



Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies – draft guidance

Response by the English National Park Authorities Association

September 2012

1. The English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) exists to support the policy-making process by co-ordinating input on behalf of the nine English National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority. It is governed by the Chairs of the ten Authorities. This response represents the collective view of officers who are working within the policies established by the National Park Authorities (NPAs). Individual NPAs may submit separate comments, which will draw on the specific issues for their particular area.

2. ENPAA welcomes the establishment of the Joint Health and Well Being Boards and believes there are important links to be made between the statutory purposes and activities of National Parks, and those of the new Boards. We hope that the Department of Health will use this guidance to assist those in the public health sector to recognise the significant resource available in National Parks to support health and well being strategies. We recognise this guidance is only one small piece of the overall transition to the new public health regime, and we would be happy to discuss with DoH, LGA and others how National Parks and Health and Well Being Boards might work together. This response focuses on specific (and fairly small) changes (see paragraph 16-17 below) that could be made to the draft guidance to support cross sectoral working.

National Parks contribute towards improved health and well being

3. National Parks cover almost 10% of England (see Map 1). Their founding legislation, the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949* includes two purposes, the second of which is to:

'promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Parks by the public'

4. The special qualities of National Parks are many and varied but include their open space, fresh air, tranquillity, natural beauty and inspiring landscapes. Opportunities for recreation have always been an important element of why National Parks exist and what they have to offer. Indeed, in 1931 the Addison report considered the concept of National Parks and it was to the Ministry of Health that he reported. And between 1931-1948 a National Parks Liaison Committee existed with the Department of Health. The statutory purpose above remains. Bringing things more up to date, the Government has recognised the benefits National Parks can play for health and well being. The *Environment Act 1995*, amended our founding legislation and placed a duty on National Park Authorities, in pursuing National Park purposes, to 'seek to foster the economic and social well being of their local communities' (emphasis added). The opportunities to enhance well being extend beyond only the resident communities living within the National Parks.

5. *The English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010* [1], is the Government's main policy statement on National Parks. It has been endorsed by the Coalition Government as continuing to represent Government policy on National Parks. It is explicit in seeking to help make connections between National Parks and health outcomes. It says:

"In the 1930's the Government National Parks Committee identified the benefit of creating National Parks in England to improve the health of the nation by encouraging more healthy lifestyles for the physical health of the nation's citizens. The need for the National Parks to be the lungs of the nation led in the 1940's to legislation to enable the creation of several National Parks. This was a solution for an industrialised and largely urban society. In the 21st Century we have become far more urbanised and also post-industrial. Today Parks are even more relevant to the health of the present and future generations. They contain some of the last remaining tranquil areas where peace of mind can be achieved in an increasingly busy society" (paragraph 105)

6. It then discusses the importance of engaging everyone in society and concludes:

"Government expects the Authorities and health and welfare providers to work in partnership to provide strategic solutions and local services to foster the physical and mental health of the nation." (paragraph 106)

7. As the Government's Natural Environment White Paper [2] acknowledges, there is now substantial evidence of the benefits to physical and in particular mental health from physical activity and access to good quality green space. We note, for example:

- the Chief Medical Officer for England has said that walking between 6-12 miles a week can reduce the risk of premature death by 20-30%, and that 'physical activity is effective in the treatment of clinical depression and can be successful as psychotherapy or medication' [3];
- NICE recommend that patients with mild depression follow a structured and supervised exercise programme including health led walks up to three sessions per week [4];
- A study of residents in Bristol found that where people have good access to formal green space they are 24% more likely to be physically active [5];
- Natural England estimate that for every £1 spent on establishing healthy walking schemes the NHS could save £7.18p in the cost of treating conditions such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes [6];
- A study by the University of Essex for MIND involved assessing the well being of 108 people who were involved in various green exercise activities. 94% of people commented that green exercise activities had benefited their mental health, and 90% said their physical health had improved [7];
- A further study by the University of Essex also illustrates the significant benefits of walking outdoors in a pleasant environment, compared to indoors, for improving self esteem, managing depression and reducing tension [8];

- A supervised programme of exercise can be equally as effective as anti-depressants in treating mild to moderate depression [9]; and
- An evaluation of the *Stepping Stones to Nature* project based in Plymouth and involving Dartmoor National Park found that the project ‘had the potential to provide significant positive benefits in the areas of physical activity, mental and social well-being’ [10].

