



## Healing People, Places and Economies

### *National Parks Supporting a Green, Rural and Inclusive Recovery from Covid-19*

#### Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a far-reaching and profound impact in England. This once-in-a-lifetime event has impacted the Nation's health and economy in an unprecedented way. Indeed, Prime Minister Johnson, highlighted the need to 'act like a wartime government and do whatever it takes to support our economy'<sup>1</sup>. National Park Authorities are uniquely placed to provide opportunities to reconnect with nature and help restart the economic engines of the communities that exist within them. NPAs are ready to do whatever they can to support the Nation in its recovery – rural, economic, and natural.

#### Offer to the Nation

Since the start of the pandemic, and resulting nationwide lockdown, National Parks have reinforced government messaging with the goal of keeping people safe, saving lives, and supporting the NHS and our rural communities.

However, the impacts of the pandemic persist – rural economies are threatened, there is long-term uncertainty for the visitor economy, and personal health and well-being has been impacted, especially for vulnerable peoples and key workers.

As the nation heals from the impacts of Covid-19, NPs are and will be key actors in Covid-19 recovery. In particular, we believe we can provide 4 key 'offers' to the Nation, that will provide for a green, resilient recovery which is inclusive for all. These will also contribute towards actively responding to the Government commissioned independent Landscapes Review<sup>2</sup> undertaken by Julian Glover and an expert panel that reported last year.

**Offer 1** – Restoring **health and wellbeing** through experiences in nature for essential workers, those disproportionately affected by lockdown, and vulnerable peoples and those with disabilities, and their families

**Offer 2** – Developing resilience through **engagement and education** of children and new visitors with nature

**Offer 3** – **Supporting the visitor economy** through a domestically focused sustainable tourism programme

**Offer 4** – **Helping the wider rural economy** and rural communities bounce back through a resilient green recovery

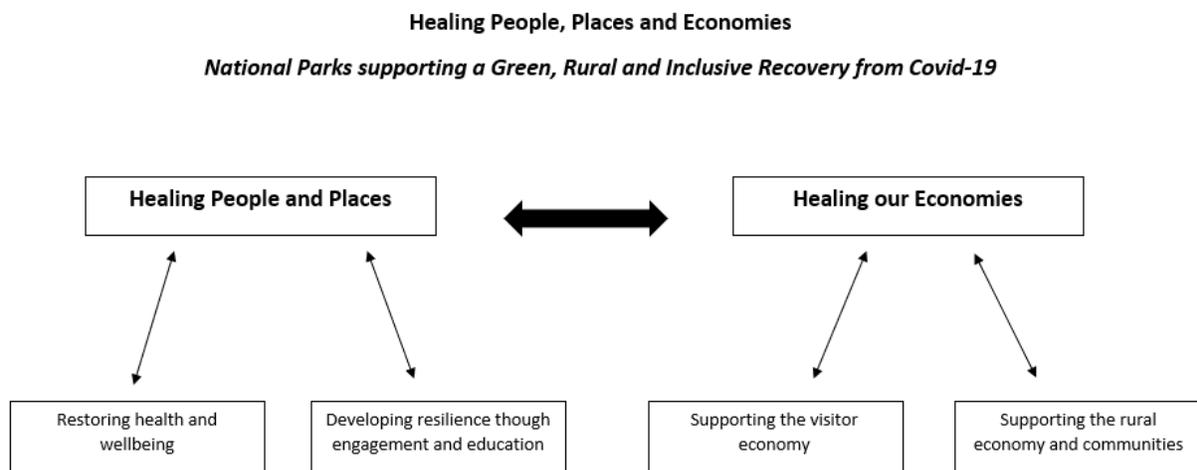
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-17-march-2020>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-national-parks-and-aonbs-2018-review>

## Four Opportunities

These proposals capture the collective vision and ambition of the 9 English National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority, herein 'NPAs', and help drive forward the Government's goals for a resilient landscape, and net zero. The Government has committed to enhancing National Parks in the 25 Year Environment Plan and these offers will contribute towards delivery of that objective<sup>3</sup>.

These 4 offers do not exist in a vacuum. They are underpinned by, and designed to advance, the National Parks' Vision, Statutory Purposes, and Duty. They are closely interlinked with the delivery of, and the achievement of each other. For example, sustaining the rural economy underpins thriving resilient landscapes, wildlife and nature which in turn provide opportunities for health, wellbeing, education, and engagement.



