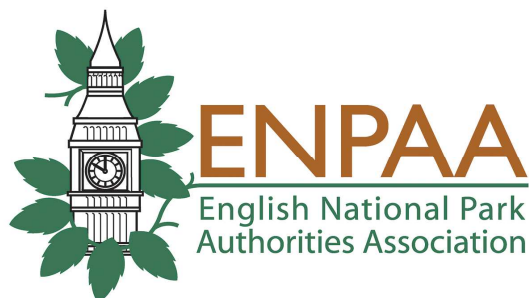


**Consultation on the Commission for
Rural Communities' Inquiry into the
future for England's upland communities**

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

April 2009



Introduction

1. The English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Commission for Rural Communities' Inquiry into the future for England's upland communities. The Association 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. Individual National Park Authorities (NPAs) have been active participants in the regional hearings of the Commission's Inquiry and will have submitted written evidence based on the particular circumstances in their respective National Parks. This submission picks up on specific issues that apply to all National Parks in upland areas of England. In particular, it addresses the following points:

- general role of National Parks and National Park Authorities;
- the importance of traditional livestock farming in the English uplands;
- developing sustainable economies in National Park areas;
- affordable housing in National Parks;
- planning in National Parks; and
- National Park coverage and potential of National Park Authorities as delivery bodies.

2. In addition to this paper, the following ENPAA position statements also form a part of the evidence to the Inquiry from the Association:

- Upland Livestock farming in National Parks – October 2007
- Affordable housing – January 2008
- Sustainable Tourism – January 2009

General role of National Parks and National Park Authorities

3. The importance of England's uplands for their spectacular scenery and open landscape character is indicated by the extent of the upland areas of England designated as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. National Parks in England are living landscapes and the 7 National Parks in upland areas provide a home for 167,000 residents and receive 40 million visitors each year.

4. The Environment Act 1995 sets out the purposes of National Park designation and provides the basis for the establishment of National Park Authorities in each National Park area. These Authorities have the duties to achieve the purposes of National Park designation and to help foster the social and economic wellbeing of

communities living within the National Parks. National Park Authorities are the planning authorities for National Park areas and the management of development within National Parks plays an important role in the achievement of National Park purposes and social and economic wellbeing.

The importance of traditional livestock farming in the English uplands

5. National Park Authorities in England have long recognised the vital role played by traditional farming and land management in shaping the landscapes that we value so highly today. They have worked closely with their local farming communities and played an active role in the development of agri-environment schemes. The first such schemes were developed in National Parks and funded by National Park Authorities and led to the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) schemes and, latterly, the Environmental Stewardship schemes administered by Natural England. ENPAA published a statement on livestock farming in 2007 and this is included with this submission.

6. Critically, traditional approaches to livestock farming in the English uplands provide a wide range of public benefits in addition to the food produced. For example, in the South West of England the upland landscapes of Dartmoor, Exmoor and Bodmin Moor were created by grazing livestock – cattle, sheep and ponies – and provide an impressive array of natural and historic riches including:

1. Providing public access to over 73,800 hectares of iconic landscapes famous for both their wildness and tranquillity.
2. 34,000 hectares of internationally important moorland
3. 10% of the England's Scheduled Monuments and prehistoric landscapes going back to the Bronze Age.
4. Landscape character celebrated by National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation.
5. The source of drinking water to 1.6 million residents and 8 million annual visitors to the region.
6. Priority biodiversity habitats and species.
7. Peat soils that store in excess of 85 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.
8. A major attraction for visitors and their direct contribution to the regional tourism economy is more than £400 million per year.

7. Similar benefits are provided by livestock farming in all uplands of England but there is serious concern about the future viability and economic sustainability of these vital farming systems. The Association believes that this must be better recognised through public funding support programmes. In particular, we would like to see two significant changes in the basis for public funding support for the English uplands:

1. The urgent targeting of additional funding to retain farms in the uplands, increase confidence in a more secure future and encourage succession planning for the farmers of the future. This could be achieved through either a revised approach to Single Farm payment that removes the anomaly of higher area payments outside upland areas or an alternative approach such as the Article 68 provisions within the CAP review measures.
2. Amendments to agri-environment programmes to enable a tailored approach to the different circumstances of different upland areas. The focus should be on

positive outcomes and achievements rather than 'profits foregone', and to have a broad scope that includes landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage, carbon management, water management and recreation and access benefits, as well as high quality food production.

