

Youth Engagement, Health and Well-being: The Role of National Parks

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Introduction

The Government, Natural England and the Glover Review of Landscapes all emphasize the need for people of all ages to engage with nature, and highlight the benefits this will bring. Young people care about our world and the state of nature and want to get involved in securing a better future. Their health and well-being and the health of the environment and natural world are inter-dependent. **This discussion paper:**

- **brings together a range of information and experience from what National Parks are doing to support and improve young people's health and well-being;**
- **suggests how a Dorset National Park could build on this experience for the benefit of everyone across Dorset and beyond; and**
- **notes how a National Park would be a key partner for councils, communities, the health sector and other stakeholders in promoting and investing in improved health and well-being, as well as in nature and environmental recovery.**

This discussion paper reflects the helpful inputs from many National Parks and other sources. We would welcome other inputs and evidence that can continue to inform future work in this important field.

Young people at risk in a declining state of nature

Young people are the future of our planet. Those aged 24 and under make up nearly 31% of the UK's population¹. Yet studies find that their physical and mental health are declining: just one in four boys and one in five girls in England do the recommended 60 minutes of activity each day², levels of obesity are rising, rates of physical and emotional illnesses are increasing, and Vitamin D deficiency, attention difficulties and other maladies³ are becoming increasingly common. In a survey conducted in 2017, one in eight children [aged between 5 and 19] was found to have a mental health disorder⁴. Evidence of the declining health of young people comes at a time of growing recognition of the serious deterioration in England's natural environment and reduction in biodiversity and wildlife which have occurred in the past 70 years. The abundance and distribution of the UK's species have declined and this trend has continued in the past 10 years⁵. Growing concern about the situation led to the 2019 declaration of a climate and ecological emergency by the Government.

1 in 8
The number of young people found to have a mental health disorder in 2017

The situation in Dorset reflects the wider picture found across the country: decreasing rates of physical activity and an overall decline in mental and social well-being.

Environmentally, although some 50% of Dorset is designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty [AONB], the past 70 years have seen ongoing landscape degradation and a major decline in biodiversity, trends that are continuing to this day. Only 39% of Dorset's SSSIs, supposedly some of its best protected sites, are in a favourable condition⁶. In 2019, the Dorset Council, the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole [BCP] Council, and many Dorset local councils and communities followed the Government in declaring a climate and ecological emergency.

¹ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/age-groups/latest>

² <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/publicationimport/pub22xxx/pub22610/hse2015-child-phy-act.pdf>

³ Richard Louv, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_protect_kids_from_nature_deficit_disorder

⁴ <https://digital.nhs.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/one-in-eight-of-five-to-19-year-olds-had-a-mental-disorder-in-2017-major-new-survey-finds>

Evidence indicates that lifestyle choices and a lack of access to the natural environment are important contributory factors to the health crisis. “We are physically less active than ever before, and the time we spend relaxing our minds has also reduced. These dramatic changes are having measurable impacts on our weight, our resistance to disease, the development of low-level conditions of anxiety, low mood and our overall well-being. In turn these changes are driving increased demand for health services in a system that is already under strain⁷.” The coronavirus epidemic brings into sharp focus the linked emergencies of health, climate and nature.

It is increasingly evident that the development of many health conditions starts in childhood and adolescence^{8,9}. Reaching young people sooner to promote health and well-being should therefore be a priority: “Early intervention avoids young people falling into crisis and avoids expensive and longer-term interventions in childhood and adulthood¹⁰”. Healthy children become healthy adults.

Health issues are particularly acute in areas of deprivation. Young people in deprived areas are amongst the least likely to experience and benefit from the natural environment¹¹. While in a national context, Dorset as a whole does not score highly in relation to deprivation, various reports show that eleven of Dorset’s neighbourhoods are in the top 20% most deprived nationally [according to the English Index of Multiple Deprivation], with six of the Weymouth and Portland areas in the top 10% nationally¹². Twenty of Dorset’s neighbourhoods are in the 20% most deprived in relation to education and a high proportion of Dorset’s rural communities could also be considered deprived in terms of barriers to housing and essential services¹³. The Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole [BCP] conurbation also has areas of deprivation. 46,000 people live in 26 areas identified as being in the top 20% nationally for multiple deprivation, while on Education specifically [relating to the lack of attainment and skills], 37 neighbourhoods are in the top 20% most deprived nationally¹⁴.

What has become known as “nature deprivation” and a consequent lack of connection with the outdoor environment mean that we are less likely to value, protect and conserve our environment. As Richard Louv says, “If nature experiences continue to fade from the current generation of young people, and the next, and the ones to follow, where will future stewards of the earth come from?”¹⁵



5. Hayhow DB, Eaton MA, Stanbury AJ, Burns F, Kirby WB, Bailey N, Beckmann B, Bedford J, Boersch-Supan PH, Coomber F, Dennis EB, Dolman SJ, Dunn E, Hall J, Harrower C, Hatfield JH, Hawley J, Haysom K, Hughes J, Johns DG, Mathews F, McQuatters-Gollop A, Noble DG, Outhwaite CL, Pearce-Higgins JW, Pescott OL, Powney GD and Symes N [2019] The State of Nature 2019. The State of Nature partnership.

6. Natural Value: The State of Dorset's Environment [2014]

7. Natural Health In Dorset [2018]. A Dorset Local Nature Partnership Paper

8. Reilly JJ, Methven E, McDowell ZC, et al Health consequences of obesity. Archives of Disease in Childhood 2003;88:748-752.

9. Richards, Marcus & Parsonage, Michael. [2009]. Childhood mental health and life chances in post-war Britain: insights from three national birth cohort studies [executive summary].

10. Bournemouth Borough Council, Borough of Poole, Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, Dorset County Council, Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust, Public Health Dorset, 2018. Children and Young People's Mental Health and Well-being Dorset Local Transformation Plan.

11 - CABI [2010] Urban green nation: Building the evidence base. London: CABI.

12 - Burt, J., Stewart, D., Preston, S. and Costley, T. [2013] Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment Survey [2009-2012]: Difference in access to the natural environment between social groups within the adult English population. Natural England Data Reports, Number 003.