## Resources

National Parks are national assets, and investment in them yields myriad benefits for society, including economic benefits. There are over 25,000 businesses located in England's National Parks providing around 170,312 jobs and contributing £13.7 billion turnover. The Gross Value Added to the economy from this activity is equivalent to a city the size of Leicester. In a typical year, National Parks welcome over 98 million visitors who spend more than £5.5bn in the National Parks and immediate areas surrounding them.

To deliver on these offers quickly and effectively, National Parks are, where they can, already repurposing current funds to redirect them to recovery from Covid-19. NPAs will be leveraging existing and establishing new partnerships to help deliver on the offers detailed below. However, to provide the most effective support and offer to the Nation, NPAs are looking to Government to pump prime financial support, which can in turn help leverage significant other funds to support these key offers. See detail below.

These four offers are the cornerstone to recovery from Covid-19, and we project that implementing the 4 offers will require approximately £14,673,000.

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<sup>3</sup> [25 Year Environment Plan – Chapter 2, Item 2.](#)

### *Offer 1 – Restoring health and wellbeing*

Offering experiences in nature for essential workers and their families, those disproportionately affected by lockdown, and vulnerable peoples and those with disabilities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to public and political attention the huge value that the public places in accessing green and blue spaces. The pandemic has also brought into sharp relief inequalities such as in access to green space and fresh air.

The National Park idea was born at the same time as the NHS, stating “there can be few national purposes which, at so modest a cost, offer so large a prospect of health-giving happiness for the people”<sup>4</sup>. Connecting to nature, both on the doorstep and through visiting a National Park is a holistic experience which benefits both mental and physical health.

This offer builds upon the national health and wellbeing approach for National Parks in England, developed in collaboration with Public Health England. It will reach across England’s National Parks and beyond, work with urban and rural audiences and bring in partners from the public, private and third sector, including local health providers.

**Offer:** NPAs would like to offer essential workers and their families, those who have been disproportionately impacted by the lockdown, and vulnerable peoples and those with disabilities, opportunities to reconnect and recover from the impacts of COVID 19 through nature by:

- twinning with local key worker establishments and businesses (such as hospitals, supermarkets, and care homes), to establish programmes of simple, low intensity, self-repeatable activities such as art therapy, cycling, and forest bathing.
- establishing a ‘learn to be healthy’ programme at schools which will have the ability to create connections with nature that can have lifelong health and wellbeing benefits and deliver learning outcomes.
- Presenting these health offers through a ‘Natural Health Service’ webpage and a ‘virtual walks’ programme for all NPAs.
- Establishing an inclusive cycling programme.

These supported outdoor activities will be led by a team of experienced outdoor experts, qualified coaches/medical practitioners. These initiatives will be offered in the next 12-18 months.

**Resources required:** A limited programme within existing resources can be provided by NPAs. However, due to the scale of the health crisis and the potential NPAs must help people in this time of need, we will require funding to enable a health and wellbeing programme in each English National Park. Our ask is initially for one year after which we can evaluate and share the impact of this work.

### **Total budget request of £1,540,000 for 10 English National Parks broken out as follows:**

- £104k per park per for core-delivery of 1-year programme

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, National Parks in England and Wales: Report by John Dower, Cmd, London, HMSO, 1945

- £34k – 1-year salary for a Health and Wellbeing Officer who will enable a wide programme of delivery by working with partners organisations as well as utilising resources available to the NPAs.
  - £70k - to enable travel funds and specialist assistance (e.g. activity providers).
- £50k per park for 1 year of ranger support to deliver Offer 1 and Offer 2
  - £45k - 1 year salary for ranger resource. Ranger will enable programme delivery, education, and on the ground-outreach for this initiative, as well as support on delivery of Offer 2
  - £5k – 1 year lease for ranger vehicle

## *Offer 2 – Developing resilience through **engagement and education** with nature*

Welcoming new and reconnecting National Park visitors and children with the countryside through a national walk and a family-based John Muir award.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and resulting lock-down, the public, and in particular children's, ability to use and enjoy natural spaces, has been severely limited. With the release from lockdown, NPAs have noticed a marked increase in visitors, often first-time or returning to National Parks after having not visited for some time<sup>5</sup>. This is a critical time for NPAs to ensure that NPs are 'landscapes for all', while developing understanding and respecting their special qualities and benefiting from the health and wellbeing benefits.

