

Position Statement

Sustainable Tourism



England's National Parks* are national treasures for their wildlife, landscapes and cultural heritage. For millions of people they offer wonderful opportunities to appreciate the best of our natural environment and cultural heritage. The National Park Authorities protect the special qualities of the National Parks and encourage people to understand and enjoy them.

England's National Parks are breathing spaces for the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of the nation and provide opportunities for millions of people, every year, to have first class outdoor experiences in first class environments. The iconic landscapes and heritage sites within our National Parks attract visitors from across the UK and around the world. National Park Authorities do not have a tourism marketing remit, but support the promotion and development of sustainable tourism because it can help to further their statutory purposes and support rural communities. We see sustainable tourism as the future of tourism – not an add-on.

Our aims are that National Parks will be exemplars of sustainable tourism practice and that, as welcoming places, National Parks' value to the nation and appreciation by the public will grow. We want more people, from all sectors of society, to benefit from a deeper experience of the special qualities of National Parks through sustainable tourism.

England's National Parks

Our National Parks are a truly national treasure. Each of the nine National Parks in England has a National Park Authority. These are independent bodies, funded by central Government. National Parks have two statutory purposes, to:

- conserve and enhance their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage; and
- promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public.

In carrying out these purposes, they also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park.

* The nine English National Parks are The Broads, Dartmoor, Exmoor, The Lake District, The New Forest, Northumberland, The North York Moors, The Peak District and The Yorkshire Dales.

Sustainable Tourism and National Parks in England

Sustainable tourism, as defined by The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, is: *'any form of development, management or tourist activity which ensures the long-term protection and preservation of natural, cultural and social resources and contributes in a positive and equitable manner to the economic development and well-being of individuals living, working or staying in protected areas.'* (Europarc 2000) ENPAA believes that in order to meet this definition, all tourism related travel to and within National Parks must be sustainable.

Sustainable tourism is important to National Park Authorities. It contributes to delivery of our statutory purposes, particularly that of promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public. There are some 75 million visits every year to England's National Parks. English National Parks are internationally known and the Lake District is one of the UK's top tourist destinations. Properly managed tourism can bring a range of benefits and help sustain our communities, environment and way of life. Inappropriate tourism development or poorly managed visitor pressure, however, can be damaging. National Park Authorities follow the *Principles for sustainable tourism in National Parks and AONBs* (Countryside Agency, 2004) and put an emphasis on opportunities for visitors to both understand and contribute to sustainable development whilst enjoying National Parks. We also welcome the work by the Department for Culture Media and Sport in developing a framework for sustainable tourism and look forward to helping meet the challenges identified.

The benefits of sustainable tourism include:

- increased and improved education and understanding of the natural environment, rural areas, climate change, sustainable development and National Parks;
- visitors contributing to local and regional economies. Promotion of local goods and services can also encourage recirculation of money in local economies;
- direct contributions to conservation and enhancement of the countryside and rural communities through visitor payback schemes;
- improved viability of rural services, facilities and communities such as Post Offices, pubs, shops and cultural and sports facilities;
- support for diversification of farm and rural businesses;
- a focus for regeneration, raising an area's profile or providing opportunities for retraining a resident workforce. Derelict land or buildings can be brought back into use;
- experience of the natural environment makes a positive contribution to people's mental and physical health;
- support for a range of cultural and community activities including arts, sports and heritage events and contribution to sports and cultural objectives for access and participation;
- making tourism in an area more attractive and competitive by addressing market demands and reducing costs; and

- rising standards in the quality of local goods and services to meet market demands for better quality, especially in terms of environmental standards. A 2002 survey by VisitBritain found that 84% of consumers would choose an attraction or accommodation provider that is part of a green accreditation scheme over one that was not.

Issues related to tourism include:

- real or perceived conflicts between National Park purposes and tourism such as, access versus nature conservation;
- loss of tranquillity, environmental erosion and pressure on infrastructure (e.g. water supply);
- transport issues such as vehicle emissions, disturbance or damage caused by numbers of vehicles exceeding the capacity of specific locations, parking issues, charging for access or parking, lack of access by public transport in many areas; and
- negative impacts on local communities such as disturbance to residents, lack of affordable housing, loss of local shops to tourist focused provision, leakage of funds away from the local community to large-scale external tourism operators.

National Park Authorities are working to prevent, mitigate or manage the negative impacts of tourism. They are also taking action to address current issues and adapt to future trends (see below). National Park Authorities work with businesses and communities to bring about positive developments but sometimes a proposed tourism development cannot be acceptably managed and, following the Sandford Principle, will be opposed.

ENPAA's Position

ENPAA supports the development of sustainable tourism within National Parks. We want everyone to come and enjoy their special qualities and are working to make sure people can do so in ways that do not undermine these special qualities.