13. State of Dorset Deprivation [2019]. Found at <https://apps.geowessex.com/insights/Reports>

14. Deprivation across the BCP Area - Indices of Multiple Deprivation - 2019 Update [Found at: <https://www.bcpccouncil.gov.uk/Council-and-Democratic/Consultation-And-Research/Research-report-docs/BCP-Insight-IMD-2019.pdf>]

15. Richard Louv https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_protect_kids_from_nature_deficit_disorder

The implications of this crisis in health and nature are immense. In 2014, “The Inactivity Time Bomb” report¹⁶ estimated that physical inactivity among today’s 11-25 year olds will cost the UK economy £53.3 billion over their lifetimes, while the total cost of mental ill health in England is estimated at £105 billion per year¹⁷. It is estimated that reducing physical inactivity by just one percent a year over a five-year period would save local authorities £1.2 billion¹⁸. Similarly, the continuing degradation of our environment and natural capital and the loss of biodiversity will come at great cost to humanity. The cost of bio-diversity loss in the UK alone is estimated to be around £12 billion per year¹⁹. Climate change and bio-diversity loss are inextricably linked. It is estimated that Britain’s economy could be the most affected in Europe as a result of climate change, with a potential annual cost of £16 billion by 2050²⁰.

£53.3 billion

The estimated cost to the UK economy of physical inactivity in youth aged 11-25 over their lifetimes

In recognition of this, the Government has set out a strategy for how we can better support our landscapes, wildlife and people. In Natural England’s Conservation 21 report²¹, three guiding principles are identified:

- Creating resilient landscapes and seas
- Putting people at the heart of the environment
- Growing natural capital

12%

Proportion of children UK-wide who had not visited natural places in the previous 12-month period

National Parks will be expected to play a key part in delivering these, working in partnership with other key stakeholders including Local Authorities, communities and the NHS. The Government wants “authorities and health and welfare providers to work in partnership to provide strategic solutions and local services to foster the physical and mental health of the nation”²². In its 25 Year Plan to improve the environment the Government states, “spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of well-being. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together”²³. There are also economic benefits associated with improving mental and physical health and feelings of well-being. “A conservative global estimate... is US\$6 trillion pa... there is a direct link between protected area visits and individual human mental health and well-being, which translates to a very substantial but previously unrecognised economic value for protected areas and conservation”²⁴.

In a climate where central government funding to local councils has decreased by almost 60% since 2010²⁵, where 2018 educational outcomes in Dorset were below the national average²⁶ and adult and children’s social care was expected to take up over 58% of the Dorset Council’s 2020/21 budget²⁷, **a National Park with its increased capabilities, expertise and central government funding offers opportunities to address the linked emergencies of health, climate and nature.**

National Parks have a statutory purpose to promote understanding and enjoyment of the environment and are expected to support the nation’s health and well-being. They receive a core grant from central government and are also able to apply for additional grants and funding. The South Downs National Park, for example, receives a core grant of over £10 million p/a from central government²⁸. In 2018/19, the Peak District National Park spent over £2 million on “promoting understanding”, with another half a million pounds spent on access, walking and riding routes²⁹, and The North York Moors National Park spent £1.63 million on “promoting understanding”³⁰.

£16 billion

The projected annual cost of climate change to the UK economy by 2050

16. A StreetGames / Cebr report [2014], THE INACTIVITY TIME BOMB The economic cost of physical inactivity in young people.

17. Mental Health Taskforce NE. The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health. 2016 [cited 2017 May 23]; Available from: england.nhs.uk.

18. Turning the Tide of Inactivity [2014]. <https://www.ukeactive.com/reports/turning-the-tide-of-inactivity/>

19. <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/articles/valuing-nature-and-the-hidden-costs-of-biodiversity-loss/>

20. The Global Futures study by the World Wildlife Foundation

21. Conservation 21: Natural England’s Conservation Strategy for the 21st Century. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/562046/conservation-21.pdf

22. English National Parks and the Broads – UK Government Vision and Circular 2010 [March 2010]. Defra.

23. HM Government [2018] A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

24. Buckley R, Brough P, Hague L, Chauvenet A, Fleming C, Roche E, Sofija E, Harris N [2019]. Economic Value of Protected Areas via Visitor Mental Health

25. <https://news.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/2020/01/03/dorset-council-to-increase-funding-for-adult-social-care-and-childrens-services/>

26. State of Dorset 2019 Compilation Report. Found at: <https://apps.geowessex.com/insights/Reports>

27. <https://news.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/2020/01/29/explaining-the-proposed-council-tax-increase/>

28. <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Unaudited-Statement-of-Accounts-2018-19.pdf>

29. https://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0031/96268/Statement-of-Accounts-2018-2019.pdf

30. <https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/about-us/how-the-authority-works/finance-and-spending/201819-SOFA-Draft-Final-with-Audit-Opinion.pdf>

How might a Dorset National Park learn from other National Parks and support health and well-being?

A Dorset National Park would work in close, supportive partnership with the Dorset Council, communities and all stakeholders, bringing additional resources and expertise to support shared objectives for the whole of Dorset. It would also work with the BCP Council and bring benefits for the conurbation and its communities. As the Leader has suggested, the National Parks purposes would align with and support the BCP Council's aims to implement policies which are sustainable, improve the health and well-being of local people and increase the involvement of communities for the benefit of all residents.

1. Via Education

A good educational experience is one of the key milestones for well-being throughout life and can impact on many outcomes in later life including employment, earnings, involvement in crime, illness and life expectancy^{31,32}. It can reduce the likelihood of poor health including long-term diseases and mental health problems including anxiety and depression³³.

The overall health benefits of a good educational experience have been estimated to provide returns of up to £7.20 for every £1 invested³⁴. **Evidence shows that educational experience and outcomes are significantly improved across the curriculum in schools when natural environments are integrated into education³⁵ and also suggests that children who learn outdoors are more motivated, know more, understand more, feel better, behave better, work more cooperatively and are physically healthier³⁶.**



Arne at Sunrise - Image courtesy of Greg Farrington

31. Public Health England [2017]. Health Profile for England, Chapter 6 – Social Determinants of Health. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england/chapter-6-social-determinants-of-health>

32. Cutler DM, Lleras-Muney A. [2006] Education and health: evaluating theories and evidence. National Bureau of Economic Research: Cambridge, MA. Working paper 12352.

33. Lleras-Muney A, Cutler DM [2006]. Education and Health: Evaluating Theories and Evidence. Cambridge, Massachusetts, US: National Bureau of Economic Research.

34. Buck D and Gregory S [2013]. Improving the public's health: a resource for local authorities. The King's Fund, London. <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/improving-publics-health>

35. Ofsted [2004]. Outdoor education: aspects of good practice. London, Ofsted. Available at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/content/download/10536/126052/file/Outdoor%20education%20-%20Aspects%20of%20good%20practice.pdf>

36. Stephen Moss [2012]. Natural Childhood Report. National Trust.

The Natural Connections Demonstrations Project, commissioned by Natural England, demonstrated clear links between “Learning in the Natural Environment” [LINE] and positive outcomes.

