



## **Consultation on the membership of the future South Downs National Park Authority**

**A response by the English National Park Authorities Association  
September 2009**

### **Introduction**

1. The English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) exists to provide a collective voice for the nine English National Park Authorities. It is governed by the Chairs of the nine Authorities, and our response represents the collective view of the Authorities.

2. ENPAA has welcomed the decision to create the South Downs National Park, and looks forward to continuing to work with the interim NPA and its successor. We believe that, in the main, questions of the membership of the South Downs NPA is a matter best addressed by those bodies directly affected – most notably the Interim NPA.

### **The overall size of the authority**

3. ENPAA believes that it is principally for the Interim NPA to consider the appropriate size of the authority, with input from Natural England, Defra, local authorities, and the wide range of other local parties. We recognise the differences that exist for a future South Downs NPA in terms of its geographical area, population, and planning pressures. We believe that the key criteria for the decision must be what will be the most effective arrangement to ensure the fulfilment of National Park purposes. Beyond that, ENPAA does not hold a view on whether this should be through having 29, 37 or any number of members in between.

### **The role of the National Park Authority Member**

4. ENPAA warmly welcomes the re-statement of Government policy, that ‘...members are not in any sense delegates for their appointing body, but once appointed, are expected to act solely in the interests of the National Park and its Authority’. We believe this principle is particularly important in helping NPAs to take a long term strategic perspective, to draw on a wide range of different expertise, and in helping it avoid party political confrontations.

5. We believe it is important that the appointment process encourages people to come forward and be appointed who have a wide breadth of interest/ knowledge. Avoiding those who may have a more narrow set of interests will help the NPA in the longer term, and ensure the members can play an active role in the governance of the Authority across its wide range of policy areas.

## **Principles underpinning any decision**

6. Whilst we believe it is for the South Downs NPA to (in time) articulate what its needs are and how these might best be served, ENPAA does believe there are some over-arching principles that should help guide Defra's eventual decision. Indeed, we welcome reference in the consultation paper to the Government wishing to draw on existing experience of other NPAs in informing its decision.

7. The introduction of Unitary Government in some parts of the country has necessitated various changes in NPA membership arrangements. ENPAA considered what the implications of these might be in some detail. The Chairs of the National Park Authorities agreed the following principles. These provide important context for any decision and recognise NPA's unique structure and the benefits that have accrued from this.

8. ENPAA believes:

- there is real benefit in having a broad basis from which Members are drawn to a NPA;
- the independence of NPAs (with no one authority having dominance) should be upheld;
- resolution of potential problems should be resolved through action at national level given the status and national objectives of the National Parks;
- the diversity and balance of NPA membership should be retained;
- ensuring satisfactory local knowledge and connection with the National Park areas amongst an NPA's membership is critical and needs to be retained; and
- the national interest in NPAs should not be diminished.

9. We hope that Defra Ministers will draw on these principles in coming to their decision over the arrangements for South Downs NPA membership.

ENPAA  
September 2009