

The Dorset Council: A Climate and Environment Emergency

A Briefing Paper by the Dorset National Park Team



Overview

The Dorset Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is being urged to recognise that this is also an emergency for Dorset's ecology and environment.

This emergency calls for fresh thinking and a new strategic vision about the linked challenges of climate emergency, environment, and ecology. Dorset's exceptional biodiversity, geodiversity and landscape diversity are spectacular and world class. They are a vital national as well as local asset. Yet Dorset's environment and wildlife continue to suffer degradation and remain under serious continuing pressure. Climate change makes them even more vulnerable. But it can also stimulate fresh thinking.

We cannot lose these jewels in the crown. A National Park, as a close and supportive partner of the Dorset Council, communities and other stakeholders, would help all of Dorset to meet the linked challenges as well as contribute to fresh thinking on the opportunities a green and more sustainable economy can offer for our communities and businesses, including farmers. A National Park would attract new investment, jobs and skills and bring additional government funding for a shared agenda. It would promote health & wellbeing and help to raise awareness and understanding of the linked challenges we face. A National Park would work with all partners to reverse ecological decline and invest in and enhance our environment, natural capital and ecosystem services such as clean water and carbon capture in soils and woodland. It would work with councils and others to develop sustainable policies, for example for transport, energy and tourism.

Our world class environment is Dorset's greatest asset. A National Park, core funded by central government, can help conserve and enhance this asset for the benefit of our communities and economy and the nation. We need the government to approve a National Park which is well-resourced to work with the Dorset Council, communities and other partners to address the challenges we face together.

Our environment is something we hold in trust and should want to pass on in a better state for future generations. A National Park would help us all achieve this.

"We live in an era of unprecedented environmental change. Examples include rapid changes in global climate and land cover, increasing pollution and biodiversity loss, and widespread environmental degradation. These trends are creating major societal challenges owing to declining natural resources and increasing risks to human health and wellbeing.... Future environmental degradation could lead to relatively abrupt changes in provision of ecosystem services, which could have a significant impact on the local economy and employment."

Trends in Natural Capital, Ecosystems Services and Economic Development in Dorset...Valuing Nature Research Project Report. Bournemouth University, June 2019

The Dorset Council: A Climate and Environment Emergency

A Briefing paper by the Dorset National Park Team

An Environment in Difficulties

At the national level, the environmental trends are deeply concerning, as DEFRA's "Lawton" report indicated and as the latest data confirms:

- **Landscape:** Since 1990, 60% of the English landscape has changed in ways which are 'inconsistent' with its traditional character, such as the removal of hedgerows and loss of heathland, wildflower meadows, orchards and ponds;
- **Wildlife:** More than half of UK species have suffered declines in recent years and almost one in six species (one in five mammals) are at risk of vanishing;
- **Water:** Only 14% of rivers in England are classed as healthy;
- **Trees:** Around half of ancient woodlands have been lost in the past 90 years.

Dorset's environment and heritage are important to local people. 94% of Dorset residents think a high-quality natural environment is of great importance to them (*Natural Value, The State of Dorset's Environment, 2014, Dorset Local Nature Partnership*). 95% of people feel it is important for wildlife to thrive in the wider countryside not just in man-made reserves or gardens (*YouGov survey sponsored by Poole company Lush*).

But reports from the Dorset Local Nature Partnership (DLNP) and others chart the continued decline of our environment:

- **"Dorset's environment has been seriously degraded over the past 80 years. Measures of biodiversity value have undergone a substantial decline in this period, as illustrated by the 97% loss of neutral grassland and 70% loss of calcareous grassland. The condition of the remaining semi-natural habitats has been reduced by nitrogen deposition and habitat fragmentation."** (*Trends in Natural Capital...Valuing Nature Research Report*).
- **Only 39% of Dorset's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are in a Favourable Condition** compared with 43.5% of SSSIs outside National Parks and 47% in the South Downs National Park. *"The fact that many of these highly protected sites are in unfavourable condition suggests we should be concerned about the condition of the rest of our 'ordinary' environment and countryside which enjoys no such protection."* (*Natural Value op cit*)
- The Dorset AONB Partnership's latest Management Plan suggests that some 60% of the **AONB landscape** is "moderate" or "moderate-weak" and **only about 25% is "good"**. In terms of the direction of travel, around 30% is "declining" or "stable-declining" and about 10% is "improving". (Map of Landscape Condition P 62)
- The DLNP Natural Value report also noted that nitrate levels have increased in rivers and groundwater and have caused the growth of dense algae mats in Poole Harbour, smothering the intertidal ecosystem. With **deteriorating water quality in our rivers** and catchment areas, Wessex Water concluded there was a need for a Poole Harbour Catchment Initiative given the environmental challenges (see their analysis in the Annex).

The Annex provides further information at both national and Dorset level.

A National Park would work with the Dorset Council and Communities

National Parks are specialised local authorities, entirely run by local people: 75% of Dorset National Park Authority members would be elected local councillors. National Parks have focussed statutory responsibilities to:

1. Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas;
2. Promote understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities and the recreational opportunities they provide and so improve health & wellbeing for local people and visitors;
3. Foster the economic and social wellbeing of their communities.

A Dorset National Park would be a **close and supportive partner for the Dorset Council** and our communities, working on a shared agenda. It would work with the Dorset Council and other partners to **help develop sustainable policies**, for example for the environment, transport, tourism and energy. A National Park, **core funded by central government**, would bring genuinely additional resources to support the Council's work and key public services including seamless, responsive and efficient local planning through a shared planning team, affordable homes for local people, rural transport, health and wellbeing and care of the environment.

A National Park could be a supportive delivery arm for the Dorset Council on the environment, biodiversity and heritage, and promote eco/heritage/cultural and sustainable year-round tourism. The additional government funding would free up Council time and resources for other pressing priorities. The South Downs National Park, England's newest National Park designated in 2010, secured over £100 million in its first five years.

How has the South Downs National Park promoted increased sustainability?

The South Downs National Park (SDNP) places sustainability at the heart of all it does. It has, for example: a climate change strategy; strategies for sustainable transport and sustainable tourism; a Local Plan in which the environment, biodiversity and natural capital are an integral part. The SDNP works with councils, communities and the NHS to promote improved physical and mental wellbeing, connecting people with nature, supporting volunteering, and, for example, funding and operating walking for health schemes. It works with councils, schools and colleges to contribute to environmental education.

The SDNP has farming and land management programmes and policies, supported by the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) and National Farmers Union (NFU), which promote and support environmentally positive farming including landscape-scale conservation through farm clusters involving two-thirds of the area of the South Downs. It has planning policies and a Local Plan which facilitate innovative farm diversification proposals, and schemes and resources to promote and enhance woodlands, to improve water quality and supply, and to promote local foods and other products and local supply-chains. All of these benefit farmers and landowners who are proactively consulted and informed by the SDNP through a South Downs Land Management Group of which all are members. **Dorset's National Park should have similar aspirations and bring expertise and resources to build on the best that is being achieved elsewhere.**

The South Downs National Park is a partner in the UN Biosphere Region for Brighton & Hove and the Downs, thus promoting sustainability and the improvement of water quality

and supply, onshore and offshore, from the catchments on the South Downs, through the conurbation, to the marine environment. The SDNP works with its neighbour conurbation to help people understand, enjoy and value the environment and improve sustainability. A Dorset NP would work with the BCP conurbation to further its aims and aspirations for sustainability, health and wellbeing, and thriving, engaged communities. A Dorset NP could be the first to have an offshore role thus better coordinating on-shore and off-shore designations and plans and supporting those whose livelihoods depend on coastal activities including in-shore fishing.

