

Rural Development in the English National Parks:

A Proposal from the English National Park Authorities

1. Introduction

1.1 Brexit and the Government's Industrial Strategy provide an opportunity to shape the future of rural development in the UK. In some of our most rural communities and our National Parks, rural development is inextricably linked with land management, as much of the economic activity of these areas is derived from the unique natural and cultural heritage assets of the place.

1.2 England's National Park Authorities have a long standing ambition to support communities and drive sustainable economies from these rich cultural landscapes, integrating land management and rural and community development.

1.3 The current designated landscapes review provides an opportunity to signal a leading role for National Parks in shaping land management and rural development whilst delivering the Government's objectives in the Industrial Strategy and the 25 Year Plan for the Environment.

1.4 This paper sets out the vision and ambition for rural development in England's National Parks. This is an integrated vision which should be read alongside our ambition for agriculture and forestry as set out in our 'Farming in the English National Parks' paper.

2. Our ambition

2.1 The precious and distinctive landscapes of our English National Parks have always been living working places. They have been created by centuries of economic activity amongst their communities, from farming and forestry, food and drink, mining and quarrying, many types of local manufacturing and, increasingly, businesses which support their many visitors. The future landscapes of National Parks will likewise be shaped – for better or worse - by the interaction between nature, communities and businesses. England's National Parks are by their very nature "cultural landscapes".

2.2 Our vision is of world class landscapes which form the basis for sustainable economic activity, which in turn supports and enhances the rich natural and cultural environment, and thereby thriving communities. Whilst the size of the economy in these rural areas will always be smaller than that of urban areas, their authenticity and distinctiveness, borne from strong, recognised identities, is their unique selling point – there is only one Broads or Lake District in the world - and an economy which is rooted in and driven out of their special qualities is likely to be more resilient in a rapidly changing and uncertain global marketplace post Brexit.

2.3 A National Park centred rural development approach, rooted in place, complements and counterbalances the more traditional urban and sector focused approach to economic development. This National Park ambition is part of a wider national policy debate about rural development - where local place-based delivery within a wider rural development framework is

emerging as a key approach to achieving rural growth and productivity. By working in this way National Parks have the potential, by sharing good practice and linking to delivery beyond our boundaries, to be Rural Enterprise Hubs and a catalyst for wider rural-focused growth across sub-regions

3. The nature of National Park economies

3.1 It is difficult to create a detailed analysis of the economy of National Parks in comparison with wider rural England, partly because many of the datasets available are not cut to the boundaries of designated landscapes. Arguably the most thorough, though now dated, was the 2013 report [Valuing England's National Parks](#).

3.2 The 2013 report found that economic activity rates were in line with national figures on average, but with self-employment rates higher in NPs. There was a high concentration of small and micro businesses, with more concentrated in 'agriculture, forestry and fishing', but also 'accommodation and food services' and, in some NPs, 'professional, scientific and technical services'. Tourism was important and was estimated to contribute one third of total employment in some NPs. Significant variation was found between different NPs. There was some evidence of the positive impact Protected Landscapes had on the areas around them in terms of employment and expenditure (the 'halo' effect). For example, in Northumberland and the Yorkshire Dales, it was estimated that the NPs support nearly three times as many jobs in the surrounding areas than in the NPs themselves.

3.3 The Executive Summary of *Valuing England's National Parks* stated "*The evidence demonstrates that, while they account for only a small proportion of the overall regional and national economy, protected landscapes support substantial levels of economic activity, and perform relatively well against key economic indicators such as rates of employment and self-employment*" and that "*The economic significance of protected landscape areas can be expected to outweigh the direct contribution they make to the economy, because of the important role that they play in sustaining the natural capital on which wider sub-regional and regional economies depend*".

3.4 The data used for *Valuing England's National Parks* was updated in August 2017 [updated 2017 numbers](#). This update used three different methodologies to derive a figure for the overall GVA within National Parks. The first estimated the GVA generated per £1 of output across different sectors, and applied this to the estimated turnover for those sectors in the National Parks. The second used data from the UK National Accounts to estimate productivity (in terms of GVA per worker) across different sectors and applied this to the estimated employment in those sectors in the National Parks. The third used relevant county-level productivity ratios, which were multiplied by the local level of employment in each National Park. All three methods have shortcomings and are likely to be either under or overestimates, and the consultants therefore state in their conclusions:

"It is therefore most appropriate to consider the GVA estimates as a range. The data suggest that GVA in the English National Parks is likely to be between £5.5 billion and £8.7 billion per annum. This suggests that the English National Park economies represent between 0.4% and 0.6% of all GVA generated in England in 2016.