This offer builds upon the national health and wellbeing approach for National Parks in England. The focus of this offer is on prevention, providing one strong product which could easily be promoted to all members of the public and could be a vehicle to promote responsible behavior in National Parks.

**Offer:** NPAs would like to offer two projects, an individual, big-sponsored walk (the 'Great Big Walk Out'), and a family-based John Muir Award<sup>6</sup>. This will be a national campaign with potentially all UK National Parks. The Walk Out will focus on establishing connections to the natural environment and the benefits that it can bring to new audiences, and in particular children. It will occur in 3 phases, using pre-established networks, new younger audiences, schools, partnership community projects and the like:

- **Phase 1 (October 2020)** – 'Great Big Walk Out' Media Launch, working with influencers and on social media to target youth and diverse audiences – National Scale
- **Phase 2 (March 2021 and 2022)** - Landmark event 'Big Walk Out Week' – National Scale
- **Phase 3 (2022)** - Targeted interventions utilising local knowledge and expertise, creating local partnership connections - Local scale

**Resources required:** A limited programme within existing resources can be provided by NPAs. NPAs are also looking for national level sponsorships for the 'Great Big Walk Out'. However, in order to fully facilitate delivery, remove barriers to participation and add equality in the offers across National Parks, NPAs are asking for funding for an officer per park, as well as funding to support transport and equipment needed.

### **Total Budget request of £2,018,000 for 15 National Parks broken out into three phases<sup>7</sup>:**

- Phase 1 - £178K – for a marketing project officer, branding/design, public relations and website design
- Phase 2 - £400K – for a two-year national campaign, and central supply kit packs
- Phase 3 - £1.44m - additional resource of an officer to lead the Education and Engagement work at each (15) National Park, a single post for a John Muir Award Officer, transportation funding, and equipment

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<sup>5</sup> For example, in the Lake District a survey completed in late May/early June calculated that a large percentage of visitors were first-time visitors

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award>

<sup>7</sup> A fully costed proposal is available upon request

*Offer 3: Supporting the visitor economy through a domestically focused sustainable tourism program*

Refocusing National Park Experiences to refocus on domestic visitors once restrictions are lifted

As a result of the international Covid-19 lockdown, global travel has come to a halt. As the Nation exits lockdown, the public will be looking to National Parks as key destinations for domestic holidays. Tourism, a key driver of rural economies in NPs, has undoubtedly been impacted by the international lockdown. Rural communities are keen to 'restart' their economies, and rural tourism can use this to good effect to build the local economy. This can also support Government measures to level-up by ensuring deep rural areas benefit too.

**Offer:** NPAs would like to provide an offer to the nation through repurposing the English National Park Experience Collection<sup>8</sup> (ENPEC) to focus on local, regional, and national visitors once travel restrictions within the UK are lifted, and then position NPs for tourism success once international borders reopen.

The ENPEC developed from scratch, since the beginning of 2018, has paved the way for offering a new way to access and engage with the rural, sustainable tourism offer in England. Developed primarily to be aimed at overseas markets, there is an opportunity to take it further to embrace domestic tourism in the short to medium term, with potential to grow the market, and the Collection. This will ignite and accelerate the recovery of the visitor economy in and around National Parks too.

The proposed approach has three phases:

- **Phase 1 (Q3 2020 – Q1 2021)** - *Amplify* the ENPEC through the delivery of Trade-focused itineraries and a Business-to-Consumer offers, whilst growing the environmental sustainability of the offer.
- **Phase 2 (throughout 2020-2021)** – Establish a *legacy* of sustained promotion and success of the Collection.
- **Phase 3 (throughout 2020-2021)** - *Embed* the ENPEC with the travel trade in existing markets to prepare for when international tourism restarts.

Future development: In association with other partners we would like to consider opportunities to develop a full UK coverage across all the 15 National Parks, and potentially other protected landscapes. Although outside of our current work and commitments through the Discover England Fund, we feel such collaboration is valuable and could usefully form an integrated element of our legacy plans.

**Resources required:** In order to deliver on this ambitious agenda, a bid for c. £300k has already been submitted to Visit England, under the Discover England Fund. NPAs are looking for Visit England and DCMS full support on this, and they will work closely and secure support or resources from local Destination Marketing Organizations.