Examples of how a Dorset National Park would support the Dorset Council's work on Climate Change and the Environment

The Dorset National Park would:

- Work with partners to develop an agreed "**State of the National Park**" analysis as a starting point for evaluating future policies, actions and progress;
- Develop through partnership and consult widely on a "**National Park Partnership Management Plan**" reflecting an agreed future path;
- Develop with partners, on the basis of local community and stakeholder involvement and wide consultation, a Local Plan that would reflect future needs;
- **Bring additional Government funding** to reinforce the capacity and expertise to address some of Dorset's key challenges.

Through its planning responsibilities, the National Park would promote relevant development to meet local needs, including:

- **Homes, including genuinely affordable homes for local communities**, thus supporting the sustainability of Dorset's economy and communities, including through retaining and attracting young families. Such provision could be assisted through LEP partnership funding for the provision of Community Land Trusts;
- **Relevant associated infrastructure** to enhance the sustainability of developments;
- **Buildings that are energy efficient and sustainable**, eg through solar panels on public and commercial properties and houses, ground source heat pumps for larger projects, community energy generation schemes;
- Enhancing and creating spaces for communal recreation and **the promotion of health and well-being** with planting that can enhance habitats and support wildlife.

The National Park would work with landowners, farmers and marine partners to:

- Help **develop locally relevant environmental land management schemes (ELMS)** which conserve and enhance Dorset's environment, biodiversity and heritage and enable farmers and land managers to **maximise the uptake of new "public benefit" farm funding**. This could include encouraging **farm clusters that can contribute to "landscape-scale" conservation** and enhancement - carbon sequestration through better soil management, wetland creation and woodland planting (mitigation), flood water retention, soil water retention, greener spaces lowering temperatures (adaptation). Two thirds of the South Downs National Park are now included in such farm clusters;
- promote and support **appropriate farm diversification** schemes which can benefit the environment and local economy as well as farmer/landowner viability;
- **promote local, sustainable produce and supply chains**, benefitting local producers, with marketing support and potential branding opportunities;

- promote joint working with organisations such as Wessex Water to encourage the increased use of **river catchment management plans** to conserve soil and water, minimise flooding, ameliorate drought and improve and diversify wildlife habitats;
- support the development of sustainable in-shore fishing and sustainable, environment-friendly recreation, and support those whose livelihoods depend on the coast and sea.

Dorset's Transport

The South Downs National Park has developed, promoted and resourced **sustainable transport policies**, and successfully secured around £10m in government funding for this purpose. Relevant actions have included support for rural bus services, improved integration of rail and bus services, the provision of additional cycle ways and walking and cycling trails, with signage, interpretation and other appropriate infrastructure. Working in partnership, and with funding from central Government, a Dorset National Park can pursue similar aims and also free up Dorset Council resources.

Dorset's Energy

In partnership with the Dorset Council and other stakeholders, a Dorset National Park could contribute to policies for **sustainable energy use and provision**, including renewable energy schemes such as geothermal, solar, wind and biomass, investment in carbon-neutral homes and other buildings, and in retrofitting buildings to reduce carbon emissions and conserve energy.

Dorset's Tourism

The National Park brand can enhance the attraction of Dorset as a holiday destination with inclusive accessibility by sustainable transport options to visitors from all parts of the UK and overseas. Evidence from National Parks suggests that visitors stay longer and spend more, that the season is extended, and that **eco/heritage/cultural tourism** are developed, all **adding value for local communities and businesses**.

National Parks can **help manage tourism pressures**, thus improving the experience for visitors and local people, including through the provision of sustainable transport.

Benefitting the Economy

A National Park would **attract investment, jobs and skills**. It would **boost the green economy** and help Dorset to be a leader in this field (see independent reports on the NP website: <https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/single-post/Economic-Benefits>). The report *Trends in Natural Capital* concludes that **investment in Dorset's natural capital through a green economy approach could increase the county's economic output and generate many jobs**.