The earlier report “Valuing England’s National Parks” (Cumulus and ICF GHK, 2013)¹ estimated GVA at between £4.1 and £6.3 billion. These new estimates represent an increase in estimated GVA of between 33% and 38% in nominal terms between 2012 and 2016. These increases reflect growth in employment and business turnover in the national parks over that period, as well as growth in productivity at national level.

3.5 Even more current is the latest *Inter-Departmental Business register (2018)*. This shows that:

- Job growth in National Parks significantly outstripped the UK average of 0.5%
- Over 5,000 jobs were added across National Parks from 2017 – 2018
- Businesses, jobs, and turnover in National Parks all increased from 2017
- From 2017 – 2018 almost £1 million additional turnover was generated in National Parks
- Turnover in National Parks roughly equates to the GVA of a city the size of Leicester

3.6 Though all these reports give a partial view based on proxy data, the picture painted of the economies of National Parks is likely to be broadly accurate. Although the businesses involved are often small or micro enterprises, their capacity for growth and increased productivity may equal or exceed those in urban areas, and return on investment is therefore both attractive and meaningful. In addition, the Halo effect means that areas around National Parks are likely to benefit from their higher national profile as places to visit as these areas may supply many of the services which cannot be supplied within the Park. It is therefore argued that National Parks have an important role to play in future prosperity well above and beyond the size of their economies; a prosperity rooted in distinctive natural assets from which a trail of benefits can be delivered long into the future.

4. Our track record – place shaping and partnership

4.1 The ambition set out in this paper builds upon a strong track record by National Park Authorities (see also case studies which are summarised in boxes):

4.2 *Rural Development is in our DNA*. The legislative framework for National Parks in England starts with its two Statutory Purposes. A thriving rural economy is a necessary (though not sufficient) mechanism for sustaining their landscapes and special qualities. This is why Parliament also places a Duty upon NPAs to seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of our communities in pursuit of those purposes. As the case studies throughout this paper illustrate, NPAs have a long pedigree in encouraging rural enterprise and championing their businesses, for example through the delivery of LEADER programmes, skills and training initiatives, enterprise hubs and local product branding. We have built up a long term understanding of the place, its economy, the focus of change, we are trusted partners who have a track record of delivery and we live with the results of our actions.

From 2002 to 2009 the Peak District New Environmental Economy (NEE) programme brought together multiple sources of funding into one programme of support which included: -

A simple grant scheme for business development;

One to one support for the development of the business ideas and grant application

Special projects e.g. Peak District Environmental Quality Mark, Dairy Wagon, Great Peak District Fair, Farmers Markets – all of which continued beyond the life of the programme.

For more detail: contact the Peak District National Park Authority.

4.3 *We are natural convenors.* NPAs themselves own less than 1% of the assets within National Parks, so National Park management plans are partnership-led, integrated, place-based strategies

The [South Downs Food and Drink Portal](#) was created in 2015 to promote South Downs regional produce and create a brand for quality local food and drink. The portal was created and run by Natural Partnerships CIC and was funded by the SDNPA and The Southern Cooperative. It promotes over 250 producers and outlets in the National Park, using a coordinated approach for mutual economic benefit. Benefits include:

- supporting the sustainability of farming through the promotion of local produce;
- encouraging sustainable tourism through promoting distinctive food and drink experiences; and
- educating visitors, residents and businesses about where food comes from and how it supports the management of the landscape.

which bring together environmental, social and economic issues. They are created and delivered by public, private and third sector bodies working to common visions and outcomes. These management plans are led by partnerships with a network behind them which includes land managers, businesses, statutory agencies, water companies, charities and social enterprises. They thereby provide an existing mechanism through which to drive a more ambitious rural-focused growth model which is essential to deliver the statutory purposes of National Parks and engages all partners.

4.4 *We are place shapers.* As planning authorities, all NPAs are required to set the policy framework and the development management regime within which communities and rural enterprises can operate. We

take a long term view and deliver sustainably and in a balanced way, ensuring that high quality, appropriate development, including affordable housing and rural enterprise, can flourish.

