

## **A National Park for Dorset: the opportunity of a lifetime**

The proposed Dorset National Park is the most significant business opportunity to present itself in a generation.



## **A Boost for Tourism all the year round**

For Dorset's tourism businesses a National Park would:

- Develop a sustainable tourism strategy benefitting all of Dorset;
- On the basis of evidence from the South Downs, lead to visitors staying longer and spending more, including through a growth in eco-tourism, heritage tourism and cultural tourism; hence Dorset's tourism would move up the value chain;
- There would be an increase in business investment and a raising of skills;
- It would result in an extended tourism season, to the better management of tourist pressures and to more of the benefits being spread around the county;
- The National Park brand would put Dorset more on the international as well as national tourism map while the branding benefits would extend to the marketing of Dorset based products and services;
- The brand would attract more mobile enterprising businesses and staff (both in the conurbation as well as rural Dorset) especially young people who value the quality of life and well-being that a National Park would conserve and enhance.

## **The evidence**

- The environment is rural Dorset's greatest economic asset worth around £1.5bn per year; it is a valuable and attractive resource for the conurbation;
- But while we have outstanding landscapes and cultural heritage, Dorset's biodiversity is being reduced, the quality of our rivers is deteriorating (affecting Poole Harbour) and our landscapes show the effects of industrial agriculture;
- A National Park has the statutory remit to conserve and enhance our landscapes, wildlife and heritage, to increase awareness and understanding of our environment and to foster the economic and social well-being of our communities;
- The South Downs experienced an 11% real terms increase in tourism spend pre and post designation at a time when nationally spend was in decline; this led to a 13.5% increase in related employment; survey evidence shows that this was partly because visitors valued the quality of the National Park, stayed longer and spent more;
- The South Downs has seen bed occupancy rates and business investment increase since its designation as a National Park;
- Research notes that nearly 60% of businesses believe that the fact the South Downs is a National Park has benefited their business; over 25% are increasing the investment in their businesses as a result;
- The South Downs sustainable tourism strategy and successful bids for sustainable transport funding has helped preserve rural services like buses, village shops and post offices. In total 97% of visitors either "Agree" or "Strongly agree" with this statement and 80% of residents also agree or strongly agree;
- More generally, a range of surveys of businesses in protected landscape areas have found strong business support for designation, showing how environmental

quality and the National Park brand support a significant proportion of local economic activity:

- over 55% of businesses in National Parks believe that the quality of the landscape and environment has a positive impact on business performance;
- over 60% of businesses state they are directly or indirectly dependent on the landscape and environment;
- over 55% of businesses felt that they would be seriously or to some extent affected by a deterioration in the landscape and environment; and
- over 50% of businesses felt that the National Park designation has a positive impact on their business;
- a third of the business benefits from a National Park occurs in areas outside the National Park boundary – where people might stay, eat and visit.

### **Attracting Additional Funding**

National Parks are funded by central Government and are not a call on local business or households. The South Downs attracts some £10 million of annual core grant (by comparison the Dorset AONB attracts some £240K annually). The South Downs secured an additional £50 million in its first 5 years – making £100 million in total.

### **Working in Partnership**

National Parks work in partnership with all stakeholders to, for example, develop their Management Plans, offer pre-planning application advice, help farmers and landowners diversify and re-use redundant buildings, help deliver the truly affordable homes that their areas need and develop sustainable tourism strategies.

- The Dorset Council, the conurbation and the Dorset National Park would work together since they have the same aims - the environment is our greatest economic asset;
- The Dorset Council will have enormous challenges and will have to focus on certain priorities;
- The Dorset National Park would partner with the Dorset Council and the conurbation to deliver a shared agenda – paid for by central Government;
- The NP Authority will be composed of 50%+ members from the Dorset Council bringing their knowledge and experience; 25% would be town and parish councilors and 25% local volunteers selected for their experience and skills;
- There would be a seamless planning resource which would develop and deliver compatible dovetailed plans; this would provide an expert, efficient, resilient planning service for all rural Dorset;
- The Dorset National Park would pay the Dorset Council for the services it buys, thus freeing Council funding for other priorities;

Dorset has never had the organisations capable of realising the potential our great environment and heritage have to offer both internationally as well as nationally.

**A Dorset National Park working with the Dorset Council, the conurbation and the LEP offers a partnership to create a powerhouse benefitting all of Dorset both the conurbation and our rural communities and countryside.**