

CONSULTATION ON THE ENGLISH NATIONAL PARKS AND BROADS RESPONSE OF THE YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

OVERALL POSITION

Overall, the Authority welcomes the draft Circular and the intention to include an ambitious vision for future of the English National Parks. We also warmly welcome the attempt to bring together in a comprehensive way the relationship between National Parks and the Government's policy outcomes across the full range of Departments and their agencies. Many of the comments that follow are a reflection of the scale of the document, and the complexity of drafting that such breadth creates.

GENERAL ISSUES

- There are a number of issues that are covered in several different places in the document. This leads to duplications in some cases, and inconsistencies in others. For example, the NPAs' relationship with Natural England is covered in para 32 (first purpose), 38 (second purpose); 69 (biodiversity); 76 (agri-environment); 84 (agri-environment again); 91 (coast); 163 (partnerships); and 165-8 (Natural England).
- There is a lack of rigour throughout the document in the use of terms such as "Authorities", "Parks", 'purpose'/'purposes'; 'duty'/'duties'/'wider duties'. All are used incorrectly at various points in the document.
- There is no mention anywhere of how the *national* significance of National Parks is reflected in both the membership and their funding (cf para 6 of 12/96), both of which have changed significantly since the last Circular.
- We welcome the many references to NPAs working in partnership with other bodies. However, there is far too little reference to the importance of NPAs (and others) working in partnership with local communities and the farmers and landowners who actually own and manage the vast majority of the land in our National Parks.
- The document (understandably) focuses on directing the activity of National Park Authorities. However, in certain of these policy areas the emphasis should be on directing the activity of the bodies that have the real lead responsibility. In some areas, the current draft (by omission) over-states the role/powers of NPAs (as compared to other bodies). This is likely to create unrealistic expectations amongst stakeholders
- There are cases throughout the document where reference is made to other statute or government policy but the wording used is somewhat different to the wording used in those statutes/policy (e.g. para 97). This is likely to create ambiguity.
- While supportive of the recognition that NPAs could and should play a useful role in a wide range of Government priorities, it seems highly unlikely that all the expectations of government can be met, particularly at a time of severe financial constraint. The Circular needs to be more realistic about the number of priorities or it must recognise that not all the priorities will be deliverable in every Park and that it will be up to NPAs and partners to prioritise locally (through e.g. the National Park Management Plan).

- There are numerous lists of previous statute or previous decisions taken by Government (e.g. paras 98 and 99), which add little to an understanding of the *current* and *future* approach to National Park policy.
- While it is intended to review the circular in five years, previous experience suggests it is likely to have a much longer shelf-life. Given the Government's emphasis on the role of the National Parks in delivering long-term outcomes in relation to e.g. climate change, it would be helpful to draft the document in a way that will stop it dating quickly. For example, by omitting the many references to relatively 'transitory' policy documents (White Papers etc) and initiatives.
- It would be helpful if the circular acknowledged explicitly the resource implications for NPAs in relation to partnership working across multiple administrative boundaries (especially on socio-economic activity). For example, this NPA is a member of 5 local strategic partnerships, while district councils would be members of no more than 2 (including their own). This is not well understood by local partner bodies, and often leads to unrealistic expectations about the level of involvement that is possible.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

- 2.1 There should be a clear and up-front statement of National Park purposes and the associated duty.
- 2.2 We welcome the acknowledgement of the success of the Sustainable Development Fund established by Defra, which has made a real difference both to the communities and businesses within the National Parks, and to the way in which NPAs work with them. It is odd that the Fund is not mentioned anywhere else in the document – the most notable omissions occurring in sections 5.3, 7.2, and 7.15.
3. We welcome the inclusion of a joint vision for the future of National Parks. However, we would like to see a single vision (rather than 'short' and 'full' versions). We would also like the vision to be more focused, use plainer English, and be explicit about who will be *doing* the things that the vision identifies.
- 4.1 It would be helpful to have explicit confirmation that the Government continues to endorse the Sandford Principle. It would also be helpful to re-state (as per para 17 of 12/96) the positive role that NPAs can play in helping to manage activity so that conflict does not arise in the first place.
- 4.2 Para 32 does little to distinguish National Parks from the wider countryside. It seems to reflect a view that the Parks are 'landscapes' that – by coincidence - also happen to contain some wildlife and cultural heritage. As Natural England's recent exercise to target agri-environment schemes showed, National Parks are the only places left in England that have extensive tracts of semi-natural habitat; and most of our nationally-important wildlife; and huge areas of internationally-designated wildlife sites; and most of our undisturbed historic landscapes; and vast numbers of nationally important buildings and monuments; and exceptional natural beauty. It is this cumulation of many values that makes them more (not less) important than single purpose designations like SSSIs.

Para 34 appears to put a significant new burden on NPAs to tackle issues that para 33 rightly acknowledges are outside our direct control. It would be more logical to conclude that para 33 emphasises the need for those bodies working in and around the Park to have regard to NP purposes when carrying out their functions (instead of placing an administrative, and probably futile, burden on NPAs).

