

Dorset and East Devon National Park Team

Securing National Park designation for our outstanding and internationally important landscapes

The Dorset & East Devon National Park - how it would work in practice

A Discussion Paper

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to consider how the Dorset & East Devon National Park (D&ED NP) would be implemented and would operate in practice. It does not seek to answer all the issues and indeed raises some options for discussion where appropriate.

It draws on experience from other NPs and especially the South Downs National Park (SDNP). The SDNP is a close comparator for the proposed Dorset and E Devon NP in terms of area, population and geography. It is also England's newest NP.

Our Aim: To sustain and enhance one of the most beautiful and treasured areas in Britain, a National Park Authority (NPA) would work in partnership with a Dorset [Rural] Unitary Authority to deliver for all our communities an efficient, streamlined, cost- effective and responsive service for the long term benefit of all who work and live here.

2. Governance

Each National Park is administered by its own NP Authority. These are independent bodies and, as National Parks, funded 100% by central government (not from local council tax). Their twin purposes, are to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.
- Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of national parks by the public.

In pursuit of these purposes, National Park Authorities, unlike AONBs, are required to:

- Seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park.

Each National Park Authority has a number of members, selected by the elected local councils and parish/town councils, and by the Secretary of State. Members receive allowances but otherwise are unpaid. The role of these members is to provide leadership, scrutiny and direction for the National Park Authority.

They ensure that the National Park Authority fulfils its statutory National Park purposes and does so in a way that best reflects the special qualities of the area. Members have a duty to achieve the efficient, effective and accountable governance of the authority in the best interests of the National Park in pursuing the aim of sustainable development – balancing and integrating the environmental, social and economic considerations. A member must work with the chair, chief executive and other members to discharge the functions of the authority and to steer and champion the management of the authority so that it delivers benefits to its local communities and the nation in accordance with National Park purposes.

NP Authorities are made up as follows:

- 75% elected representatives of local authorities of which one third are representatives of parish and town councils
- 25% Ministerial appointees to reflect both the national and local perspective – appointees tend to be respected local people, champions of key relevant interests (such as rural communities, farming, wildlife conservation, tourism etc).

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) has 27 Members, comprising:

- 14 Councillors from Local Authorities within the South Downs National Park. There are 15 local authorities covering the Park area, and each is entitled to a seat on the Park Authority, with two councils opting to share a seat.
- 6 Councillors from Town and Parish Councils within the South Downs National Park, 2 each from East Sussex, West Sussex and Hampshire, elected through the relevant Associations of Town and Parish Councils.
- 7 Members appointed by the Secretary of State following open consultation and competition.

The members of National Parks are appointed to represent the authority and area as a whole and not their appointing body or local base. Members appointed by the Secretary of State to represent national and local interests may be appointed for up to 4 years, with a possible extension to a maximum 8 years in total.

Parish and local authority appointed Members serve until the next election of their Council. Elections are held periodically, although these are typically staggered between the parishes and local authorities. These Members are eligible for re appointment to the NP Authority if re-elected to their council.

The balance of representation is considered to work well, with an area-wide strategic voice complemented by local knowledge.

Within the Dorset Rural UA, the NPA would ensure a similar voice for communities through council representatives, including from Parish and Town Councils. This last point is significant in that currently, or in a proposed Dorset UA, Parish and Town Councils have no direct say in planning decisions.

Far from any democratic deficit (as some unacquainted with how a NP is constituted might suggest), the NPA has 75% local elected councillors, complemented by the 25% Ministerial local appointees. This enhances and strengthens the representation of local communities and expertise compared with current local planning authority arrangements.

Neither would the creation of a NP add a layer of bureaucracy. The relevant current AONBs would disappear and the new NPA would provide a more efficient single focus, via a coherent governance structure and policy framework, to reflect the views of all relevant interests in a one-stop-shop, streamlined approach.

3. The NP Boundaries

The Dorset & East Devon National Park Authority would work closely with the Dorset Rural Unitary Authority and East Devon Council for efficient and effective service delivery and cost-effective use of resources. Efficient, collaborative and complementary working between the NPA and UA would be facilitated in Dorset by the 1:1 relationship between the two Authorities.

Within the broad 1:1 model, possible options could be considered for the boundaries of the National Park.

The NP area suggested by the NP Team in the 2013 proposal to Natural England included the Dorset and East Devon AONBs [together covering the full extent of the World Heritage Jurassic Coast] plus additional heathland between Dorchester and Wareham [Thomas Hardy's "Egdon Heath"]. The NP Team made clear from the outset that the NP area and boundary suggested were a starting point, and that the detailed scope of the NP would need to be the subject of consultation and discussion.