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<sup>8</sup> The English National Park Experience Collection (ENPEC) is a collaboration between nine English National Parks. The project has developed experiential tourism within the National Parks, by creating a collection of 72 immersive experiences, supported by 85 local accommodation providers.

*Offer 4 – Helping the wider rural economy and rural communities bounce back through a resilient green recovery*

NPAs to champion a green recovery by utilising their local networks and insight to deliver targeted funding

Covid-19 and the lockdown have had a huge impact on the communities and economies of NPAs, which represent 10% of England. It is vital that rural economies, and SMEs are not neglected in national recovery planning or 'left behind'.

NPAs' relationships and partnerships with businesses, local authorities, and associations, makes them key influencers in rural communities. We work closely with Local Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships to seek investment in our rural economies. We are keen to develop a new approach to rural development that uses the assets of our national parks to contribute to wider economic growth and productivity, whilst supporting vibrant and thriving communities in and around the Parks. Due to the impacts of Covid-19, we have an opportunity to work with Defra/BEIS to capitalize on the changes caused by the ongoing pandemic.

**Offer:** England's National Parks are offering to lead a 'green' recovery where sustainability, climate action, reduced commuting and car use, low carbon businesses, and local food use, are the new norm for England's rural areas. We will work closely with our AONB partners in each part of England. Each phase of this offer will focus on rural communities' economic and infrastructure recovery, and will promote a shift towards a green sustainable economy, and maintaining and enhancing natural capital:

- **Phase 1 (2020 Q3) - Share Insight** – Through NPE business networks and projects and a bespoke survey, we can provide Defra with much finer grained data on the impacts of COVID-19 and the needs of businesses than is possible through the LEPs and Local Authorities (which necessarily have to aggregate data across rural and urban areas, SMEs and major sectors).
- **Phase 2 (2020 Q4 - 2021) - Champion & influence** - Using the above evidence base and insight, NPAs can work alongside Defra to champion rural issues with other key departments (BEIS, MHCLG and DCMS) and inform the design and delivery, ensuring appropriate reach to rural economies.
- **Phase 3 (2021-2022) - Engage & Deliver** - Working closely with Local Authorities and LEPs in their areas, NPAs could pilot a rural recovery fund, delivering rapid, targeted support direct to SMEs with flexibility and low transaction costs. Such a pilot could test the principles for a subsequent England-wide support package for rural areas. For example, if £10m formerly earmarked as part of the Shared Prosperity Fund were directed via NPAs this could make a real difference on the ground, as many of our rural businesses are SMEs or micro-enterprises.

As mentioned under Offer 3, the structural issues facing international visitors, combined with the likely surge in demand for domestic holidays for the UK market, create an opportunity for National Parks to position themselves as welcoming and open for business post-Covid-19. This offer is in addition to the work we are already doing to support local businesses and communities.

**Resources required** : While all NPAs have repurposed some of their resources to support rural communities during the Covid-19 lockdown period, and indeed many now have small community funds, rural economies are still feeling the immediate and will feel the long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Total Budget request of £11 115 000 for 10 English National Parks broken out into three phases**

- Phase 1 - £25 k- survey/website design support
- Phase 2 - £340k - 1 FTE at £34k per park to help administer the program
  - NPAs are also requesting that the government work in close partnership with NPE to develop the evidence base on impacts, vulnerabilities and opportunities in the rural economy and green recovery.
- Phase 3 – £10m of reprofiled funding from previous EU rural socio-economic programmes channeled through the NPAs
  - NPAs are requesting that government prioritize NPA as key agents to deliver pilot or funding programs for green, rural recovery
- All phases - £750k - administrative costs (IT resources, prints/production/distribution)

## Conclusion

After the Second World War, both the NHS and England's National Parks were established for the health and benefit of the Nation.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, we currently see ourselves in another crisis, of health, of economy, of connection to nature and of climate change. National Park Authorities are uniquely placed to provide opportunities to reconnect with nature and communities and support rural economies rebuild and are ready to do whatever they can to support the Nation in its recovery. Doing so will help to respond in a very meaningful way to the ambitious vision set out in the Government's recent Landscapes Review.

NPAs are looking to the government for support on four key offers to the Nation, that will help heal the Nation through supporting a green, rural and inclusive recovery from the devastating impacts of Covid-19.

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National Parks England is the umbrella organisation that brings together the nine English National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority. It exists to support policy and practice.