In a survey of schools that took part in the study, the following proportion of schools agreed that LINE had a positive impact on pupils:

- enjoyment of lessons [95 per cent]
- connection to nature [94 per cent]
- social skills [93 per cent]
- engagement with learning [92 per cent]
- health and well-being [92 per cent]
- behaviour [85 per cent]
- attainment [57 per cent]³⁷

Yet today, just 10% of schoolchildren have access to outdoor learning. Furthermore, data collected by Natural England between 2013 and 2015 suggested that up to 12% [1.3 million] of children UK-wide had not visited the natural environment within the previous year³⁸. Poor health, a lack of community cohesion and low educational attainment inflict huge costs on society - ranging from tens of millions to billions of pounds. Even if LINE has only a small impact on these costs, for example by reducing the impacts by just one-tenth of one per cent, this could mean savings of between £10 and £20 million per annum³⁹.

A strong case can be made, on educational, health & well-being, economic and environmental grounds, for supporting children’s access to the natural environment.

The Government’s ambition is to connect more young people with nature and to engage young people with National Parks at every stage of their education⁴⁰. In the Government’s 2016 8-point plan for National Parks, the expectation was that National Park Authorities should be engaging directly with 60,000 young people per year through school visits by 2017/2018⁴¹. National Parks are uniquely placed to help deliver better learning experiences and academic outcomes for young people, and to contribute to long-term health benefits while fostering and encouraging an early interest in the natural environment and ensuring that today’s youth are tomorrow’s environmental custodians.



Lake District - Image courtesy of Mike White

37. WAITE, S., PASSY, R., GILCHRIST, M., HUNT, A. & BLACKWELL, I. 2016. Natural Connections Demonstration Project, 2012-2016: Final Report. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 215.

38. HUNT, A., STEWART, D., BURT, J. & DILLON, J. 2016. Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: a pilot to develop an indicator of visits to the natural environment by children - Results from years 1 and 2 [March 2013 to February 2015]. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 208. Retrieved from: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/498944/mene-childrensreport-years-1-2.pdf

39. Dickie, I. et al [2011] Assessing the Benefits of Learning Outside the Classroom in Natural Environments. EFTEC, London. www.eftec.co.uk

40. DEFRA, National Parks England, Natural England and the Environment Agency [2016]. 8-Point Plan for England's National Parks. Retrieved from assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509916/national-parks-8-point-plan-for-england-2016-to-2020.pdf

41. DEFRA, National Parks England, Natural England and the Environment Agency [2016]. 8-Point Plan for England's National Parks. Retrieved from assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509916/national-parks-8-point-plan-for-england-2016-to-2020.pdf

The South Downs National Park - Education

"We know that contact with nature improves children's ability to concentrate and their self-discipline. And yet children in the UK have less contact with nature now than at any time in the past. Research shows that playing in a natural environment improves young people's social, mental and physical development"⁴².

With an active team in place and a range of staff with "education" as an integral part of their role, the SDNPA has been able to deliver a considerable amount, reaching many and varied communities in the region. Alongside an annual programme of public events, the South Downs National Park has engaged with local schools both in and around the SDNP area. It supports education providers with advice and teaching support [for example through the Learning Zone of the SDNPA website], works with teachers from schools in and around the National Park and offers travel grants to schools from more deprived areas.

The National Park offers a South Downs Curriculum, which ties in with the National Curriculum [covering all subject areas,] and employs a Learning, Outreach and Volunteer Lead. The National Park's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics [STEM] events engage a diverse range of people, help tackle the science learning "gap" and provide a good link with some of the core work of the SDNPA, such as biodiversity and habitats, dark night skies, and industrial heritage. Such events engage partner organisations and stimulate interest in the National Park and its work as well as in relevant locations and events run by others.

Their report on the first 10 years of the SDNP notes some of their achievements with young people. Highlights include:

- 21,177 young people have used the SDNP's School Travel Grant to access learning outside since 2013.
- The SDNPA has engaged with 70 per cent of schools in and around the National Park.
- Over 4,500 individuals have started a John Muir award to learn about caring for the environment.
- Over 600 students are engaged every year as part of science, technology, engineering and maths [STEM] events⁴³.

In 2017, 213 schools in and around the South Downs National Park were surveyed for evaluation purposes by research company Information by Design. 69% of these schools had visited the National Park. The survey found that **96% of school head teachers or outdoor learning coordinators felt that Learning Outside the Classroom [LOtC] was good for children's physical and mental health and that it improved their personal, social and emotional development. Furthermore, over three quarters of respondents [77%] found that LOtC improved behaviour, with a further 75% stating that LOtC classroom raised attainment. 92% of responding schools felt that LOtC helped improved young people's confidence and 87% felt that it helped children engage better with school**⁴⁴.

The National Park has also partnered with the national charity Learning through Landscapes with the specific aim of allowing young people to re-connect with their local natural environment. It recognises that, 'Learning outside the classroom is proven to raise attainment, bolster social, emotional and personal development, and contribute to the health and well-being of children and young people'⁴⁵.



Image courtesy of South Downs National Park

42. <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/connecting-young-people-with-nature/>

43. https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/celebrating-10-years-key-achievements-south-downs-national-park-anniversary/?utm_source=South+Downs+National+Park+Newsletter&utm_campaign=a6c096bce5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_09_01_32&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9343411c82-a6c096bce5-125989185

44. Hibberd, T [2017]. Survey of Schools's Usage of Outside Space for Learning in the Academic Year 2016/17. South Downs National Park Authority

45. South Downs National Park: Management Plan [2014-2019] Found at: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf>

The Broads Authority - Education⁴⁶

The Broads Authority's 2017-2022 Education Strategy specifically states the aim that, "People from all walks of life and all ages and abilities, particularly young people, disadvantaged people and people with disabilities, have opportunities to connect or reconnect with the Broads on their doorstep and "go the extra mile" for recreation, learning, and physical and mental health and well-being. Mainstream and extra-curricular educational opportunities make use of the area's natural and cultural assets and inspire and motivate young people as part of lifelong learning."

