

# The Economic Benefits of a Dorset National Park

## Including conclusions from the report by Cumulus Consultants

November 2018 \*



### 1 Strengthening Natural Capital

Dorset's natural capital is its greatest economic asset. Our communities and economy depend on the vital ecosystem services it provides (including clean air and water, healthy soils and food, woodlands and other means of carbon capture, wildlife including pollinators, and open-air recreational opportunities). A National Park would help Dorset recognise the value of this natural capital and provide a focus for conserving, enhancing and investing in this.

### 2 A Partner in an Economic Strategy for Dorset

The National Park would be a strategic partner and delivery agent for a successful and sustainable Economic Strategy for rural Dorset and county-wide. Working with councils, communities, businesses and the Local Enterprise and Nature Partnerships, a National Park would help boost productivity, profitability, employment and skills and help Dorset to attract and retain successful businesses and provide opportunities for young families. It would create opportunities to grow the green economy and help make the area a leader in this field.

### 3 Developing the Dorset Brand

A National Park would strengthen Dorset's brand nationally and internationally, and provide opportunities for a range of businesses, adding value for communities and the economy. It could assist the development and marketing of local products and supply chains.

### 4 Attracting Investment

A National Park would strengthen efforts to attract both private sector inward investment and increased government investment. In a survey by Bournemouth University, more than 50% of businesses reported that the quality of the natural environment was one of the main reasons for conducting business in Dorset (*Trends in Natural Capital...Valuing Nature Research Report, BU, June 2019*) Some business leaders have said a National Park would help them attract key staff and especially younger people who value all that a National Park can offer.

### Economic performance of National Parks and business support

England's National Parks generally perform well economically:

- The overall unemployment rate in England's National Parks is half the national rate
- Evidence shows that small businesses thrive in National Parks; they contribute 3 times as much to business turnover in English National Parks as in the UK as a whole;
- Total Gross Value Added (GVA) in England's 10 National Parks is between £5.5 billion and £8.7 billion per annum.

Various surveys of businesses 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
- the majority of businesses felt that the National Park designation has a positive impact on their business. (*Cumulus Consultants*)

\*see the full report at <https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/single-post/Economic-Benefits>

## 5 Adding Value to the Tourism Sector

Tourism is a major sector in Dorset's economy. A National Park would provide an important boost to the sector, helping to add value to its tourism offer and facilitate sustainable growth through:

- Developing a Dorset-wide tourism strategy and enhancing the Dorset brand
- Encouraging higher value year-round tourism including eco/heritage/cultural tourism
- Supporting skills development and tourist information
- Developing sustainable tourism and transport policies and helping to manage tourism pressures.

### South Downs National Park – benefits to the tourism sector

There has been a 14% rise in the number of businesses in the SDNP's visitor economy sector since 2013.

The South Downs has seen visitor spending and bed occupancy rates increase since its designation as a National Park. Research shows that total visitor days to the National Park increased from 39.2 million in 2003/04 to 46.3 million in 2011/12, resulting in growth in visitor expenditure from £333 million to £464 million in the same period. This represented a 10.7% increase in real terms, resulting in an estimated 13.5% increase in related employment. During the same period, the value of tourism spend across England declined in real terms. The average occupancy in the South Downs was found to have increased and 56% of businesses believe that National Park designation has benefited their business. Many tourism businesses reported that their future development plans are connected to the National Park designation, seeing this as an opportunity to attract more custom. Tourism in the South Downs has helped sustain rural services like buses, village shops and post offices. (*Cumulus Consultants*)

## 6 Adding Value to the Land-based Sector

Agriculture and forestry are at the heart of the rural economy, but businesses face ongoing economic challenges, including changes in farm funding and uncertain market conditions. A National Park would help farmers and land managers to maximise the uptake of "public benefit" farm funding, e.g. by helping to develop locally relevant environmental land management schemes (ELMS) and helping farmers to diversify, convert redundant buildings and add value to rural produce. In the South Downs NP, farmers secured twice the agri-environment funding that might have been expected based on the area involved.

## 7 Planning for sustainable development

A National Park would facilitate sustainable development and support the development of housing, including truly affordable homes, and workspaces that communities need. This would help retain and attract young families. National Parks have a specific remit "*to proactively respond to local housing needs*". The South Downs NP worked with communities and assisted over 50 Neighbourhood Plans as part of preparing its partnership Local Plan.

## 8 Strengthening local communities and improving rural service delivery

Working in partnership with the Dorset Council and other local stakeholders, a National Park would contribute to the delivery of rural services, strengthening the development and sustainability of rural communities. The National Park would be core funded by central Government. It could be the delivery agent for much of the Council's work on the environment, heritage and tourism, thus releasing Council resources for other priorities across the county.

## 9 Benefiting the whole economy and population of Dorset

A National Park would be an asset for the county as a whole, working in close and supportive partnership with councils, communities, businesses, land managers and others, to benefit all who work in, live in and visit the county, in rural and urban areas alike.

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