Promotion of sustainable tourism is not itself a specific purpose or duty of National Park Authorities, however, sustainable tourism contributes to National Parks' two statutory purposes. Since tourism is often one of the main economic drivers of rural economies it also contributes to the duty to foster the socio-economic well being of local communities. At a strategic level, National Park Authorities seek to influence tourism and visitor management by working with and through existing tourism partnerships and providers. This includes working with partners who support and enhance the provision of information, interpretation and the activities offered in National Parks.

National Park Authorities:

- want everyone to come and enjoy the special qualities of National Parks, put something back into the local economy and environment, and leave with a better understanding and appreciation of what National Parks are about;

- are keen to encourage quality and good design, and a scale of building, facilities and activities which respects the landscape and its communities;
- would like to see a tourism sector which supports National Park purposes and where there is an emphasis on quality, environmental best practice, use of local labour, skills, materials and produce, and the re-use of buildings;
- will embrace changes that will deliver sustainable tourism and achieve a high quality visitor experience; and
- want to provide the conditions for tourism businesses that deliver sustainable tourism to flourish and for visitor stay and spend to increase.

Throughout their work, National Park Authorities promote opportunities to increase the understanding, awareness and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks. In order to achieve the aims above National Park Authorities:

- Work in partnership with Destination Management Organisations/Area Tourism Partnerships to develop sustainable tourism strategies and action plans and put these into practice. Dartmoor First, Visit Peak District Sustainable Tourism Strategy, Cumbria Tourism and Conservation Partnership are all examples in this respect.
- Promote the principles of sustainable tourism, particularly through ENPAA's membership of the Partners for England Forum.
- Will continue promoting National Parks, through UK ANPA and the *Britain's Breathing Spaces Brand*, as places for physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.
- Work with communities and businesses to raise awareness and promote action on sustainable tourism for example, through Community Tourism Groups.
- Promote sustainable tourism by working with all interests to improve the environmental performance of all sectors of the tourism and visitor industry through the adoption of agreed standards and methods, such as green accreditation schemes.
- Work with other organisations and communities to promote (and occasionally provide) sustainable transport options and encourage greater awareness of travel options and their environmental impacts so that people think about their mode of travel to and within National Parks.
- Recognise the importance of working with partner organisations, businesses and communities in areas around the boundaries since visitors may be staying in accommodation outside the National Park and making one or more day trips into it. They may not necessarily notice the boundary of the National Park but we need to work together to maximise the benefits to and from these visitors.
- Work directly and with others to provide public realm services and improvements that enhance the visitor experience. Services provided include rail and bus facilities and services, visitor and education centres, public amenities, interpretation, information (websites, leaflets, maps, etc) and ranger services.
- Undertake rights of way management and waymarking including for accessible trails and cycle trails. Some authorities also manage waterways and have navigation duties.

- Oppose tourism development and activity that is not sustainable or would damage the special qualities of a National Park if the development/activity cannot be made sustainable or its negative effects avoided or mitigated.
- Work to reduce barriers to accessing the National Parks and to provide opportunities for all. In part this work helps achieve Government goals for health, access and education but it also helps fulfil National Park Authorities' responsibilities under the Equality Act 2006 and Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. For example, the Mosaic Partnership, managed by the Campaign for National Parks, included four NPAs (the Peak District, Yorkshire Dales, Brecon Beacons & North York Moors). Mosaic was a three and a half year project (ending in September 2008) to develop a long term and active engagement between Black and Minority Ethnic groups and National Parks. From 2009 all the English National Park Authorities will be working with a new tranche of the Mosaic project which will target the most disadvantaged communities in terms of socio-economic indicators and access to green space.
- Develop, promote and put into practice policies that facilitate diversification of businesses and allow them to adjust to changes in market conditions or tourist preferences. For example, the Lake District National Park Authority works with local farmers and other stakeholders on diversification schemes that provide sustainable tourist facilities and improve the economic viability of the farm.
- Monitor visitor numbers and activities using National Park Authority surveys and data from other organisations (destination management partnerships, Natural England, VisitBritain) in order to inform visitor management strategies.
- Some National Park Authorities have or are working towards European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Landscapes status. Others are involved with other international schemes that recognise excellence in sustainable tourism.

Areas for further action

The current proliferation of green/sustainable tourism standards and schemes can confuse tourists and put off businesses from taking simple actions or registering for accreditation. National Park Authorities will work to promote nationally recognised schemes and best practice while supporting local initiatives that promote excellence in sustainable tourism.

National Park Authorities will work with others to ensure appropriate adaptation to the changing nature of tourism and recreational activity. More people are seeking active pursuits in National Parks such as climbing, kite surfing, off-road cycling, via ferrata walks, sailing or horse riding. While these still account for only a small proportion of activity within National Parks (walking, sightseeing and tranquil enjoyment of the landscape still make up the major proportion of activities), National Park Authorities are working to support and encourage active recreation in ways that do not damage the National Parks' special qualities or detract from their enjoyment by other visitors. As other trends emerge National Park Authorities will monitor those and adapt to make best use of them to deliver our statutory purposes.