Developing sustainable economies in National Park areas

8. Underpinning the farming economies of the uplands will make an important contribution to the future sustainability of upland communities where agriculture is still a significant economic component. The future viability of agriculture also has importance to the other aspects of upland economies, such as tourism, which rely on the conservation of high quality environments. An estimated 40 million visitors visit the 7 upland English National Parks each year with an annual contribution to the economies of these areas estimated at more than £2.5 billion. ENPAA published a statement on sustainable tourism in 2009 and this is included with this submission.

9. High quality environments are key to the economic success of many of our upland areas and the National Park Authorities, as planning authorities, have a key role in providing the conditions for business development and growth while conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the National Parks upon which so much of the prosperity depends.

10. A study undertaken by SQW Consultants demonstrated the importance that businesses attach to high quality environments within the Yorkshire/Humber Region. The Region has three National Parks within it (North York Moors, Yorkshire Dales, and part of the Peak District). Overall findings of the in-depth study (published in a Council for National Parks report: *Prosperity and Protection*) were:

- sales by businesses in the National Parks in the one region are worth £1.8 billion annually, supporting over 34,000 jobs;
- spend by visitors to the three National Parks amounted to £400 million annually, and a further £260 million elsewhere in the region;
- a survey of 400 businesses within the National Parks, the towns around them, and against a comparator found that 69% of businesses believed that high landscape quality has a positive impact on their business performance; and
- 58% would expect a deterioration in landscape quality to adversely affect their business.

11. Over the past five years NPAs have also developed a track record of support for a wide range of innovative economic and community projects through the National Park Sustainable Development Funds. Each fund is supported by an independent panel of volunteers recruited from National Park areas who advise on the use of funds. This community-led approach has proven highly successful and provides a useful model for sustainable development across all of the upland areas. This and other examples of ways in which National Park Authorities support sustainable rural economic activity are provided in Appendix 1.

Affordable housing in National Parks

12. In National Parks, as in many rural and upland areas, there is a high demand for housing, much of which is developed externally through demand for in migration and second or holiday homes. This upward pressure on house prices when combined with

the relatively low salaries of many people working in rural areas, leads to large gaps between open market house values and local affordability.

13. The planning role of National Park Authorities has an important contribution to make in helping to address the issue of affordable housing for local people in National Parks. National Park Authorities have pioneered approaches that are delivering affordable housing through the planning system to help meet local housing need. In addition, many National Park Authorities are actively involved in local partnerships with housing authorities and registered social landlords to provide rural housing enablers in their areas. The RHEs work with parish councils, local communities and people in housing need to identify the scale of provision required and to support the identification and acquisition of suitable sites for new affordable local needs housing provision.

14. Over the past ten years National Parks have developed planning policies favouring local needs housing with occupancy ties to ensure that these dwellings are retained for local need and remain more affordable. The housing provided through these policies has a range of tenures including rented, shared equity and self-build. Altogether, a stock of more than 750 new local needs homes has been developed across the 7 upland National Parks and new schemes are coming forward at an increasing rate as National Parks work with local housing authorities and other partners to promote more affordable housing provision.

15. These achievements have been made without compromise in quality of design to provide sustainable local homes that help maintain viable local communities in National Parks. ENPAA published a statement on affordable in 2008 and this is included with this submission.

Planning in National Parks

16. The first point to make is that all planning services operate within a national, regional and local planning policy framework. National planning policy is set out in a series of Planning Policy Statements and the most significant policies that set the context for the management of much of the development typical in National Parks is set out in PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas and The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995.

17. Regional and local planning policies in National Parks are set within this context with local policies based on considerable local consultation and engagement. For example, in preparing for its local plan review in 2000, Exmoor National Park Authority held ‘Planning for Real’ events in 26 settlements across the National Park, attended by over 2,000 local residents – more than 20% of the resident population.

18. In undertaking their work as planning authorities National Park Authorities see their role as one of facilitating and managing development in ways that meet economic and social needs within a high quality environment. All National Park Authorities provide pre-application advice at no cost to the applicant in order to establish an early relationship with potential applicants and understand their needs and ways in which they might be met within the planning policy framework.

19. The advisory and negotiated approach means that the vast majority of planning applications are approved (more than 90%) often with innovative approaches to meeting the needs of applicants. Whilst some potential applicants might complain of being discouraged from making a full application at the pre-application stage, there are many more who do achieve a successful application. This is often through delegated

decision making that reduces the time taken and the stresses that often surround planning applications that receive large numbers of objections.