All the local authorities in Dorset have the opportunity to consider, in consultation with others, the geographical basis on which a NP could be included in proposals to government as part of a devolution deal for Dorset. Three broad options might be outlined as follows:

a] **NP area less than 100% of Dorset Rural UA area: ie NP not coterminous with rural UA, and smaller in scope.** This option would include a NP on the basis of the 2013 proposal or one confined to just the AONBs – ie upgrading the AONBs to NP status to provide the additional protection, resources and economic benefits.

b] **NP area 100% of Dorset Rural UA, ie coterminous with the UA.** The NP would include the Dorset AONB, the Dorset part of the Cranborne Chase AONB, and areas not currently included in either AONB, ie North and NE Dorset [including the heritage towns of Sherborne and Shaftesbury,] parts of S and mid-Dorset [including Dorchester, Weymouth and Portland,] and the area of additional heathland between Dorchester and Wareham.

c] **NP area exceeds 100% of Dorset Rural UA, ie NP not coterminous with the UA, and larger.** The NP would include the whole area of the UA plus other areas, notably the E Devon AONB [completing coverage of the WH Jurassic Coast,] and possibly other areas such as the W Wilts part of the Cranborne Chase AONB.

Option b] has attractions for administrative and operational simplicity and efficiency and may therefore appeal politically. It would provide a direct 1:1 relationship between the UA and the NP. However, the rationale of a National Park would remain the nationally important landscape of this region, and all areas would need to justify their inclusion against the designation criteria on landscape character set by Natural England.

4. The National Park's Roles, Responsibilities and Funding

i. Introduction

Every National Park has a National Park Management Plan. This key document is for everyone who has a responsibility in the area, setting out how organisations will work together to achieve shared objectives for the future management of the National Park. It is developed through extensive consultation, involving all the key interests across the area as well as the general public.

There is a long-term vision, with each Management Plan acting as stepping stones towards it, looking 5 or so years ahead, then reviewed and updated accordingly. It will establish shared objectives and priorities, and influence not only the work of the NPA, but also a host of organisations that the Authority works alongside. So the Plans are for the National Park as a whole, not the NPA specifically. In some National Parks, this is reflected by such plans being

referred to as National Park Partnership Plans.

The Partnership Management Plan for the South Downs NP, our nearest comparator NP, for example, sets out a shared vision for how all partners would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, providing a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to achieve the outcomes towards realising the vision. It focuses where they all believe partnership action can make a tangible difference over the next five years.

The vision for the South Downs National Park is that by 2050:

- *The iconic English lowland landscapes and heritage will have been conserved and greatly enhanced. These inspirational and distinctive places, where people live, work, farm and relax, are adapting well to the impacts of climate change and other pressures*
- *People will understand, value, and look after the vital natural services that the National Park provides. Large areas of high-quality and well-managed habitat will form a network supporting wildlife throughout the landscape*
- *Opportunities will exist for everyone to discover, enjoy, understand and value the National Park and its special qualities. The relationship between people and landscape will enhance their lives and inspire them to become actively involved in caring for it and using its resources more responsibly*
- *Its special qualities will underpin the economic and social well-being of the communities in and around it, which will be more self-sustaining and empowered to shape their own future. Its villages and market towns will be thriving centres for residents, visitors and businesses and support the wider rural community*
- *Successful farming, forestry, tourism and other business activities within the National Park will actively contribute to, and derive economic benefit from, its unique identity and special qualities. <http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SDNP-Special-Qualities.pdf>*

Preparation of the Plan was led and co-ordinated by the National Park Authority working jointly with a high-level stakeholder group, the South Downs Partnership, along with a number of important groups (eg South Downs Land Management Group and South Downs Network), key organisations and extensive public consultation. It is designed to stimulate local action, influence the major streams of public and private investment into the National Park, and align with the policies and programmes of other public, private and not-for-profit

bodies. Indeed a real effort is made to forge partnerships across sectors with joint working groups, projects and a range of partnerships. The Partnership Management Plan drives the Authority's own business and operational plans, and provides the starting point for the development of the policies in the South Downs Local Plan, the single planning policy document for the area. Such a document will remove the need for hundreds of different policies across 15 local authorities – efficiency and effectiveness in evidence and in action!