The Strategy also highlights the benefits, particularly for children and young people, that are gained from learning about and enjoying protected landscapes. These include:

- **Improved self-confidence and personal character development.**
- **Better awareness, understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural environment, and a passion to help protect and enhance it.**
- **Greater sense of community connection and belonging, helping to reduce social isolation and conflict.**
- **New and enhanced life skills, including social and vocational skills, offering broadened horizons and lifelong opportunities.**
- **Improved physical and mental health and well-being.**
- **A lifelong appetite for learning.**

The Broads Authority engages via mainstream formal programmes for school-aged children and also through wider outreach activities for children, young people, families, local communities and visitors to the area. Between 2012 and 2016, The Authority and its partners delivered a number of successful initiatives including, amongst others:

- Working with partner organisations on the creation of a "Broads Curriculum" with supported resources, materials and training available to schools. This is designed to underpin the Broads as a first-class environment for cross-curricular study and outdoor learning, and to engender a sense of place in local school children and their communities.
- The coalition and co-ordination of more than 30 organisations in a Broads Environmental Education Network [BEEN], which collectively deliver around 50,000 educational days p.a. across the Broads
- The delivery of direct school contacts with National Park staff [an average of about 2,000+ pupil days p.a.]
- The delivery of 30+ Broads Discovery Days per year to schools from high IMD [Index of Multiple Deprivation] areas across East Anglia and the South East.
- The delivery of a programme of outreach experiences to schools such as presentations and training with National Park staff – around 12 sessions p.a.
- The delivery of immersive, longer term, project based educational programmes with local primary schools, such as cross-curricular river projects, involving a wide range of subjects.



Long Stratton High School Young Ranger enrichment activities and Ranger with North Primary School [Tower Hamlets] school children. Images courtesy of The Broads Authority

46. https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/964270/Broads-Education-Strategy-2017-22-FINAL-APPENDIX-1.pdf

2. Via Improving Social and Emotional Well-being

One in eight young people will need support or treatment for mental health problems, the majority of which will have started before they are 18^{47,48}. Studies show that poor mental health in children and young people is associated with lower educational attainment and with a higher probability of not being in education, employment or training at age 17 and 18⁴⁹.

We know that forming a connection with the natural environment can promote a sense of belonging and improve self-esteem, giving children a greater sense of self-worth and reducing stress and aggressive behaviour. Other benefits from exposure to nature include reductions in stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression⁵⁰. Conversely, "Nature Deprivation", a lack of time in the natural world, often as a result of too much time spent on screens, has been associated with depression⁵¹.

National Park Authorities are working with Health and Well-Being Boards, Clinical Commissioning Groups and a host of other partners on innovative schemes. Mental health and well-being benefits are often most significant for marginalised groups and **socio-economic inequality in mental well-being has been shown to be 40% narrower among those who report good access to green/recreational areas**⁵².

The Broads Authority - Outdoor Enrichment

The Broads Authority has launched projects that work with children from deprived areas and those not in mainstream education. It recognises that, "Outreach, particularly 'hands on' learning for young people and people from disadvantaged backgrounds, is a strong and increasingly important focus".⁵³

A programme of engagement might include learning how to coppice, how to use tools and woodland management with the aim of giving children a taste of success and achievement. Through fun activities they learn numeracy, literacy and communication skills as well as teamwork, problem-solving and risk management, developing vital self-esteem and confidence⁵⁴.

Between 2012 and 2019, the education strategy delivered:

- Regular long-term youth engagement projects with organisations such as the Short Stay schools for Norfolk, Norwich City College, Catch 22 and local secondary schools [2011-19].
- Frequent and targeted "Broads Discovery Days" run in partnership with the Country Trust for schools from high IMD areas across East Anglia and the South East. [Norwich, Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Ealing, Hackney and Tower Hamlets].
- A wide-ranging John Muir Awards programme integral with Forest School approach - 100+ awards delivered since 2012.
- An extensive work experience programme to 15-21 year old students, amounting to about 20 placements each year. These placements often lead to inspirational direction for young people making career choices.
- A range of primary and youth learning projects, plus outreach and learning strategy within the "Water, Mills and Marshes" Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Project 2016-22.
- A range of close educational partnerships between the Broads Authority and The Country Trust, The Mancroft Advisory Project, Whitlingham Charitable Trust and many others. Partnerships have also led to education and outreach projects run with Norfolk Education and Action for Development, and Age UK.

47. <https://dunedinstudy.otago.ac.nz/files/1588235710422.pdf>

48. Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication [published correction appears in Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2005 Jul;62[7]:768. Merikangas, Kathleen R [added]]. Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2005;62[6]:593-602. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.593

49. [63] A matter of justice: local government's role in tackling health inequalities.

50. Dr Maxwell S and Dr Lovell R [2017], Evidence Statement on the Links between Natural Environments and Human Health, DEFRA

51. <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-nature-impact-our-well-being>

52. Dr Maxwell S and Dr Lovell R [2017], Evidence Statement on the Links between Natural Environments and Human Health, DEFRA

53. https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/964270/Broads-Education-Strategy-2017-22-FINAL-APPENDIX-1.pdf

54. <https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/learning/get-inspired/outdoor-enrichment>



Students from Pathways College - Images courtesy of The Broads Authority

The North York Moors National Park Young Ranger and Explorer Club Programmes

Set up in 2016, the Explorers Club pilot targeted young people aged 4-11 and the Young Ranger club aimed to reach older children, aged 11-18. The Explorers club participants were involved in a mixture of fun environmental play and conservation tasks, with homework set gathering evidence for gaining a John Muir Discovery award. The Young Rangers club sessions included conservation work, skills development and wildlife monitoring, as well as helping out at events. Through the scheme the young people could work towards a John Muir Award.

£6

**The return, in social value,
on every £1 invested
in the Explorers Club
and the Young Rangers
scheme in the North York
Moors National Park**

Recent analysis of the schemes, using UK Government Cabinet Office SROI [Social Returns on Investment] methodology, identified many benefits: increased environmental awareness and responsibility, improved mental health, improved self-confidence and independence, increased socialising and social responsibility and improved family relationships, among others. Every pound of investment in the above projects generated 6 pounds in social value created for participants, i.e. for an investment of £60,000 there was a social value return of approximately £368,000⁵⁵.



Young Rangers doing some dry stone walling - Image courtesy of North York Moors National Park Authority

55. Tim Godspeed [2020], The Social Value of Explorers Club & Young Rangers Pilots, MoreThanOutputs

3. Via Improving Physical Health

In the academic year 2016 to 2017, 34.2% of 10 to 11-year olds in England were overweight or obese, and time series analysis suggests that this percentage is likely to continue to rise in the next few years⁵⁶. The majority of these children will remain obese in their adult years, which carries implications for poor health including contributing to higher rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, most cancers and therefore a higher risk of premature mortality⁵⁷. As Dr Gavin Sandercock, from the University of Essex, explains: "Year-on-year we keep finding lower and lower fitness levels suggesting children are doing less and less exercise. Inactive lifestyles are a health risk, but physical fitness is the single best measure of health in childhood, adolescence and on into adulthood. Poor fitness and inactivity lead to multiple health problems in their adult life"⁵⁸. Only 51% of children are thought to achieve the recommended amount of at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each day. Instead, Britain's 11-15-year-olds spend about half their waking lives in front of a screen: 7.5 hours a day, an increase of 40% in a decade⁵⁹.