4.5 *We are positive and pro-active planning authorities,* demonstrating real innovation in areas of development constraint. We are also locally led: by virtue of our governance model, all NPAs have strong links to their overlapping Local Authorities and to their Parishes. The NPE publication [Enhancing our National Treasures](#) gives a range of examples

4.6 *We can make the connections:* by bringing together environment, social and economic players, and by working across our boundaries (*for example NPAs have well established networks with local councils, LEPS, LNPs, businesses, community development organisations and universities and other*

The **New Forest Marque** group champions food, drink and craft producers and the hospitality, retail and wholesale businesses who offer local produce to their customers. The aim is to support and promote local business, enhance and strengthen local rural economy and to help preserve rural and traditional practices, and to raise awareness of the availability of the wide variety of New Forest Marque produce.

For more detail: contact the New Forest National Park Authority.

research institutions). As National Park Authorities we work closely with people who are firmly connected to these places, tapping into local social capital to help sustain local communities whilst delivering important benefits to the nation.

4.7 National Parks are already well connected to existing economic development, infrastructure development and enterprise support initiatives operating at national, regional and sub regional levels. NPAs can help ensure future rural development initiatives work seamlessly

with these, but more importantly, influence future economic development so that directly or indirectly, it helps deliver the Statutory Purposes.

The Greater Dartmoor Local Enterprise Action Fund (GD LEAF) programme delivers RDPE LAG programme for Dartmoor and its hinterland. The current €1,922,700 (approx. £1,627,500) programme runs for 6 years from 2015 to 2020. Three local authorities contribute annually alongside the DNPA which also supports the programme through Officer-time.

By June 2018, LEAF had committed nearly £1,600,000 and supported the creation of 98 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs. It is currently achieving an intervention rate of 41% (grant as percentage of total project costs) and cost per job created of £16.k.

For more detail: contact the Dartmoor National Park Authority.

Places and rural policy in transition

4.7 There has been extensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing rural areas. Whilst there are common themes between National Parks, AONBs and other parts of rural England, some of the trends (for example, on affordable housing or broadband provision) may be more extreme in our National Parks.

4.8 As with other rural areas, National Park economies have relied upon a suite of policies and (largely EU) funding mechanisms including Pillar 1 and 2 CAP payments, LEADER, ERDF, EAFRD etc. As is well documented, whilst these have provided a boost to areas that might otherwise be at a disadvantage, the lack of overall coherence and the administrative burden attached to them has prevented many National Park enterprises from benefitting. The stop start nature of these programmes and the lack of a consistent, longer term integrated vision has greatly limited their ongoing impact. By virtue of on the ground capacity and continuity of approach, NPAs have the potential to add value to future programmes which will replace these.

5.3 At national level there are growing calls for a fresh approach to rural development. In its 2019 report [It's Time for a Rural Strategy](#), the Rural Services Network (RSN) states: *"It is time for a Rural Strategy which raises rural opportunities and challenges up the political agenda: which is forward looking and ambitious, recognising the contribution that rural areas make and those they could make to the wellbeing and prosperity of the nation as a whole. The RSN considers there is now a compelling case for such an approach. Years of public sector austerity have left significant challenges for service delivery in rural areas, which must be addressed. There is an urgent need to define a new settlement for rural areas, replacing the current model based heavily on European Union policies and funding streams. ..."*

5.4 In April 2019, The House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy published its [report](#). Its Chair, Lord Foster, said: *"Rural communities and the economies in them have been ignored and underrated for too long. We must act now to reverse this trend, but we can no longer allow the clear inequalities between the urban and rural to continue unchecked. A rural strategy would address challenges and realise potential in struggling and under-performing areas, and allow vibrant and thriving areas to develop further. Doing nothing is not an option."*

5.5 The HoL report then sets out a range of recommendations across different policy areas to tackle the challenges facing the rural economy, namely: rural strategy, rural delivery and place-based approaches, digital connectivity, housing and planning, skills and business support and local service delivery. Where National Parks exist, NPAs have already demonstrated that they are or have the potential to add value on all of these issues.