Further information can be found at <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/key-documents/partnership-management-plan/>

This plan was preceded by a State of the Park report providing a baseline of data, to help inform the SD Partnership Management Plan. This is a vital foundation document for the area, detailing the most important data that describes the state of the South Downs, needed for testing the success of the Management Plan when it is reviewed, to help inform its revision and updating of actions: <http://snpr.southdowns.gov.uk/files/default.html>

ii Relationship with Local Authority Plans

The National Park Management Plan helps shape the planning policies adopted within the National Park, whilst neighbouring Local Planning Authorities need to 'have regard' to it and have a duty to cooperate when adopting their own planning policies. Guidance accompanying the Government's National Planning Policy Framework explains that the National Park Management Plan does not itself form part of the statutory development plan that guides development for adjacent areas. Such plans should, however, be 'taken into account in the local planning authorities' Local Plans and any neighbouring plans in these areas'. The National Park Management Plans 'may also be material considerations in making decisions on individual planning applications' in adjacent areas. The NP Management Plan provides the overall guidance for the NP's Local Plan, which sets the planning policy context for development management across the Park.

Local Plans look ahead over some 15-20 year time periods. How existing Local Plans relate to the NP Management Plan would in part depend on the timeframe for the development of that NP Management Plan. Where Local Plans are in place or have been agreed locally and endorsed by government, for all or part of a new NP area, they would remain in force for that area until the National Park's Plan was produced. So while the various Dorset Local Plans will proceed on their own timescale, a NPA would have the opportunity to prepare and consult on a new NP Local Plan, if appropriate entailing changes to such previous plans.

In the South Downs, the NPA worked in partnership with the local authorities on their developing Local Plans. The priority for the new NP was the statutory Management Plan and

to ensure a robust plan. A robust plan, with fully engaged consultation, would take time to produce, so the local authority Local Plans were essential for this formative period. The South Downs Local Plan would follow, but was not expected to be approved for a few years following the establishment of the NPA. In that intervening period the NPA agreed with those local authorities with substantial areas within the Park to produce Joint Core Strategies for their Local Plans. This provided support for the local authorities and ensured strong NP policies in the local authority plans, a vital bridge to the South Downs Local Plan, then some way off.

We can assume that where planning permissions for development have been granted, these permissions would remain in force for the period of the permission.

iii National Parks' roles and responsibilities

National Parks' roles and responsibilities reflect their statutory duties, as outlined in section 2 above. National Parks are funded by central government to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.
- Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of national parks by the public.

In pursuit of these purposes, National Park Authorities have a duty to:

- Seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park.

[Section 62, Environment Act 1995, amending Section 11 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949]

The case for the NP also fits with emphasis in public policy [Environment White Paper, 2011] on landscape-scale conservation and connectedness. The Dorset & E Devon NP would be a “green bridge” for the South [between the South Downs and New Forest NPs to the East and the Dartmoor and Exmoor NPs to the West], as the Lakes2Dales NP extension [approved by DEFRA in 2015] is a “green bridge” for the North.

Each NP has a number of paid staff who carry out the work necessary to run the National Park. These include Rangers, education and recreation teams, sustainable development advisors, and planners.

The NPA might also have expert groups / panels which guide its work on such aspects as farming and land management, business, recreation, tourism, built design etc. These could draw on local expertise including from the Local Enterprise Partnership and sub-groups.

iv National Park funding

NPAs receive NP grant direct from central government, and add to this other sources of funding. On the basis of the SDNPA – our close comparator in terms of area covered, population and geography – a D&ED NPA might receive £10m per year from central government. It would have the ability to seek and bid for other funding from a range of sources just as the SDNPA is currently completing a range of sustainable access initiatives (Purpose 2), worth nearly £10 million, attracting funds from the Department for Transport plus other match-funding, for local sustainable transport and cycling projects, some with the neighbouring New Forest National Park. It is about to commence on a multi-million pound heathlands lottery project with a range of partners (Purpose 1). The Lake District National Park Authority raises around £5 million in income each year through its various facilities and activities.

The Chancellor announced, in his Autumn Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government's continued funding and support for NPAs (grant settlement assured for the lifetime of this Parliament, with inflation increases for the five years).

NP funding is a great asset to the NP's local authority partners. When council funding is cut to the bone, established functions and services are at risk. Though careful not to intervene or take on other authorities' statutory functions, the NPA can provide great added value to council partners, complementing their core activities, providing resources and levering in other finances and support. The creation of a new NPA would provide a significant benefit across Dorset.

NPAs can contract out the delivery of certain functions, including development planning, to other authorities, as is done by the SDNPA, and pay them for the delivery of these services. NPAs can also "contract in," undertaking relevant functions for partner authorities. This contributes to efficient and economic delivery.

5. Key Themes: working in practice

A. Planning

Local and development planning for the NP area is a key responsibility of the NPA (as noted above). There are various delivery models across the UK and these partly reflect the time when the NPs were established. The SDNPA, England's most recent NP, adopts a partnership model with local authorities, contracting out the implementation of the basic Planning functions to the relevant authorities.