"The science exists for all to see; invest in the health of children and make a huge difference to their health in later life and hence to their economic productivity. For example, four-fifths of obese children will remain obese as adults and this will result in them losing between 10- 20 years of healthy life," Dr Nina Modi [Former President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health].

The benefits of physical activity are numerous and include building healthy muscles and bones, improving balance, self-esteem, self-perception and mood and reducing stress, anxiety and fatigue⁶⁰. While the New Forest National Park's Wild Play scheme is highlighted here, any project or scheme that gets young people outside and engaged with the natural environment will be of benefit to their physical health – this includes the various examples of engagement with young people mentioned in this report but also the many that are not included.

Better health is not just about exercise and weight, however. Recent studies have demonstrated that contact with the natural world can make a huge impact on inner health. Evidence suggests that a healthy gut microbiome may help to promote health, reduce the incidence of certain inflammatory-based diseases and ensure an effective immune system. Experience of the environment and wildlife at a young age could lower the risk of disease in later life and ensure a healthier future for our young people^{61,62}.

34.2%
of 10-11 year olds were
overweight or obese in
2016-2017

The New Forest National Park - Wild Play

The New Forest National Park has set up 3 wild play sites in their area and produced a tool-kit for how to design and develop your own. Playing in the outdoors promotes physical activity and there is strong evidence that nature is a major motivator for exercise. Outdoor play also allows for a certain sense of freedom which helps children develop a sense of independence, increases their levels of concentration, self-esteem and self-discipline and allows children to develop a practical sense of risk and how to assess and manage this. Supporting families to have fun outside is a key part of Wild Play⁶³.

56. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england-2018/chapter-4-health-of-children-in-the-early-years>

57. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england-2018/chapter-4-health-of-children-in-the-early-years>

58. <https://www.essex.ac.uk/news/2018/09/25/new-research-finds-children%E2%80%99s-fitness-falling-faster-than-first-predicted>

59. Sigman, A. [2007] 'Visual voodoo: the biological impact of watching television'. *Biologist* 54 [1] 12-17; BMRB International [British Market Research Bureau]. [2004]

'Increasing Screen Time is Leading to Inactivity of 11-15s'. Youth TGI Study. Both quoted in Sigman, A. [2007] *Agricultural Literacy: Giving concrete children food for thought*. www.face-online.org.uk/resources/news/Agricultural%20Literacy.pdf

60. Des De Moor [2013]. *Walking Works*. Found at https://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/Walking%20works_LONG_AW_Web.pdf

61. Tasnim N, Abulizi N, Pither J, Hart M and Gibson D [2017]. Linking the Gut Microbial Ecosystem with the Environment: Does Gut Health Depend on Where We Live? <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5635058/>

62. Maxwell, S & Lovell, R. [2017] Evidence Statement on the links between natural environments and human health. Defra and University of Exeter Medical School.

63. Wild Play Toolkit [2018]. New Forest National Park Authority. Found at: <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/documents/conservation/wild-play-toolkit/>

4. Via Supporting Families

Research on children aged 2 to 16 years, living in England, found higher rates of mental disorders across all ages for those who lived in families that struggled to function well, and showed that parental mental health was also a key factor in understanding the mental health of children⁶⁴. National Park Authorities recognise the importance of supporting the whole family and understand the benefits of providing an inclusive environment.

In Dorset, the Bournemouth-based charity “My Time for Young Carers” gives young people with caring responsibilities the opportunity to spend time in the stunning environment of the Purbeck countryside and the World Heritage Jurassic Coast. “The young carers who visit My Time’s centre in Purbeck experience and enjoy the physical and mental well-being and health benefits of this stunning landscape. We welcome the opportunities which a Dorset National Park could offer to care for and promote enjoyment of this very special area, and to encourage and enable young carers and others to benefit from access to it”.

Exmoor National Park - FUN Project

The Exmoor National Park’s FUN [Families United through Nature] Project aims to inspire and connect communities of families to come together and enjoy being outdoors in nature and to create a sense of belonging to place, giving children the best start in life possible. It helps and supports families to learn and play together, improving the physical and mental health and well-being of children and young people through nature-based activities⁶⁵.



Image courtesy of Guy Day

64. Office for National Statistics, [2019]. Children Whose Families Struggle To Get On Are More Likely To Have Mental Disorders. [<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/childhealth/articles/childrenwhosefamiliesstruggletogetonaremorelikelytohavementaldisorders/2019-03-26>]

65. <https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/living-and-working/health-and-well-being/fun-project>

South Downs National Park

John Muir Families Outreach Programme

This initiative is aimed at families, particularly in inner city or highly urbanised locations near the National Park, where children and their parents have had little to no access to wild places such as the South Downs. Families taking part are encouraged to complete a John Muir Award, gain an appreciation of the environment and feel empowered to take care of it. The initiative also allows participants to benefit from the many health, well-being and educational opportunities in the South Downs⁶⁶. The John Muir Award captures the imagination of many people and the set of challenges is a great way of instilling respect and understanding of the SDNP, as well as helping to care for it. It has been a hugely successful way of connecting people to the landscape and this particular outreach programme is part of a wider national scheme called "National Parks Futures", which aims to connect 20,000 young people with nature over the next 5 years.

The John Muir Trust is a supporter of the Dorset National Park saying, "The John Muir Trust recognises the outstanding qualities of Dorset's natural environment, especially its wild areas, and the potential to protect and enhance these through a National Park designation. National Parks help to connect people with nature. Each year, they provide the setting for discovery, exploration and conservation for the many individuals who complete their John Muir Awards around the UK. By upholding their aims with ambition, working in partnership for landscape scale restoration, National Parks can help wild nature in England to recover and thrive. The Trust supports this campaign for all that it offers the people of Dorset and those who visit."

Dartmoor National Park

Dartmoor National Park uses a "progression route" for young people to help them understand what makes Dartmoor special and to support learning outside the classroom and, importantly, outside the formal school context. This engagement starts, for children and their families, with a family learning club catering for families with 5 - 12 year olds [the Ranger Ralph Club]. Interestingly, it has become evident that what appears to be a club for children has "reach" into adult audiences, as parents have also found it to be a valuable learning experience.