5.6 In an internal discussion paper, titled *The future of rural development policy post 2020*, the CLA, NFU, ACRE and a number of Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) stated *"It is widely recognised that Brexit and the Government's Industrial Strategy will fundamentally change the shape of rural development. With this change there will also be opportunities to reassess the current relationships between central and local government as well as the funding mechanisms, how they are directed and how they are delivered. We believe that a newly focused and targeted rural development policy can meet the Government's twin objectives of economic growth and increased productivity and aid the promotion of private investment. Maintaining the status quo following Brexit and failing to take into account the flaws in the present structures, simply exacerbate the challenges facing rural businesses without tackling and resolving the outstanding issues"*.

5.7 The paper concludes with a number of recommendations. These include at national level the need for a rural development framework and ring-fencing of part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Locally, it is proposed that LEPs should take the lead by establishing rural boards. Again, where National Parks exist NPAs are ideally placed to work in partnership with LEPs to establish these rural boards.

The English National Park Experience Collection
nine of England's ten National Parks have worked together, and with local businesses, to curate for the first time a collection of experiences that tell the story of our landscapes and their people. The English National Park Experience Collection offers the most outstanding visitor experiences in our most exceptional landscapes. All of these experiences are new for 2019. Supported by Visit England's Discover England Fund a small central team, working with the National Park Authorities, have supported 140 business with 1:1 business support and have enabled the creation of new 75 bookable experiences by these businesses, with 82 quality accommodation providers. We are now taking this collection to the travel trade to contract the experiences with the Australian, German and US markets. Our aim is for this work to inspire the travel trade and businesses to do more business in our National Parks. We also hope, with appropriate funding and support, to work with partners in Wales and Scotland to extend this collection to the whole of the UK.

For more detail: contact the Peak District National Park Authority

5.8 Since all National Parks are overlapped by one or more (LEPs), these bodies should be key partners in supporting their economies through the Brexit transition. However, whilst there have been good examples of joint working (such as the SW rural productivity review which brought together six LEPs and two National Parks, or the Rural Growth Pilot in NE England), the general experience of NPAs has been that LEPs have been slower to engage on place, natural capital or the rural economy. Many NPAs already work in close collaboration with the economic development teams of their District, Borough and County Councils, and this will continue to be important alongside working with LEPs, particularly as it is not yet clear whether future Government policy in relation to rural areas will place more emphasis on LEPs or on Local Authorities. Either way, the economies of National Parks matter.

5.9 With Brexit and the need to bring back to the UK policies and funding programmes, there is a great opportunity to create a much more integrated, cross-government approach to agriculture, land management, and wider rural development, and to streamline, simplify and reduce the transactional costs of delivering support. Some of the building blocks are in place: for example the commitment to a new England Land Management Scheme which pays farmers and foresters to produce public goods, a community housing fund (and possible revolving land bank) to support rural affordable housing.

5.10 Currently missing is a coherent and long term vision for how this can be delivered over the medium and long term for our finest landscapes and deepest rural areas. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund has the potential to be a powerful new mechanism to support rural businesses, but unless there is much more explicit direction to integrate rural economies into the Local Industrial Strategies being developed by LEPs, this opportunity will be missed.

6. Proposed Model

6.1 National Park Authorities should be given a clear role to work in partnership with LEPs and Local Authorities in shaping and delivering a new model of integrated rural development for National Parks. This model should stimulate a diverse rural economy which both supports and draws value from the landscape and special qualities, based on unique, place-based opportunities. The learning from this can be applied well beyond NP boundaries.

6.2 Our proposed model of rural development will secure improvements in a “triple bottom line” within and around National Parks, namely:

- **Natural capital** (via Net Environmental Gain, ELMS, Nature Recovery Network);
- **Economic capital** (via our planning role, allocation of employment land, working with LEPs as they develop their LIS, targeting Shared Prosperity Fund; and
- **Social capital** (identifying and safeguarding human and community assets, affordable housing).

6.3 Our proposed model of delivery would secure the above through a less fragmented and more integrated approach. The concept is for an integrated package of support and advice to communities and economies in transition so they can be resilient and adapt, thrive and grow. This builds on existing NPE proposals to Government on ELMS and the LEP offer but expands this into a more ambitious land management and rural development vision. We acknowledge that a locally tailored ELMS programme will have some socio-economic benefits, however, a more holistic and integrated approach to rural development in National Parks is required. It is conceived as a model for National Parks but could provide wider sub-regional benefits and learning. A successful model could be rolled out to rural areas facing similar challenges across England, the UK and beyond, thus exporting existing and developing good practice from the management of our National Parks.