As in the SDNP, the D&ED NPA could well contract out delivery of the Planning function to

the partner local authority, under NPA Planning policies. While the SDNP has 15 constituent local authorities (11 borough and district councils, 1 unitary and 3 county councils), a Dorset NPA and Dorset [Rural] UA would have a simple, streamlined 1:1 relationship. In this option, the NPA would pay the UA to operate and implement the planning functions for the NP area within the UA. In respect of E Devon, Planning functions could be contracted to East Devon DC and Devon CC as appropriate.

The NPA would be a single point of advice on all planning matters for the National Park. NPAs have a good track record of approving planning applications. Indeed, they approve a higher percentage than other local authorities. This has been attributed to the partnership and open approach of NPAs, in using their resources and expertise. As has been said of the SDNPA “the quality of a planning application is often much higher in a NPA (good enough to approve as opposed to bad enough to refuse).”

It is also significant that the Government [as the relevant Circular says] “recognizes that National Parks are not suitable locations for unrestricted housing and does not therefore set general housing targets for them.”

B. Economy and Communities

NPAs have a duty to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities. The NPA agrees policies, and delivers a programme of activities and expenditure, in support of this objective. In all its activities, the NPA works in partnership with local stakeholders, including communities, local authorities, businesses, landowners and farmers, voluntary groups, and the LEPs.

A Peer Review of the SDNPA in 2013 (an independent review by Solace Enterprises and the first ever report into the way it works) commended its success in attracting external funding, its planning delivery system and community engagement.

The recent independent study *The Economic Opportunities, Benefits and Wider Impacts of a Dorset and East Devon National Park* notes how NPs perform well against key economic indicators such as rates of employment and self-employment and have substantial levels of economic activity. It illustrates how NPA expenditure on salaries, projects and other activity directly benefits local businesses and the economy.

A D&EDNP with its NP brand would offer economic opportunities to a wide-range of business sectors across Dorset and East Devon’s diverse economy, county-wide, including gateway areas. Such a powerful brand within a NP context provides the opportunity to attract external funding from a wide range of sources.

A before and after survey by the SDNPA showed that the NP brand benefitted the visitor economy, for example through higher value tourism – visitors spent more after the NP was designated and stayed longer.

These benefits go well beyond the tourism sector. As the economic study quoted:

“The Government recognises that National Parks contribute to the economy well beyond tourism and the visitor economy. Their economies are mixed and varied – like the parks themselves – and include farming, extractive industries and manufacturing, as well as a wide range of creative and service-sector businesses, firms using new technologies and many innovative enterprises”

In an age where many small businesses, especially in the so-called creative sectors, can locate anywhere provided the essential infrastructure - including fast speed broadband (where the SDNPA is actively pushing for effective coverage across the Park) – is in place, then the quality of the environment, heritage and the NP brand can be deciding factors in locational decisions. The NP can attract as well as retain businesses.

A D&ED NPA would work closely with Dorset LEP to benefit rural Dorset and its communities in a similar way to the SDNP’s work with its main Coast to Capital LEP.

The NPA would also work to support communities: eg through local and affordable housing, key services, employment, and skills.

In the SDNPA the provision of affordable housing is supported by policies which:

- set targets for the percentage of homes build that are affordable
- ensure priority is given to local people seeking such accommodation
- can restrict the ability of developers to sell to second homers.

In 2015, Purbeck District Council took advice from the Planning Advisory Service on the question of second homes and whether these could be restricted through planning policy. The PAS advised that such restriction was not possible “because Purbeck is not in a National Park.” A NPA would have such powers, but a non-NPA authority currently does not.

The National Park Authority Offer to LEPs

NPAs have a long track record in:

1. Delivering sustainable development in rural areas

2. *Building trusted relationships with widely dispersed small and micro businesses*
3. *Working in partnership with other organisations and private sector businesses to bring innovative solutions to rural development*
4. *Attracting National and European funding to support projects*
5. *Building strong partnerships across their communities, with well-established links with local people and businesses.*

The NPAs provide a valuable source of expertise and support, not just for fostering sustainable development and economic and social well-being within the National Parks, but sharing that learning for rural areas more broadly.

[See National Parks England: Open for Business, an offer to LEPs, 2015]

C. Landscape and Conservation

The D&EDNP would work with farmers and landowners, eg to assist and support beneficial land management, enhance eligibility for farm funding schemes, assist farm product marketing and diversification.