In 2015 a Junior Ranger initiative was developed for young people aged 13 -16, using the Europarc Junior Ranger model as a template and linking it to the well-respected John Muir Award. In 2019, a Youth Ranger programme for young people aged 16 plus was launched which, combined with the apprenticeships already on offer, means that Dartmoor National Park schemes now provide continuity from age 5 to at least 25: a foundation they believe will encourage passion for the environment and the National Park, will promote better understanding, will help develop key social skills and will support a healthy start to life⁶⁷.

Most other National Park Authorities have also established Youth Ranger projects to engage young people in the outdoors and to give participants a taste of volunteering within protected landscapes.



Image courtesy of Vicente Vieira

⁶⁶. <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/inspiring-new-initiative-launched-connect-families-nature/>

⁶⁷. <https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/enjoy-dartmoor/dartmoor-rangers/junior-rangers>

5. Via Improved Employment Prospects

"Hands-on contact with nature is not only essential for protecting the environment but appears to be a means of cultivating community and enhancing the mental health and well-being of children and adults alike. Structured activities, such as those commonly occurring in sustainability education, are powerful catalysts for creating a stronger sense of community - both within and beyond school boundaries"⁶⁸.

Young people experience significant challenges as they progress to adulthood and appropriate support for them on their journey is essential to ensure future health and well-being. Studies have shown that time spent "Not in Education, Employment or Training" [NEET] can have a detrimental effect on physical and mental health, and increase the likelihood of unemployment, low wages, or low quality of work later on in life⁶⁹.

Developing practical skills, resilience and confidence is essential for taking those first steps into employment and adulthood, and National Parks have introduced projects that can help with acquiring new skills and improving prospects. Work experience opportunities with National Park Authority staff can offer life changing inspiration to young people and often lead to career choices within the environmental sector.

In Dorset, the Youth Parliament is an important initiative that will enable its members to represent Dorset at a regional and national level. Candidates for election in 2019 campaigned on issues such as improving mental health services, tackling climate change, better "skills for life" teaching and better jobs and pay for young people. These align with the potential offered by a Dorset National Park for a thriving, sustainable future for communities, the economy and the environment.

The North York Moors National Park

The National Park Authority set up its first apprentice scheme in 2002 to help young people develop the skills and confidence to find jobs locally and therefore help sustain local communities. The practical skills programmes train people in countryside management, farming and traditional building skills that are in short supply locally.

Having seen the benefits of the conservation apprenticeships to both the Authority and the wider community, the scheme was extended to include apprenticeships in business administration and finance and there are plans to develop apprenticeships in new areas of work in the future. Currently 14% of the North York Moors National Park workforce is made up of apprentices and the park supports the employment of a further 8 apprentices within the National Park.

For the Authority, the rewards of apprenticeships are substantial. For example, in a typical two years, a team of conservation apprentices will enrich 20 hectares of habitats, improve 40km of recreational routes and build or repair 4.5km of dry-stone wall, hedge or fence boundaries. Without the apprentices, this work wouldn't be done or would be too expensive to complete⁷⁰. Ian Nicholls, Assistant Director of Corporate Services said, "... As well as academic qualifications and practical skills, the emphasis we put on team working and other 'soft' skills means that our apprentices leave us as well-rounded individuals"⁷¹.



Image courtesy of North York Moors National Park Authority

68. DILLON, J. & DICKIE, I. 2012. Learning in the Natural Environment: Review of social and economic benefits and barriers. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 092.

69. NEET: Young People Not In Education, Employment or Training [2018]. Andrew Powell. Briefing Paper Number SN 06705

70. <https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/about-us/apprenticeships>

71. <https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/about-us/apprenticeships>

Fostering a sense of responsibility towards the natural environment and encouraging social engagement is a key driver of many of these projects. Empowering and supporting young people and their communities to take ownership of the natural environment around them and to use their skills to develop and take forward local conservation plans benefits those involved and local landscapes and wildlife.

New Forest, South Downs and other National Parks - National Citizen Scheme [NCS]

Designed specifically for 16 and 17 year olds, the NCS programme aims to improve social cohesion [fostering understanding between different backgrounds], social mobility [building essential skills for work and life] and social engagement [promoting understanding of citizenship responsibilities] and the Government has specifically stated its goal of doubling “the number of young people to experience a National Park as part of National Citizen Service by 2020”⁷².

In the New Forest National Park, rangers welcome more than 500 teenagers each summer as part of the National Citizenship Service [NCS]. The programme looks to develop the skills that employers increasingly value: confidence, leadership and independence, and they partner with a range of local organisations to help deliver the scheme. The South Downs National Park introduced the scheme in 2017, while many other National Parks are also involved.

Results have been impressive: nine out of 10 young people complete NCS feeling that they have learnt important skills for the future, and three quarters feel more confident about getting a job⁷³. Further analysis has found that NCS participation impacts life satisfaction, as more young people feel they have the skills and experience to get a job in the future and an ability to handle problems. Entry rates for NCS graduates into higher education are on average 12% higher than for non-NCS graduates, while the value of NCS participation is significantly higher for those living in areas of low and medium entry into higher education. Overall, for every £1 spent on the NCS programmes, between £5.93 and £8.36 of value was returned⁷⁴.



NCS participants in the South Downs National Park - Image courtesy of South Downs National Park

72. DEFRA, National Parks England, Natural England and the Environment Agency [2016]. 8-Point Plan for England's National Parks. Retrieved from assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509916/national-parks-8-point-plan-for-england-2016-to-2020.pdf

73. Cameron, D., Stannard, J., Leckey, C., Hale, C., & Di Antonio, E. [2017]. National Citizen Service 2015 Evaluation Main report. Ipsos MORI; Cabinet Office

74. NCS Well-being and Human Capital Valuation [2017]. Jump. Retrieved from <https://jump-projects.com/case-study/national-citizen-service-vfm/>

Mosaic Project - National Parks

English and Welsh National Parks participated in a well-received programme of engagement under the aegis of the Mosaic Project. Some Mosaic projects aimed to reach young people, while others worked with Black, and Minority Ethnic communities [BAME].

The Mosaic youth projects aimed to build long-term youth skills, citizenship, health and confidence through engagement with National Parks and tried to make things fairer and better for young people aged 16 to 25 who didn't have the best opportunities in life by encouraging them to volunteer and help other young people to enjoy National Parks. Criteria for taking part included being Not in Employment, Education or Training; limited access to public transport and services; not knowing what career path to follow; being the main carer in the home; needing to improve physical or mental health or suffering from stress. The recruited volunteers were called Young Champions.

