



National Parks
England



Active
Travel
England



**On track for
the nation**

How National Parks are unlocking access
to health and nature through active travel

This report shares how National Park Authorities (NPAs) are delivering access to health and nature through appropriate funding and strong strategic relationships.

The report was developed by a working group of access and transport officers, led by representative chief executive from the Yorkshire Dales.

The partnership developed during 2024/25 through Active Travel England Capability Funding for that period.

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The value of National Parks in active travel development

Protected landscapes support our nation's health and wellbeing and are crucial to delivering commitments to tackle climate change and restore nature.



What we mean

Active travel

People having the choice to make physically active and healthy everyday journeys by walking, wheeling (using wheelchairs or mobility aids), and cycling, rather than by car or other motorised transport. This includes shorter journeys for going to work, school or the shops and more extensive leisure routes linking to settlements, attractions and public transport.

Transport Hub

Connecting and facilitating transfers between services such as buses, trains or private vehicles and potentially access direct to active travel routes.

Local Cycling, Walking and Wheeling Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP)

Strategic plans setting out a recommended local/regional approach for local authorities to plan networks of walking, cycling, wheeling and other user routes. Usually the responsibility of Highways/Combined Authorities and typically urban-focused.

Active Travel Network

Planning for and mapping of local/regional utility journeys, visitor travel, and leisure routes such as those identified in LCWIPs.

National Park Management & Partnership Plans

Multi-stakeholder plans, typically running for a five-year period, that set out the aims and objectives for each National Park across a range of topics such as nature recovery, visitor engagement and climate change. Led by each National Park Authority but with actions for the partnership.

Active Travel England Capability Funding

Funding and project support to the 10 English National Parks for capability building activities, including the development and delivery of a network plan.



Active travel in Protected Landscapes

Infrastructure plans for walking, wheeling, cycling and horse riding set out a local/regional approach which incorporates networks of routes and priorities for improvements.

It is an approach which delivers for health and nature and opportunities for more connected, safer, and accessible places.

Active travel plans (LCWIPs) inform policies in National Park Management Plans and Local Plans which take forward actions for stakeholder partnership to meet aims and objectives across topics including nature recovery, visitor engagement, and climate change.

They contribute towards targets for net zero and safer roads by providing an alternative to using cars. This includes connectivity with where people live and visit and integration with different modes of public transport.

They support people to have a better choice for walking, wheeling, cycling or horseriding and may also be used to:

- prioritise future improvement work via feasibility studies
- develop funding bids and partnerships for delivery
- input to planning application decision making, including where possible, securing developer contributions
- provide for ongoing maintenance of the network.

This report:

- looks at National Park equivalents of Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)
- identifies shared delivery for National Parks and Protected Landscapes with Active Travel England (ATE)
- demonstrates the National Park Authorities' (NPA) role in policy development and delivery and as practitioners – advising and enabling
- showcases the distinctiveness of each National Park in the unique landscapes, constituent authorities, and variety of differing community needs and priorities, including residents, business owners and visitors
- identifies how each NPA has tackled this work individually but with shared practices and similarities to create combined strength nationally and for guiding, influencing, and supporting active travel in and around National Parks
- sets out the development and extent of capability achieved by the funding during 2024/25.

National Park Authority individual approaches

Broads National Park

Focus on smaller communities and transport hub integration

Dartmoor National Park

Network assessment for on and off-road route improvements

Exmoor National Park

Reduce commuter and visitor reliance on private transport

Lake District National Park

High-level network mapping linking with existing LCWIPs

New Forest National Park

Feasibility

Northumberland National Park

Connectivity with surrounding market towns

North York Moors National Park

Priority corridor development

Peak District National Park

Development of trails network

South Downs National Park

Delivery of cycling and walking strategy ambitions

Yorkshire Dales National Park

Strategic routes, local interventions, and zoning



Outcomes from the Active Travel England Capability Funding



These active travel plans will be embedded into each National Park's Management Plan and Local Plan and provide the strategic context for the required investment in the infrastructure to achieve active travel goals.