7. Principles

In designing such a model, a number of principles would be embedded:

7.1 Place –based. The model would focus on distinct and recognisable areas, often well defined by National Park or protected area boundaries, but as our experience of the delivery of other programmes such as LEADER has shown a flexibility to work beyond these boundaries as appropriate (eg Northumberland Uplands LEADER and landscape partnership schemes). This place based delivery at the local level would fill the gap that is likely to exist between rural initiatives in Local Industrial Strategies and their practical delivery in rural communities

7.2 Outcome driven not measures based. Local flexibility would allow us to exploit the distinctive landscapes and economies of National Parks and address the specific needs of their business sectors, proposing a series of outcomes to Government, identifying the unique mechanisms required to deliver these. For example, we know that the lack of affordable housing is a barrier to growth, productivity and the continued viability of some National Park economies. (Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks have proposed a revolving land bank to address this). Another example might be superfast broadband and good mobile communications, where the outcome we seek is improved productivity via businesses and individuals that make use of superfast broadband and mobile telephony, not just about the infrastructure *per se*. This outcome focused approach is also already being tested with respect to ELMS – for example in Wensleydale in the Yorkshire Dales NP - but could be more broadly applied to, and integrated with, rural development measures.

7.3 Empowering rather than prescribing fixed options. Rather than prescribe a series of nationally set options, the approach would allow our businesses and communities to identify their own solutions. For example, farmers using their expertise to deliver environmental improvements and local communities and businesses given the opportunity to help shape the places they live and work in. An example of this is in relation to farm productivity – not

prescribing what is eligible but offering technical support to develop an integrated farm or whole estate plan (combining economy and environment) with potential investment for measures that will enhance farm/estate business sustainability and resilience through improving productivity in both environmental and economic terms. Such an approach would also be easier to monitor in terms of impact.

7.4 Integration not fragmentation. The place-based approach in National Parks provides the opportunity for better integration of policy and programmes. At the level of an individual farm or estate, to integrate the environment, food production and wider diversification activities. At the level of a farm cluster or business network, to ensure that our farmers, micro businesses and SMEs are learning from each other and perhaps collaborating on ‘back office’ support in order to reduce costs/improve profitability. A business-to-business support model can work well in terms of benchmarking, mentoring, networking and ratcheting up performance.

8. Indicative Programme

8.1 Whilst the precise nature of local programmes will need to react to local challenges and opportunities, and ensure integration with wider regional and sub regional programmes, rural development in England’s National Parks is likely to embrace a number of key activities. For example:

- Developing clusters and supporting supply chain integration;
- Skills training and knowledge transfer;
- Use of National Park brand to leverage business;
- Targeted improvements to infrastructure and connectivity; and
- Research and innovation (testing and piloting) and sharing good practice (mainstreaming)

9. In Conclusion

9.1 It is clear that the contribution of rural areas to economic growth and productivity needs to be fully recognised and planned for in post Brexit arrangements. Not to do this would, in the case of our National Parks, be equivalent to ignoring the economic potential of a medium-sized city.

9.2 A unique place based and locally led approach to rural development in England’s National Parks represents a real opportunity to shape rural development in our deepest rural areas, and in areas which display a unique set of assets and challenges which could in turn help inform approaches to rural development more widely. There is great potential for the National Park brand to add leverage and value to products and services.

9.3 Implementing the above approach would result in:

- Enhanced delivery of National Park purposes by aligning more of the economy behind them;
- Better targeting of existing/designated public funds;

- Filling critical gaps in support for rural businesses and communities;
- Acting as a catalyst for private sector and third sector investment;
- Working with the grain of the rural asset base – natural, economic and social;

A National Parks based rural development model would therefore improve lives, landscapes and livelihoods across a triple bottom line. It would do this by ensuring better outcomes from and more streamlined delivery of a wide range of existing and planned policies and measures across Government Departments. Key amongst these are the 25 Year Plan and ELMS (Defra), Housing White Paper and NPPF (MCLG), Industrial Strategy, LEPs and Shared Prosperity Fund (BEIS). It would also be relevant to other departments for example DCMS & DfT (rural connectivity and mobility), DH (health & wellbeing). Implementation of these policies in rural areas such as National Parks needs strong and pro-active leadership and integrated thinking, it cannot simply rely on “trickle down” from an urban/sector focused approach to growth. NPAs are up for this challenge and would now like to engage with Government and LEPs in taking it forwards.