A number of benefits were identified in subsequent evaluation. **The scheme was considered a great success in encouraging acceptance of self and others, in improving self-confidence and in supporting positive well-being and physical health through purposeful activities. The scheme increased employability through growing skills, improved confidence and developing networks, and contributed to participants' connection to nature⁷⁵.**

The New Forest National Park Authority describes how Young Champions were asked to speak at their bi-monthly meeting for all staff: "One of the Champions had a background of trauma and extremely low self-esteem. He wasn't there at the beginning and we thought he'd bottled. But just as we were about to start, he slipped in, suited and booted. And for the first time in his life he spoke in public to a full room. That he even came was testimony to how important the National Park and Mosaic was to him. His words about what an impact the New Forest had made on him and his health kept people talking about him for months and months afterwards". A report from the Full Cycle Mosaic Project in the Lake District National Park states that participants, "gained soft skills. All of them reported feeling more confident through the project. Some said they got to see people in a new light and change their relationships for the better"⁷⁶.

The Mosaic BAME projects were particularly interested in forming long-term sustainable engagement with nature by black and minority ethnic communities. Here Community Champions were recruited from urban areas near to the National Parks. They were trained and supported to become Champions of National Parks within their communities and to engage with the National Park Authorities on equality issues and access to National Parks⁷⁷. This cohort of Champions has helped to increase the number of ethnic minority visitors to the National Parks: people who have worked in the National Parks for many years report an increase in ethnic minority visitor numbers and, in some cases, that they are now seeing ethnic minority visitors for the first time⁷⁸. The Champions themselves reported many benefits including increased confidence and knowledge, reduced stress and improved well-being: Mosaic Community Champion Aisha Mirza states, "I've got my confidence back after such a long time and, due to this, my independence"⁷⁹. Zarin Rasul, a Community Champion from Cardiff, said, "Many of my group have a lot of stress going on in their lives. I take the group out for walks and to the [Brecon Beacons] National Park. It really helps them to de-stress"⁸⁰.



Quarry Hill, Dorset - Image courtesy of Mike White

75. <https://www.cnp.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploadsfiles/Final%20Evaluation%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

76. <https://www.cnp.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploadsfiles/Mosaic%20Legacy%20materials%201%20Activity%20case%20studies.pdf>

77. Mackie, L [2015] Evaluation of the Mosaic Cymru Project. Final Report Summary. Found at: <https://www.cnp.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploadsfiles/Mosaic%20Cymru%20Final%20Evaluation%20summary.pdf>

78. Mackie, L [2015] Evaluation of the Mosaic Cymru Project. Final Report Summary. Found at: <https://www.cnp.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploadsfiles/Mosaic%20Cymru%20Final%20Evaluation%20summary.pdf>

79. The Mosaic Model. Access to Nature: Early Findings Paper. Found at: publications.naturalengland.org.uk

80. <https://www.cnp.org.uk/news/mosaic-community-champions-enjoy-change-scenery-snowdonia>

Conclusion

This discussion paper highlights how National Parks, in partnership with local authorities, communities and other organisations, can support the Government's objectives of improving the health and well-being of young people and their families.

The family of National Parks has, from the outset, embraced the important aim of supporting and helping to improve health and well-being. National Parks work together to bring to this role their expertise and valuable resources which enable them to have outreach, education and ranger services, just as they bring their considerable resources to bear on the vital work of conserving and enhancing the special landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage of their areas.

The 2019 Glover Report proposes that National Parks' role in addressing health and well-being issues should be even more explicitly stated. This is timely. The combined effects worldwide of climate change, population and development pressures, and farming practices are having a severe impact on our planet; ecosystems are being destroyed and we are experiencing major losses of biodiversity. Meanwhile the ongoing shift to a more sedentary lifestyle is affecting our physical and mental health. The reduction in time spent outdoors means that generations of children are growing up "nature-deprived", less likely to value the environment and more likely to suffer in terms of their health and well-being and economic prospects.

The future health of millions of children, the sustainability of the NHS, and the economic prosperity of Britain require a renewed focus on illness prevention and public health⁸¹. The coronavirus pandemic brings this into sharp focus. Natural England's June 2020 "People and Nature Survey" shows how highly people value the benefits of the natural environment and green spaces for their health and well-being⁸². When National Parks were created after 1945, they were seen as a "Natural Health Service" to parallel the creation of the NHS and help promote the health and well-being of the nation. The roles of National Parks and the NHS are in this way inextricably linked. Positive partnership approaches by our National Parks, local authorities and the health sector can be complementary, mutually beneficial and reinforcing in their effects.

Dorset, a county with exceptional landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage, faces the linked challenges of the climate and ecological emergencies, the decline in natural capital⁸³, challenges to the health and well-being of communities – including some which experience particular deprivation – and the rising costs associated with adult



Man O'War Head - Image courtesy of Mike White

81. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/healthy-children-transforming-child-health-info.pdf>

82. <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2020/06/12/people-and-nature-survey-how-are-we-connecting-with-nature-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

83. Natural Value, The State of Dorset's Environment [2014]. Dorset Local Nature Partnership

and child social care.

A Dorset National Park could help councils to resource and deliver a shared agenda Dorset-wide, addressing these linked challenges. It would bring additional resources and expertise and work in partnership with the Dorset Council, Public Health Dorset, communities and other stakeholders to help promote and invest in the health and well-being of our young people and communities, as well as the health of Dorset's environment, wildlife and natural capital. The Government and the Glover Review want National Parks to work beyond their boundaries to extend their benefits. A Dorset National Park offers a very special opportunity to better connect people with nature at local, regional and national level, while in the process providing exceptional value for money and returns on investment for the nation, society and communities.

A new Dorset National Park partnership should be part of a positive and restorative vision for our future. It should build on the experiences and successes achieved by other National Parks. It would contribute to a successful, sustainable and resilient economy and a thriving, healthy, greener future for communities, the economy and environment Dorset-wide. It would work to support and improve physical and mental health and well-being for local people and visitors, of all ages, building on what has been developed in other National Parks.

From apprenticeship and junior ranger schemes to designing and building "wild play" areas, from Learning Outside The Classroom opportunities to partnering with the successful National Citizenship Scheme, Mosaic and John Muir awards schemes, existing National Parks demonstrate how a Dorset National Park could:

- help develop resilient, more confident and independent young people,
- contribute to improved physical and mental health,
- strengthen family and social relationships and
- improve life skills and opportunities
- while also better conserving and enhancing Dorset's environment, wildlife, heritage and natural capital.

Evaluation of "social returns on investment" showed that, in one project in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park, for every pound of investment there was 6 times as much value created for participants and society. A pilot project with partners in Weymouth/Portland and in the Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole [BCP] conurbation could reflect some of the benefits achieved and the lessons learned in other National Parks.