- The production of 10 individual National Park strategic active travel plans that identify, prioritise and develop safe and accessible walking, wheeling, cycling and (where appropriate) horse-riding routes across the National Parks.
- High level network development, planning, and mapping of local utility journeys and visitor travel, as well as leisure routes for walking, wheeling, cycling and horse riding.
- Highlighting key connections across each National Park and adjoining communities, connections with gateway towns on the periphery of a National Park, family friendly cycling routes, routes to schools, routes to and around key visitor hubs, routes connecting with public transport provision.
- Development in conjunction with constituent councils' LCWIPs and Local Transport Plans and stakeholder engagement, including involvement of Local Access Forums.
- Identifying infrastructure improvements and investment priorities for the future supported by building an economic case.

What we've learned and what could happen next

Data



Use and expansion of in-person electronic data such as fixed-point counters on key routes



'Mobile telematics' such as mobile phone and app data, including route length and time of use



GIS and 3D mapping

Feasibility

Through public consultations and by working with other key stakeholders, NPAs have prioritised feasibility studies that identify potential projects for funding and delivery. Including but not limited to:



Develop new and existing active travel routes that are 'shovel ready'



Investigate the development of transport hubs, for integrating, trains, buses, and active travel



Support stakeholder and community engagement to co-create active travel improvements



Develop action plans prioritised by feasibility and needs



Identify specifications appropriate for sensitive landscapes and habitats



Identify costs for proposed work packages. Support collaboration and working with others

Consultation

National Park Authorities have a strong history of working with constituent / neighbouring authorities, communities, landowners and others to deliver for the region, its residents and visitors

They work closely with other organisations with an access remit, including Natural England, National Trust, Forestry England, and the water companies

A partnership approach with constituent Highway Authorities provides close working relationships. In some cases, this includes delegated responsibility for Public Rights of Way maintenance

Active travel plans are developed in partnership and close collaboration with Local Access Forums and Walk Wheel Cycle Trust for their network

New advisory groups have been established providing expertise and local knowledge into the development of active travel plans, putting them at the heart of outcomes

Public engagement, co-design, consultation and public opinion surveying for networks and schemes is an important contributor to the development of active travel planning for guidance on needs, buy-in, and use

Facilitated workshops with other interested groups and adjoining urban communities help inform the development of priority routes



Conclusions and recommendations

Active Travel England's Capability Funding supports National Park Authorities in England to take access to the next level, working with communities and key stakeholders to create a strategic plan for embedding active travel in protected rural areas and for investment in the schemes to develop this.

Partnership working with Active Travel England and across all the National Park Authorities and with local authorities and key stakeholders is key to the success of this work and ongoing progress.

The following recommendations are to ensure the work is continued and leads to meaningful change in active travel for access to nature, health and wellbeing, supporting communities and the rural economy, and contributing to net zero in the UK's National Parks.

- 1** A continuation of capability funding for National Parks, including for behavioural change expenditure
- 2** National Park Authorities to have access to funding for feasibility, design, and delivery of schemes
- 3** Influencing local authorities and mayoral authorities to extend their focus beyond urban areas to unlock potential and increase spend on active travel in rural and protected areas
- 4** Flexibility to ensure appropriateness of specifications in protected landscapes
- 5** Support for access for all in protected landscapes



Case Studies

There is nuance across each National Park Authority's LCWIP, depending on several factors. This includes, but is not limited to how advanced each National Park is with their active travel development or how many local authority stakeholders fall within National Park boundaries.

The case studies below highlight some of these differences and the approaches being made to maximise outputs. However, there is a common thread that all NPAs are working towards nationally, which supports ATE and provides a stronger voice for active travel in rural landscapes.



CASE STUDY

Peak District National Park Authority High Level Network approach

The Peak District has a well-established and well-utilised existing network of accessible, multi-user trails already attracting 100,000s of visits a year. Some of these have been under the care and management of the National Park Authority for over 40 years.