NPAs have a very good track record of working closely with farmers to help them access agri-environment schemes. The SDNPA, in partnership with Natural England, with its ranger staff on the ground in regular contact with local farmers, has achieved successful outcomes here. It has performed well at drawing in and successfully targeting Countryside Stewardship funds, in particular the Higher Level Scheme, and influencing the priorities for future grant focus. The proportion of agri-environment monies going to the South Downs far exceeds the SE average. Ref:

https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/npa_2015Feb03_Presentation-by-Natural-England-on-Countryside-Stewardship.pdf

A recent development, as the old Countryside Stewardship is superseded by the new Environmental Stewardship scheme, has been the forming of farm clusters, “joining together” farmers and landowners across large areas of the South Downs, successfully attracting funds from the ES Facilitation Fund, enabling landscape-scale action benefitting the NP and the local farmers. This has evolved out of the South Downs Way Ahead Nature Improvement Initiative (NIA), a Defra-funded pilot, looking at ways of implementing the Lawton Review (Making Space for Nature) and the Government’s Natural Environment White Paper. There are eight such clusters in various stages of development, covering a potential area of nearly 100,000 hectares, some 60% of the NP. This provides a real opportunity for a range of future

action to deliver on Park purposes and to support the local South Downs economy, farmers and landowners.

Another project arising out of the NIA is looking at diffuse pollution affecting water and potential solutions through Payments for Ecosystem Services. The Rother Project is investigating the serious run-off problem, mainly involving the horticultural industry farming on the sloping sandy arable fields which drain into the River Rother. The sediment load in the river (as well as soil erosion seriously affecting highways, neighbours and their crops etc) is becoming acute with major problems for fish and fishing, water flows and the general health of the river.

A partnership has been set up with Southern Water, the Environment Agency and local farmers and landowners covering the chalk block around Brighton, the drinking water aquifer for hundreds of thousands of people. This is looking to reduce increasing nitrate levels in the water supply by targeting borehole catchments, running precision spraying trials and increasing awareness and action over this precious aquifer and the need for sensitive management at its surface. This has great potential for becoming one of the first Payments for Ecosystem Services in the area.

The SDNPA was one of only 11 new Food Enterprise Zones (FEZs) that, according to the Environment Secretary in February 2015 “will unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of the countryside”. This is assisting the beleaguered dairy industry, looking at ways of diversifying and using the planning system in more imaginative ways to support farmers.

Ref: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/supporting-communities-business/supporting-dairy-farmers-food-enterprise-zones/>

The new zones will free up food and farming businesses, making it simpler and easier for them to grow, and will attract new businesses. Local communities will benefit from new jobs and the opportunity to develop local produce, boosting their economies.

FEZs will ensure that communities are able to grow their businesses while allowing them to protect their valuable countryside. They will give power to local people – allowing them to decide what kinds of businesses should be in their FEZ and where it should be located, developing those areas that their region excels in.

Based around Local Development Orders, and in line with local priorities, they will make the planning process simpler and easier for food and farming businesses that want to expand.

As well as attracting investment, the Food Enterprise Zones will encourage closer ties between food and farming businesses to boost the domestic food and farming sector.

D. Recreation, Health & Wellbeing

There are many examples of NPA activities, partnering with local businesses, the health services and voluntary groups, adding key value to councils whose funding and services are being cut, and benefitting people within and beyond the NP area. For example, the D&ED NP would be an ideal solution to DCC's problem of future funding for the Jurassic Coast.

An example of the SDNP's Health and Wellbeing partnership activity is the GROW project, which has, for 5 years, provided the benefits of contact with nature for physical and psychological wellbeing. The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) provides ongoing support to the GROW project, its ranger team leading events and training sessions, and securing Sustainable Communities Fund support for a minibus. The SDNPA's wide-ranging Health and Wellbeing programme can be seen here:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoy/explore/walking/wellbeing/>

6. Transition to a National Park

Building whole-heartedly on the classic/statutory NP objectives, we emphasise that we want for Dorset and East Devon a NP for the C21st, fit for purpose, accessible and accountable, designed from the outset with stakeholder participation.

Process: the Government will decide whether to approve a National Park on the basis of a recommendation from Natural England (NE). Dorset has the potential for a relatively streamlined approval process, if the proposal to Government has broad agreement among key stakeholders. A Public Inquiry may well be needed, but the greater the degree of consensus among councils and other stakeholders, the smoother and quicker the approval process.

Implementation: Dorset would plan for straightforward, smooth, cost effective implementation, learning the lessons from other cases, eg SDNP. Key to smooth, cost effective implementation of a NP would be a local, cohesive delivery team, with agreed objectives and action plan. Dorset can reassure DEFRA on this approach.

Dorset & East Devon National Park Team

in consultation with colleagues in the South Downs National Park

May 2016