8. The National Parks are an asset or resource to assist Health and Well Being Boards. The National Park Authorities (and the Broads Authority) that administer them, alongside a range of partners are also behind a number of initiatives to promote health and well being outcomes. These include:

- adopting health and well being outcomes within National Park Management Plans;
- promoting opportunities for walking, cycling and a range of activities in National Parks to residents and the major populations surrounding them;
- working in multi-agency partnerships to support local Walking for Health initiatives, and ‘stepping stone projects’ that help those who wish to extend beyond very local walks but are not yet ready for particularly long walks;
- working with PCTs on schemes for disadvantaged communities;
- all English National Parks working under the *Mosaic* project to encourage greater numbers of BME communities, and younger people, to access National Parks;
- facilitating investment in walking and cycling infrastructure within the National Parks;
- supporting 107 projects that promote health and well-being through the use of the Sustainable Development Fund;
- creating opportunities for inspiration and improved well being through activities or experiences; and
- promoting National Parks through the *Britain’s Breathing Spaces* national brand.

9. Case studies to illustrate the work of the National Park Authorities are set out below. For brevity only a few are included here.

New Forest National Park Authority – ‘Walking in Mind’

The Walking in Mind project has involved the New Forest National Park Authority working in partnership with the PCT (Test Valley South Assertive Outreach Team), Forestry Commission and Hampshire County Council to develop and run led walks for small groups of PCT clients with moderate/severe mental health issues. It involves people aged between 18-64. They are recognised as having mental health problems where traditional mental health services have been unable to meet their needs. Walks are organised once a fortnight, for a group of ten clients. Each client signs up to undertake eight walks, and the project team has agreed to monitor their progress through the ‘CORE’ assessment process for mental health.

The PCT has indicated that the results which they are getting are excellent, with definite improvements amongst a hard to support group. At present the project has a limited range, and the National Park Authority would like to continue with its partners in order that the project could be available for those with mild to moderate mental disorders as well.

Dartmoor National Park Authority – ‘Walking for health’

Dartmoor National Park Authority has been working in a multi-agency partnership with neighbouring local authorities and the Devon PCT to produce a set of self-guided walking for health leaflets that promote easy access trails in all the main settlements in the National Park and promote the physical, emotional and mental health benefits of exercise outdoors. This includes ‘doorstep walks’ which aim to encourage people to try walking locally as a first step to health/ rehabilitation; and an ‘Easy Going Dartmoor’ initiative aimed at people with mobility problems, people who use a wheelchair, the visually impaired and parents with children in buggies. Feedback from users of the packs has been very positive.

The NPA and partners are also exploring ways to encourage a wider audience to enjoy sections of promoted long distance routes such as the West Devon Way. Suitable sections of the route will be promoted as short walks accessible by public transport and are ideal as progressional walks for health walkers and also to encourage inner city single parent groups from Plymouth to access the National Park. Significant work is put into outreach through contacting GP surgeries and this has included working with mothers with children under 1 year of age; promotion of post-natal health messages; young men at risk of offending (self-esteem, self-confidence, mental health); carers and dependants, both together and in isolation; teenagers as part of 'Healthy Living Week', and a Moor Men’s Health Project 2012. But it is recognised this would benefit from a more strategic approach and support from the Department of Health/ Health and Well Being Boards.

Northumberland National Park Authority - ‘Walk to well being’

Since 2006, the Northumberland National Park Authority has been represented on the regional ‘Green Exercise Group’ alongside Natural England and the PCTs in the North East region. The National Park Authority has also been involved in a ‘walk to well being’ project for over three years. This novel project brings funding together from the Community Investment Funds (administered by Sport England) and the Sustainable Development Fund (administered by the National Park Authority). Its aim is to fill the gap and act as a stepping stone between walking your way to health initiatives (WHI) based on 1-2 mile walks, and going on much longer walks. There are 15 walks organised each year, covering 2-4 miles through iconic landscapes, and are run by trained WHI volunteers.

The project officer is managed by the National Park Authority and has access to the wonderful landscapes found within the National Park, and the knowledge and experience of those in the NPA. The Northumbria PCT, which is on the Steering Group, has a key role in marketing the project and raising awareness of the opportunities to target groups eg. physios, practice and district nurses, mental health centres etc.

10. In a few areas, National Park Authority Members have been asked to sit on (and in one case to Chair) Health and Well Being Boards. However, as National Parks are by definition for the benefit of the nation, it is important that Health and Well Being Boards look beyond their immediate boundaries when developing Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.