National Parks help people and nature to thrive. More than ever, Dorset deserves, needs and can benefit from a Dorset National Park. The Glover Review of Landscapes recommends new National Parks and recognises Dorset's outstanding case. We look forward to government action to implement its manifesto commitment to create new National Parks.

The Dorset National Park Team

Dorset & East Devon National Park CIC. Co Number: 10563714

June 2020



Data Collection, Analysis and Outcomes

The extent and robustness of data collection, analysis and evaluation of outcomes for the projects and schemes mentioned in this study inevitably vary. While numerous peer-reviewed studies^{84,85,86} have demonstrated the benefits that the natural environment can have for the health and well-being of young people, National Parks have perhaps understandably focussed their resources on delivery and on qualitative evaluation. Some reporting of outcomes has tended to rely on personal feedback and surveys rather than on attempting to quantify the effects on health of such outreach and education projects.

A post-project assessment of notable interest is the SROI [Social Returns on Investment] evaluation, using Cabinet Office methodology, of the North York Moors Explorer Club and Young Rangers Scheme, mentioned in this report. Bearing in mind that Local Councils and public health bodies monitor the health of children from birth, it would be interesting to consider if National Parks could partner to a greater extent with these organisations, schools, local health service agencies and universities, both to help focus their activities and benefits towards those most in need, and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of National Park-supported projects in addressing health concerns. Such quantitative analysis might in turn help to justify further projects.

National Parks and Wider Society, including the Not So Young

Although this report focuses on projects aimed at young people and looks at the case for early intervention and preventative public health, spending time outdoors is also beneficial for adults' mental and physical health and well-being. National Parks are undertaking valuable work with dementia sufferers and those susceptible to poor mental and physical health. Examples of projects include, but are not limited to, the Dartmoor National Park's "A Natural Health Service" and Exmoor's "Moor to Enjoy", The Grow project, which is supported by the South Downs National Park, and the Peak District National Park's "Natural Health Service" which offers accessible routes, health walks and dementia walks.

Positive outcomes for participants in the Exmoor and Dartmoor National Park projects were reported in areas such as relaxation, enjoyment, learning and sense of belonging⁸⁷, and data collected by The University of Bristol from 87 participants in the Grow project found that 87.5% of these felt that Grow had been of significant or great benefit to their mental health, while 63.3% reported that Grow had been of significant or great benefit to their physical health.

A 2018 evaluation report for the North York Moors National Park Authority, referred to above, estimated the Social Return on Investment [SROI] for the beneficial impact on health and well-being of the National Park's projects. This estimated that for every £1 invested by DEFRA, some £6 of health and well-being benefits were generated, including for participants, visitors and volunteers. Bearing in mind the limited data available in regard to schools, community champions, explorer clubs etc., this is likely to be an underestimate⁸⁸.

The Dorset AONB has developed a "Stepping into Nature" programme that aims to help older people, including those living with dementia and their carers, become happier and healthier by connecting with nature. The resources of a Dorset National Park, allied to those of other organisations including the Dorset Local Nature Partnership, would enable such activities to be scaled up and extended to involve and benefit increased numbers and to increase the benefits and returns to individuals, families, the community and a range of public bodies.

84. White, M. P., Alcock, I., Grellier, J., Wjeeler, B. W., Hartig, T., Warber, S. L., Bone, A., Depledge, M. H., & Fleming, L. E. 2019. Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Scientific Reports* 9: 7730

85. Twohig-Bennett C, Jones A. The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes. *Environ Res.* 2018;166:628-637. doi:10.1016/j.envres.2018.06.030

86. Rook GA. Regulation of the immune system by biodiversity from the natural environment: an ecosystem service essential to health. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A.* 2013;110[46]:18360-18367. doi:10.1073/pnas.1313731110

87. Howes S, Edwards-Jones A and Waite S [2018]. Moor Health & Well-being: An Evaluation of Two National Park projects: Dartmoor Naturally Healthy & Exmoor Moor to Enjoy. Found at: https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/11/11507/Moor_Health_and_well-being_final_reportpublished.pdf

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Nick Sanderson – Education Officer – The Broads Authority

The views expressed and conclusions drawn are however entirely those of the authors and we particularly thank the project leader **Zoey Ingarfield**.

Welcoming the Discussion Paper

"There is compelling evidence of a growing disconnect between people and the natural environment and yet now, more than ever before, our natural landscapes provide a vital resource in supporting the health and wellbeing of all young people. Supporting young people to get inspired, to take part in life-long learning, and to move from inspiration to taking action is core to our ambitions as National Parks. This extensive report outlines the significant work National Parks are undertaking to connect young people with protected landscapes, while also acknowledging the important work ahead to develop our offer as the nation's 'Natural Health Service'."

Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive, South Downs National Park Authority and Lead Officer for the National Parks UK Learning and Engagement Group

"Walking long-distance routes with friends and family was one of the highlights of my childhood. I can still remember how steep the path along the Jurassic coast seemed when I was about 10. I want everyone to get the chance to gain from experiences like that which is why we made it a central part of the recent Landscapes Review which I led. This excellent report underlines just how much it matters "

Julian Glover OBE, Chair, Landscapes Review

"As a free-range child, my whole life has been shaped by the opportunity I had, with my four sisters, to explore, play and be enthralled by the natural world. Today, far too few children have that experience, and we know of the negative mental and physical consequences of a lack of contact with nature."

This report is packed full of evidence about what can be done, is being done and could be done so much more widely and systematically if we really cared about young people's lives. Let's seize the moment to put nature, and access to it, at the heart of our plans for the future."

Dame Fiona Reynolds DBE, Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, former Director-General, National Trust

"With growing recognition of the importance of the environment and access to nature for our health and wellbeing, the John Muir Trust welcomes this helpful report on the role of National Parks in encouraging and inspiring young people to experience and enjoy wild places, thus supporting their physical and mental health and wellbeing. We are delighted to work with National Parks in encouraging and helping young people and families to enjoy and care for the natural world and are interested in the possibility of a Dorset pilot project."

Emma Reed, Award & Engagement Manager, John Muir Trust

"Now, more than ever, we understand and feel the importance of the natural environment and having access to nature. I welcome this helpful report on what National Parks are doing to encourage and inspire young people to experience, enjoy and love these special landscapes, thus supporting their physical and mental wellbeing, educational achievement, and skills. These are impressive examples which we want to build on for the future."

Janette Ward, Chair, Campaign for National Parks (CNP)

For more information visit www.dorsetnationalpark.com

For enquiries contact info@dorsetnationalpark.com

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