Benefitting Dorset's Health & Wellbeing

A National Park would work in partnership with the Dorset Council, communities and others to invest in and **improve health & wellbeing** - increasing recreational opportunities, enjoyment and understanding of the natural world and helping to **connect people of all ages with nature and the environment**. It would contribute to environmental education and training in **partnership with schools and colleges** and work with all stakeholders and partners to invest in and improve the health of Dorset's environment, wildlife and natural capital, and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and actions.

Our environment is something we hold in trust and should want to pass on in a better state for future generations. A National Park would help us all achieve this.

Annex

Further Environmental Evidence

The National Scene

Landscape: The last 90 years have seen the loss of 97% of flower rich meadows and 80% of lowland heath (much of what remains is in Dorset). Since 1990, 60% of the English landscape has changed in ways which are 'inconsistent' with its traditional character through lost hedgerows, heathland, wildflower meadows, orchards and ponds.

Wildlife: Since 1970 there has been a 51% decline in farmland birds and a 59% decline in insects. More than half of UK wildlife species have suffered declines and almost one in six species (one in five mammals) are at risk of vanishing.

Pollinators: Three UK bumblebee species are extinct, and 7 have more than halved in 25 years. Farmland butterflies have declined by 27% and woodland butterflies by 58% since 1990.

Soils: Soil is being lost at 10 times the rate it is created, with around 2.9 million tonnes of soil lost from fields in England and Wales every year (Defra). Soil degradation costs the economy around £1.2bn a year including: reducing food production, increasing flooding and reducing water quality.

Water: Only 14% of rivers in England are classed as healthy.

Trees: Ancient woodlands support over 200 of our rarest and most threatened wildlife species, yet around half of our ancient woodlands have been lost in the past 90 years

Hedgerows: 50% of UK hedgerows have disappeared since 1947 as a result of changes in farmland management, most that remain are in 'poor condition'. Dependant wildlife has been severely affected by habitat loss eg half of our hedgehog population has disappeared since 2000.

(*National Factfile* from CNP)

Research suggests 80% of farmers believe the health of the natural environment is important or very important for their farm business: <https://www.cnp.org.uk/news/study-shows-consensus-between-farmers-and-conservationists>

The Challenges in Dorset

Dorset has outstanding landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage. But it faces serious challenges. Some of the key facts were outlined on page 2. In addition:

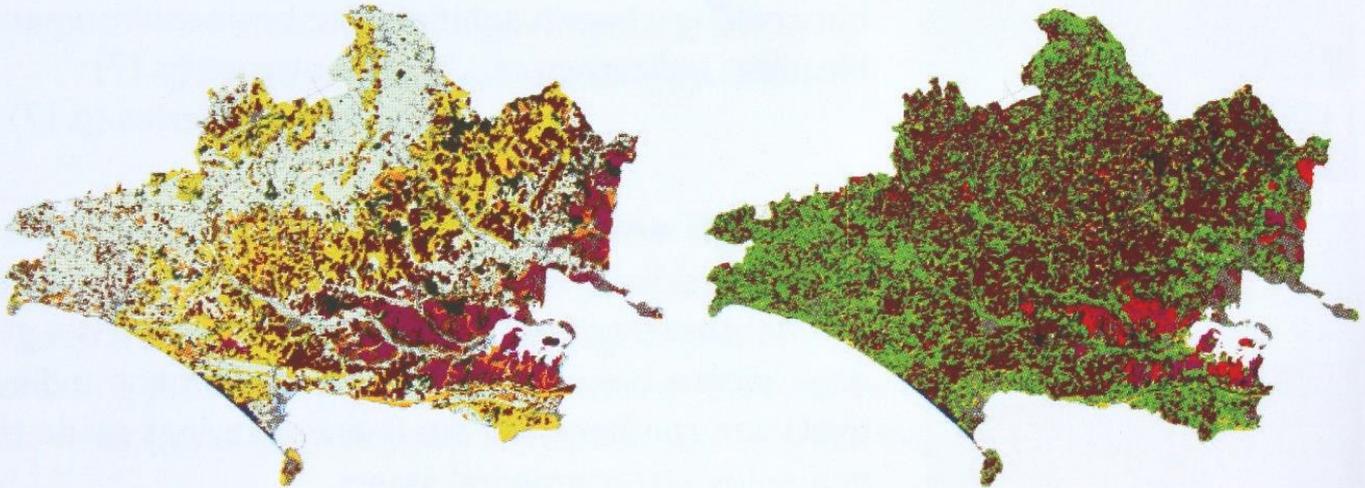
"All of Dorset's semi-natural ecosystems are receiving nitrogen deposition in excess of critical loads, and this is changing the structure and composition of ecological communities." (*Trends in Natural Capital...Valuing Nature* Research Report, Bournemouth University, June 2019).