- 4.3 The Authority is generally supportive of this section (esp. para 35). However, we think it could be more positive about the potential to promote and manage a wider range of recreational activity and newer forms of ‘promoting understanding’ (beyond traditional “education”).
- 5.2 The text in relation to the role/responsibilities of other bodies (para 52) seems weak and inconsistent with what is (rightly) expected of NPAs in para 51.
7. Para 70 is helpful in identifying four broad priority areas for NPAs. However, the rest of the section then goes on to list 20 other things as “priorities”. It is simply unrealistic to suggest these are *all* priorities. Most of these would fit better within a section called ‘Other key issues for National Parks’ or something similar. It is notable that the priorities in para 70 include nothing on the second purpose, and the second purpose is largely glossed over in the long list of “priorities” that follow.
- 7.3 it is unhelpful to start listing *ad hoc* in statutory guidance detailed requirements for inclusion in National Park Management Plans (see also paras 34 and 81). These would be better dealt with, if necessary at all, through a considered update of the existing guidance provided by the then Countryside Commission in 2005.
- 7.4 It would be helpful to define what ‘value for money’ means here, since “sustainable procurement” generally does not mean ‘lowest cost’.
- 7.7 The text here does little to help clarify what the government thinks should be the respective roles and responsibilities of NPAs and Natural England in delivery within National Parks. It does not tackle the need to ensure that activity is not being duplicated (especially on-farm). Given the variety of circumstances, it is understandable if a ‘horses for courses’ approach is to be adopted, but it would be helpful to at least enshrine some of the principles of joint-working established in the ‘ENPAA/Natural England protocol on agri-environment delivery’.
- 7.8 It is not clear why common land is seen as a priority in its own right for National Parks (as opposed to any other areas of countryside). It is our view that encouraging NPAs to get more involved in some aspects of the work that Defra and other local authorities can already undertake, is likely to serve only to further muddy what is already a complex and opaque process.
- 7.9 We find it difficult to see why this legislation, which has now been in place for 7 years, should be considered a “priority”. Paras 88 and 89 are simple statements of fact rather than providing any guidance.
- 7.11 We feel this section is too narrowly focused on rights of way for their own sake. It would be better to broaden this by highlighting the role of rights of way in a) providing access to opportunities for other type of recreation (cycling, caving, climbing, paragliding etc) and b) supporting the local economy.

- 7.15 While we support the intention behind this section, the drafting is quite loose and goes beyond what is actually set out in statute (and which is most accurately, and helpfully, expressed in the last sentence of para 54). It would be helpful to be much more explicit about NPAs having a *supporting* role to the real lead players (Regional Development Agencies and District Councils). It would also be a positive move to include some reciprocal onus on those bodies to ‘go the extra mile’ to support:
- a) the provision of key services, such as broadband, that are essential to the viability of remoter rural communities;
 - b) economic development *on a scale* appropriate to remote rural areas; and,
 - c) economic development *of a type* that helps to “conserve and enhance the special qualities” (e.g. sustainable tourism; farm diversification; etc).

This section could also helpfully distinguish between NPAs’ twin roles in supporting local economy as a) the planning authority, and b) as part of delivering statutory purposes. In relation to the latter, it is odd that there is no reference to the sort of activities that NPAs could (and do) undertake to support the local economy: e.g. supporting sustainable tourism; delivering agri-environment support; Sustainable Development Fund; renewable energy installations etc etc.

Finally, this section focuses solely on the economy *within* the [National] Parks. This overlooks the significant role that the Parks play within the regional (and national) economy. For example, a study in 2006¹ revealed that the economy of the 3 National Parks within Yorkshire and the Humber generates £1.8 billion annually and supports 34,000 jobs in the region. Visitors to the National Parks spend £660 million in the region and this direct visitor spend alone supports some 12,000 jobs.

- 7.16 This is another example of where the role of NPAs is over-stated. There needs to be an explicit expectation placed on Primary Care Trusts, GPs etc in and around National Parks to use National Parks for benefit of their patients. NPAs’ role is to facilitate that with advice, information etc. But the latter is futile without the former.
- 7.17 Again, there is little mention of, or expectations placed upon, the other bodies with a (bigger) role to play than NPAs. RDAs, District Councils etc should all be expected to “fully reflect the 2004 principles for sustainable tourism in NPs”.
- 7.20 Despite the heading, this section doesn’t include anything on ‘*sustainable* transport’.
- 7.24 This section could helpfully include a mention of accountability of partnerships
- 9.1 It would be helpful here to highlight the critical role that Natural England is also expected to play in relation to the *historic* environment (as well as biodiversity, landscape and recreation). Agri-environment schemes are the only realistic potential source of funding for much historic environment work (but this can be seen as secondary to e.g. biodiversity in terms of Natural England’s priorities).
- 9.4 The Environment Agency deals with more issues than just water; and there is no mention of issues relating to flooding.

¹ Prosperity and Protection, Council for National Parks