering carbon and increasing the resilience and function of ecosystems
- provide the resources and funding required to help NPAs deliver on this agenda
- provide support from across key departments to ensure a comprehensive and joined up approach
- support NPAs in monitoring carbon emissions and measuring progress
- support NPAs in efforts to improve understanding and awareness of how to address the climate crisis

We look to:

- Local Authorities and other relevant bodies to support NPA planning policies
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to assist NPAs in assessing the needs of rural communities and the potential for low carbon economic development
- LEPs and Utilities to support NPAs in promoting small scale, community-owned renewables

- Natural England to work with NPAs on supporting land management techniques that protect carbon sinks and adapt to a changing climate
- The tourism sector to engage with NPAs in promoting sustainable tourism that reduces emissions and protects our special qualities
- All other bodies and local organisations whose work contributes to the implementation of National Park Management Plans to actively support this agenda

National Parks England (NPE) provides a collective voice for the National Parks. This statement sets out their shared position on Climate Change. Each Authority works to implement the Management Plan for its area, and so each NPA 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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