In its recently approved Management Plan, the AONB Partnership noted that its ability to achieve its environmental aims was constrained by its statutory remit and its financial resources. "A *step-change in our approach to nature conservation is required to ensure that natural systems are repaired and rebuilt, creating a more resilient natural environment for the benefit of wildlife and ourselves.*" (P41)

The spread of so-called "improved grassland" has led to the loss of landscape and ecological diversity:

LAND USE CHANGE 1930s TO 2000

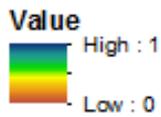
- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ■ Woodlands | □ Mesotrophic grasslands managed | ■ Heathlands |
| ■ Conifer woodlands | ■ Calcareous grasslands managed | ■ Fens, marsh and swamps |
| ■ Arable | ■ Calcareous grasslands rough | ■ Inland bare ground |
| ■ Improved grasslands | ■ Acid grasslands | ■ Build-up areas and roads |
| ■ Mesotrophic grasslands rough | ■ Littoral sediments, inc saltmarshes | ■ Water |



Past and present maps show degree of change

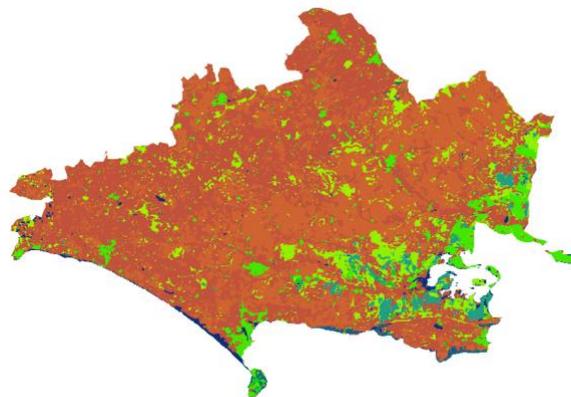
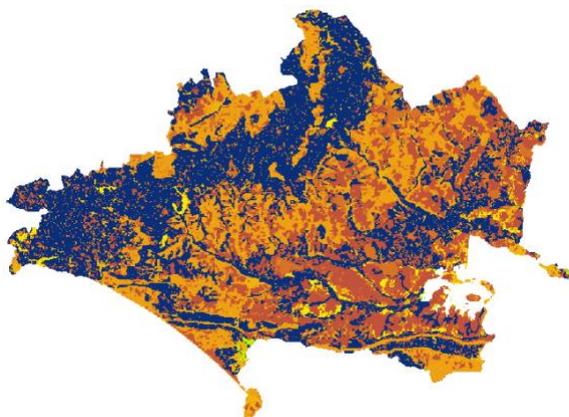
Maps from D.A.P. Hooftman, J.M. Bullock / *Biological Conservation* 145 (2012) 30 - 38

Biodiversity has, largely as a result, reduced substantially between 1930 and 2015, as the following charts demonstrate:

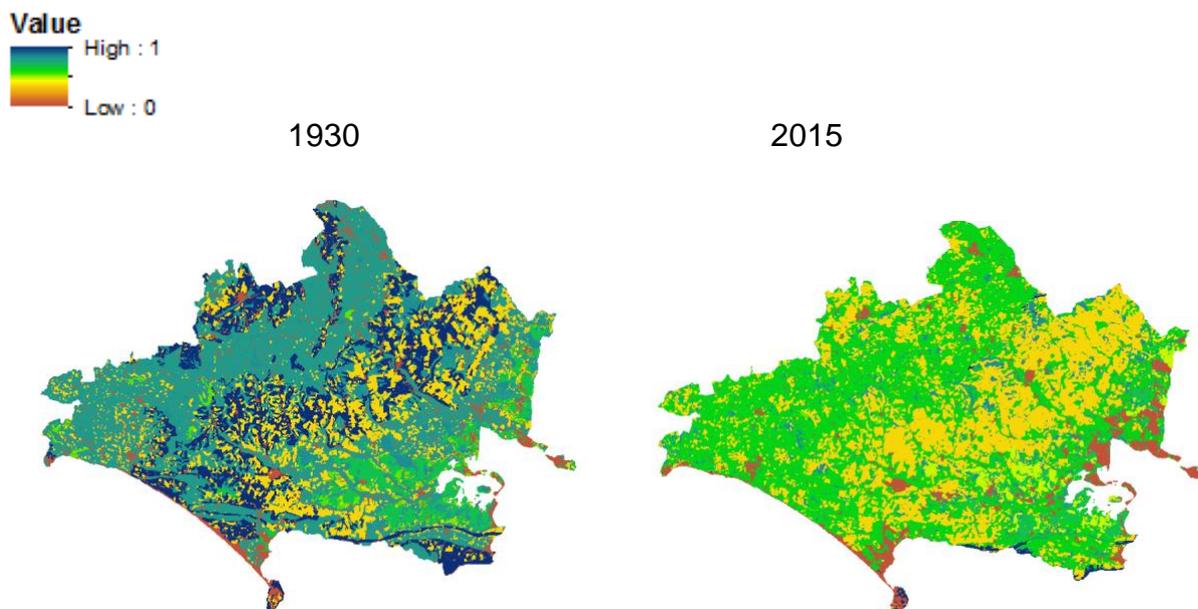


1930

2015



The habitat quality for pollinators has also declined:



(Natural Value op cit)

The deteriorating quality of the water in the Poole catchment rivers and streams led Wessex Water to note in 2014 why a Poole Catchment Initiative was required:

“We would like the rivers and groundwater in the catchment and Poole Harbour to be healthy for the benefit of wildlife, local residents, businesses, tourists and anglers. However, the catchment has its challenges which include:

- *Some of the groundwater and rivers within the catchment currently fail to achieve Water Framework Directive (WFD) standards. WFD is European legislation to protect and enhance the water environment. The Environment Agency is responsible for ensuring that all water bodies achieve ‘good’ ecological and chemical status by 2027;*
- *Some groundwater sources are at risk of failing Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) supply standards. Wessex Water is required to ensure compliance with these standards at all times for the health and safety of their customers;*
- *The River Frome, from Dorchester to Wareham, and a section of the Bere Stream are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and are subsequently protected due to their diverse and rare aquatic plants and animals. Both currently fail SSSI condition assessments by Natural England;*
- *Poole Harbour is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for its internationally valuable birdlife. The harbour is also designated as a transitional water (estuary) under the WFD but currently fails to achieve the requirements of both designations.”*

*Dorset & E Devon National Park Team July 2019
info@dorsetnationalpark.com*

Dorset & East Devon National Park CIC. Co Number: 10563714
Registered Address: Badgers Keep, Barnhill Road, Wareham, Dorset BH20 5BG