20. During 2008/09 the 7 National Park Authorities in upland areas of England approved more than 150 agricultural buildings and extensions and 15 new agricultural tied dwellings/farms.

National Park coverage and potential of National Park Authorities as delivery bodies

21. We believe that National Park Authorities are well placed to assist in the delivery of increased sustainability and improved economic and social wellbeing in England's uplands. The strengths that National Park Authorities bring include the large proportion of the English uplands that fall within National Parks; the proactive role of National Park Authorities as planning authorities; the close contacts that National Park Authorities have developed with local communities over many years, and the ability to bring together active partnerships and attract resources.

22. National Park Authorities include a high proportion of representatives of their local communities with typically 12 out of 22 members nominated by local authorities in the National Park area and a further 4 members elected from parish councils in the National Park. This make up of membership means that National Park Authorities frequently have a higher proportion of their members from local upland communities than other local authorities and agencies where upland wards are in the minority on the authorities due to the high sparsity of upland communities.

National Park Authorities supporting sustainable rural economic activity

All NPAs have programmes designed to support their local communities and the following examples illustrate some of the ways that National Park Authorities are working to support the rural economies of National Parks.

Planning – as Local Planning Authorities, the NPAs are able to encourage sustainable developments to meet local need. As special purpose authorities, NPAs are in a unique position to have a detailed local knowledge to help identify, foster and support development which does not degrade the special qualities of the National Park. NPAs typically grant planning permission for more than 90% of applications received (DCLG 2006).

Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) – the NPAs provide funding to a large variety of different projects through the SDF. This includes seed funding for new enterprises (such as renewable energy projects) and for traditional industries. Through SDF, National Parks have been delivering a key role as test beds for sustainable development and rural regeneration.

Branding of local products – the Yorkshire Dales NPA has recently given its full support to a campaign by Wensleydale Dairy Products to obtain EU Protected Designation of Origin status for Wensleydale Cheese. This is designed to protect the status and brand of real Yorkshire Wensleydale, and avoid the livelihoods of those involved in its production from being undermined. On Exmoor, the National Park Authority is supporting an Exmoor Beef brand and marketing the promotion of the Exmoor Horn traditional sheep breed.

Rural Skills and Training – a number of the NPAs have schemes designed to support local skills. Northumberland NPA, through a *Traditional Boundaries Skills* project, trains 10 people a year in dry stone walling and other traditional skills. Many of the trainees come from deprived communities and are on low incomes. They are given accredited training and education to help them set up their own businesses so they can then bid for work from local farmers and land owners.

Supporting local communities – the NPAs provide practical support, for example, by sharing visitor centre premises and IT facilities so that they can be used by local enterprises too. National Parks have, in many areas involved local businesses in helping to deliver core national park services and in doing so have aided micro-enterprise development and helped secure local employment.

The Visitor Payback scheme – established by the Lake District NPA it asks visitors if they'd like to pay an additional amount on the basis that this money is invested back into the maintenance of the area. Around 190 businesses are now in the scheme which has generated approximately £750,000 for the management of the Lake District. Other NPAs have, or are establishing similar schemes.

Supporting upland farming – all National Park Authorities are working with their communities to help foster economic development that supports the special qualities of their areas. For example, the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project has worked with local farmers to form a co-operative – Dartmoor Farmers Association – to add value to the meat they produce; develop a Moorskills apprenticeship scheme to ensure that traditional upland farming skills are retained; and to develop new markets for sheep wool.

Exmoor NPA has worked closely with Exmoor Farmer's livestock auctions to enable the provision of a new replacement livestock market at a cost of £1 million at a central location in the National Park.

NPAs have also been successful at obtaining external funding to help boost the farming and tourism economy. For instance Northumberland NPA grant aided and gave planning permission for the construction of a series of large, modern agricultural buildings - funding that without the NPA farmers could not have accessed. Similarly North York Moors spent £2.83 million on a long term programme to improve the productivity of sheep farming and grouse moors. These had benefits for National Park purposes but also very substantially benefited the upland economy.

Through the South West Uplands Task Force, Exmoor and Dartmoor NPAs have helped target £2 million in Rural Development Programme for England funding to help achieve increased profitability of farming in the two National Parks, and a further £3 million to local farmers for conservation plan projects.

These comprise a few examples and all National Park Authorities in the English uplands can provide examples of innovative projects for developing their local economies.