One of the biggest challenges for National Park Authorities is closing the circle between farmers, landowners and managers and visitors so that the benefits of visitor activities are passed on directly to local communities e.g. payback schemes and working holidays. There is a further challenge in ensuring that money stays and circulates within local economies. All National Park Authorities are working to use sustainable tourism to drive rural regeneration and on economic policies and projects that help retain and recirculate money locally. Some examples include, Northumberland National Park Authority which uses a bottom-up approach to the development of sustainable tourism with community, land management, business and tourism sectors working together. The aim of the successful ASPECT project was to encourage these sectors to come together to discuss the potential benefits of sustainable tourism and work on product development. The Peak District National Park Authority supports business diversification through proactive engagement by their planning staff. Exmoor National Park Authority uses its Sustainable Development Fund to promote use of local produce in the hospitality sector.

Widening participation in outdoor activity especially for disadvantaged community groups and young people is a goal of all National Park Authorities. They have developed outreach programmes to attract wider audiences to enjoy the special qualities of National Parks and are working to give more people an understanding and appreciation of National Parks. Some National Park Authorities are focussing on black and minority ethnic communities, some on people with disabilities and some on other disadvantaged communities or young people. Many of these programmes are run in partnership with other organisations. National Park Authorities are working to reduce or remove barriers to visiting National Parks for all sectors of society, are all involved in the MOSAIC project and delivery of Defra's Outdoors for All action plan.

ENPAA would like more people to visit National Parks but also to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the National Parks so that they can get more from their visits and over time to enable their behaviour to become more sustainable. An informed visitor will get more from their experiences in National Parks and is more likely to engage in behaviours and activities that enhance National Parks rather than detracting from their special qualities.

National Park Authorities are encouraging people to stay longer in National Parks. They are working to improve the overall visitor experience so that visitors will stay overnight and thus contribute more to the local economy, rather than just make day visits. This will also give them more opportunity to visit places away from the main 'honeypots' and try new activities or experiences. Some National Park Authorities are engaged in studies of how increased visitor spend can be achieved through enhancing the value of 'products' (intangible products such as the landscape and tranquil surroundings and tangible items like locally grown food) to visitors. Some National Park Authorities are working to spread the benefits of tourism across the National Park through visitor management strategies and marketing campaigns, thus reducing pressure on popular attractions or locations.

Supporting action

Within Government, we look to:

- Defra to continue to work to promote sustainable tourism where this falls within their remit. For example, promoting and supporting carbon neutral tourism and supporting programmes which promote rural businesses and sustainable tourism such as the 'Walking with Farmers' tours or Farm Stay programme.
- DECC to promote sustainable tourism where this falls within their remit. For example, promoting and supporting carbon neutral tourism and sustainable transport options.
- DCMS to incorporate the Green Tourism Business Scheme standards and environmental sustainability into the National Quality Assurance Schemes and work to make sure the sustainable tourism framework is taken up and acted on throughout the industry.
- DfT to help make National Parks more accessible by sustainable transport options and encourage modal shift for trips to and within National Parks. A full list of activities required by DfT and others to help achieve these changes is contained in ENPAA's *Transport* Position Statement.
- CLG and BERR (directly through National Policy Statements, Planning Policy Statements and guidance; and indirectly through regional spatial planning) to give clear guidance on how genuinely sustainable tourism related and recreational developments can take place, building in strong protection for designated areas, and setting high standards for sustainable design and construction that enable National Park Authorities, and others, to facilitate truly sustainable developments.
- All Government departments to recognise that tourism or recreational activities which conflict with National Park purposes for conserving and enhancing the environment have to be actively managed and in some cases restricted.

We also look to:

- VisitBritain to work with UK ANPA, ENPAA and individual National Park Authorities to:
 - promote National Parks as exemplars of sustainable tourism;
 - promote National Parks as high quality destinations for sustainable domestic tourism; and
 - respond proactively to tourism trends by promoting sustainable tourism benefits (in terms of health and wellbeing) in National Parks i.e. as Breathing Spaces.
- VisitBritain and Natural England to continue to undertake and improve recreation and tourism research and monitoring data that supports National Park purposes.
- RDAs to set up specific programmes for sustainable tourism development in protected areas, perhaps through the Rural Development Programme.

We would expect that any successor body to VisitBritain, created as a result of the Tourism Review, would take on these activities and continue to work in partnership with National Park Authorities to promote and develop sustainable tourism.

The English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) provides a collective voice for the National Parks. This statement sets out their shared position on Sustainable Tourism. Each Authority works to implement the Management Plan for its area and so each National Park Authority will need to implement this and other policies in ways that are compatible with this plan and appropriate to local circumstance.

ENPAA

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