Joint Health and well Being Boards can contribute towards National Park Purposes

11. It should be apparent that there is considerable synergy between the work of the Health and Well Being Boards, and the purposes of National Parks. In particular the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments can consider the potential role of National Parks (which may be beyond their immediate administrative boundary) for delivering health and well being benefits for their population. The draft guidance also stresses the importance of linking different sectors. NPAs are also the local planning authority for their areas and so the Boards can help the NPAs and other parts of local government to work together to deliver shared aims.

12. The National Parks Circular referred to above includes a long term Vision for the English National Parks and the Broads. This includes that by 2030, National Parks will be recognised as '*fundamental to our prosperity and well-being*'.

13. The synergy described above is supported through legislation since both the Department of Health, and Health and Well Being Boards will be covered by S62 of the *Environment Act*. This amends Section 11A(2) of the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949* which requires all relevant bodies to 'have regard' to Park purposes.

14. More recently there has been a significant encouragement given to increasing people's access and connection with nature. This is reflected in the Natural Environment White Paper 2011 where connecting through nature's health service is a major theme. And although the Draft Guidance refers to Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs), there are a range of other innovative partnerships that exist which support the preventative rather than cure agenda.

Small amendments to the Draft Guidance can assist integration with National Parks

15. Although National Parks contribute towards the achievement of health and well being outcomes, we are frequently not recognised as part of the public health sector, and as a consequence can be overlooked. This is unfortunate and means that possible linkages and efficiencies are also missed. As a consequence, and also because of our shared ambitions we hope that DoH will make some minor amendments to the draft guidance to prompt Health and Well Being Boards, and others, to consider the potential role and links to be made with National Parks.

16. The changes that we would suggest are:

- adding 'National Park Authorities' in paragraph 3.1 (3rd para);
- adding 'National Park Authorities' in paragraph 5 (3rd para);
- adding '...and National Park Management Plans' after reference to LEPs in paragraph 7 (2nd para);
- consider the role of National Parks under the headings 'Flexible geographical scope' and 'Beyond the statutory core' since National Parks are likely to be a resource beyond the immediate boundaries of a Health and Well Being Board;
- Appendix A, para 1.6 – to include reference to National Park Authorities;
- Appendix A, para 3.6 – we would welcome inclusion of 'and National Park Management Plans' at the end of this paragraph.

17. We would welcome more explicit reference to National Parks under the title 'Other duties, to the discharge of which JSNAs and JHWSs can contribute' and offer the following:

New paragraph:

National Parks cover extensive areas of England and Wales and exist, in part, to create opportunities for the public enjoyment of their special qualities. They are therefore a significant resource for populations both within and beyond the National Park boundaries for supporting health and well being outcomes and may be relevant for JSNAs and JSNS. Each National Park benefits from a National Park Management Plan. Health and Well Being Boards have a duty to 'have regard' to National Park purposes and feeding into the National Park Management Plan and working alongside the relevant National Park Authority is a good way of fulfilling this duty.

18. We hope that these changes can be made to this draft guidance, and that it will be possible to reflect the potential links to be made with National Parks in any additional material that is produced. We do not wish to make the guidance prescriptive through the changes sought, as we recognise that the nature of the partnerships and ways of working will vary across the country. We do hope, however, that the DoH will support such cross sector working. We note and welcome that the draft guidance states that 'this ability to look beyond health and social care will be critical to the success of health and well being boards'. Our suggestions for inclusion are very much meant to work within this spirit.

References

- [1] UK Government: *The English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular*, 2010
- [2] UK Government: *Natural Environment White Paper – Securing the Value of Nature*, 2011
- [3] Department of Health: *At least five a week: a report from the Chief Medical Officer*, 2004
- [4] National Institute for Clinical Excellence: *NICE Guidance note 16*, 2008
- [5] E Coombs et al: *Objectively measured green space access, green space use, physical activity and overweight*
- [6] Natural England: *Our Natural Health Service*, 2009
- [7] MIND: *Ecotherapy: the green agenda for mental health*, 2007
- [8] MIND: *Ecotherapy: the green agenda for mental health*, 2007
- [9] Halliwell E: *Up and running? Exercise therapy and the treatment of mild or moderate depression in primary care*, Mental Health Foundation, 2005
- [10] J Richardson et al: *Building HIA approaches into strategic green space use: an example from Plymouth's Stepping Stones to Nature project*, Health Promotion International 2012

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Map of English National Parks

It may be helpful to map the location of the National Parks against the new Health and Well Being Boards.

NATIONAL PARKS

Britain's breathing spaces