The development of a high-level network of routes would focus on and expand upon the benefits of these key arteries:

- Developing a strategic plan for infrastructure investment priorities supported by building an economic case with framework documents for a National Park Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (NPCWIP).
- High level network planning for utility routes and on-road and off-road leisure routes for walking, wheeling, cycling and horse riding.
- Building key connections across the National Park, between communities and with adjoining conurbations and to key visitor attractions and long-distance leisure routes.
- Support work through an emerging Local Plan to guide development at and management of Gateway sites and Recreation Hubs.

The work will establish a framework for future network planning and for the development of area access plans involving towns and villages within and neighbouring the National Park.

Who's involved?

A framework developed in-house through extensive expertise within the National Park Authority with constituent and neighbouring councils, highways authorities and with the use of consultants for research and reporting.

The benefits

- Contribute towards aims for net-zero by 2040
- Create a welcoming place where all are inspired to enjoy, care for, and connect to its special qualities, and for communities to be thriving and sustainable places where all generations can live healthy and fulfilled lives
- Develop a sustainable travel framework

The strategic framework will build on the Authority's previous Wider Peak District Cycle Strategy, re-engaging with partners to identify routes benefitting residents of and visitors to the National Park.



**PEAK
DISTRICT
NATIONAL
PARK**



CASE STUDY

Northumberland National Park Authority Building connectivity

Focusing on connectivity outside the National Park with surrounding market towns to provide access to more remote and wilder places and links to other National Parks.

- Commission an active travel plan for the whole of the National Park, that will pilot a new and stronger engagement process with the Highway Authority, local communities and different groups, in the audit, planning and development of better active travel experiences between the four visitor hubs i.e. the gateway market towns and their respective destination areas.
- An audit of existing road and off-road routes that connect each market town with their associated destination area, working with our stakeholders to identify which can be developed into safer and more accessible active travel routes, with measures to overcome barriers, and address issues and gaps in provision of facilities, services, and information.

Who's involved?

Working closely with an active travel specialist.

The benefits

- Targeting future investment where it will be most effective, resulting in an increase of visitors travelling to the National Park by foot or cycle from 8% to 10% by 2032.
- 'Create, develop and promote a more accessible National Park for all', by facilitating improvements to a network of visitor hubs across the National Park.
- 'Enable and promote net zero, then climate negative, resident and visitor experiences', by: working with NCC, Transport NE and transport stakeholders to explore active travel opportunities for the National Park and gateway settlements, promoting cycling and walking, and researching and promoting innovative solutions to encourage active travel.



Northumberland
National Park



CASE STUDY

North York Moors National Park Authority Connecting corridors for all

Focus on tourism and the economic benefits of regenerative and transformational tourism, linking ATE to leisure and utility travel and to widen accessibility to improve equity, inclusivity and diversity.

The aim of LCWIP corridor development is to revolutionize access to the National Park, connecting gateway towns with surrounding urban areas and existing schemes. By enhancing understanding of these corridors from gateway towns, we can advocate for vital infrastructure improvements enabling multi-modal travel and alternative access routes to the National Park.

Use the National Parks Capability Fund to establish a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), aiming to enhance connectivity between urban areas and the National Park, prioritising key corridors.

Who's involved?

NYMNPA, Forestry England, North Yorkshire Council, Redcar and Cleveland Council.

The benefits

- Climate change adaptation, public health promotion, and fostering a low carbon economy in the National Park
- Better understand and evidence (data analysis) of the use of selected corridors which serve as strategic walking, wheeling, and cycling routes into the National Park.





CASE STUDY

New Forest National Park Authority Feasibility

Focus on close working relationships with one single county council and other stakeholders covering the entire National Park boundary in the preparation of a New Forest LCWIP.

- Consultation sessions with the local community and local New Forest Cycle Working Group
- Set the strategic context for the delivery of the complete utility and leisure network, aspiring to LTN 1/20 standards
- Become 'bid ready' for the interventions to make a difference by increasing capacity and knowledge locally
- Seek to develop 'best practice' in realising active travel in a highly protected landscape which other areas can learn from.

Who's involved?

Hampshire County Council, Wiltshire Council, Forestry England and New Forest District Council.

The benefits

- Expand gravel track network by up to 40% (60km) in coming years, mainly through upgrading and use of existing tracks.



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