

A National Park for a Thriving Dorset Economy



Key aims of the Government are to create the conditions for economic recovery and a thriving future, and to help areas “level up” and strengthen investment, skills and productivity. The Government sets its commitment to create new National Parks for England in this context.

A Dorset Council report provides the following data on Dorset’s economic position:¹

- Dorset is below the national average for competitiveness and in recent years all parts of Dorset have become less competitive. Only the former district areas of East Dorset and West Dorset rank at or above the median for the country. The former area of Weymouth & Portland ranks 372 out of 379 localities and Purbeck is among the ten areas reporting the greatest fall in competitiveness ranking.
- Whilst the Dorset area including the conurbation has above average representation of advanced engineering and manufacturing as a whole, it has low representation of businesses in high productivity sectors and also below average representation in high R&D spending sectors.
- Although business survival is good, Dorset has fewer than average start-ups: 73 for every 10,000 residents aged 16-64 compared with 100 in England.
- 11 neighbourhoods in rural Dorset are in the most deprived 20% nationally for employment, and Portland Underhill and Weymouth 1B are in the most deprived 10% on indices of multiple deprivation, income, employment, education & skills and health. Just under a third of rural Dorset’s neighbourhoods are deprived in terms of “barriers to housing and essential services,” and Dorset lacks sufficient genuinely affordable homes.
- Earnings are below average. Median gross weekly pay in 2019 for full time employees was £537 for Dorset workers, compared with £587 for Great Britain.
- 36% of the Dorset workforce is aged over 50 compared with 28% in England, and over the next decade the population in Dorset aged 16-64 is forecast to shrink by 0.2% per annum - a net loss of nearly 4,000 people. The old age dependency ratio (the number of people aged 65+ compared to the number of people of working age) is expected to increase from 527 per 1000 in 2019 to 655 per 1000 in 2029.

Businesses thrive where natural capital and social capital are valued and strong. A Dorset National Park can not only help Dorset address its economic challenges. It would work in partnership with Dorset Council and communities to foster an environment in which natural and social capital, as well as the economy, thrive, benefitting all of Dorset.

- Evidence suggests that National Parks attract investment and jobs as well as additional Government and other funding.
- National Parks are home to successful, vibrant businesses including small and micro businesses in the knowledge economy, and they work in partnership with economic stakeholders and communities to plan for and meet their needs for housing (including truly affordable homes), economic and employment space².
- For example, in the South Downs National Park there were approximately 55,500 employees in 2018, an increase of 1,530 or 2.84% between 2016 and 2019

¹ Data for Dorset are taken from the Dorset Council 2019 report:

<https://apps.geowessex.com/insights/Topics/Topic/Economy>

² A Report on the Economic Cost-Benefit Analysis on the Creation of a National Park within Dorset and East Devon Kyle Dyett, Professor Davide Parrilli and Dr Ishmael Tingbani, Jan 2018

according to the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) 2018. Over the same period, neighbouring comparator areas had lower employment growth.

- There were 2,645 businesses in 2019 in the knowledge economy in the South Downs National Park, 32.51% of the total 8,135 businesses. Since 2016, only the South Downs NP and the Enterprise M3 LEP area have shown a positive growth in the percentage of knowledge economy businesses during the period 2016 - 2019, whereas Solent, South East LEP, Coast to Capital LEP and the South East region as a whole all saw a decline.
- Evidence from the South Downs suggests that National Park designation leads to higher value tourism with people staying longer and spending more, as well as to a growth of higher value eco/heritage/cultural and dark skies tourism. This in turn encourages an increase in the skills base of the tourism industry.
- A majority of businesses in National Parks believe that the quality of the landscape and environment has a positive impact on their performance, and that National Park designation has a positive impact on their business³.
- The economies of National Parks are more resilient in economic downturns and their overall unemployment rate has been half the national rate.
- Through investing in and enhancing the environment (Dorset's greatest economic asset⁴) and growing Dorset's natural capital, a National Park would help achieve sustainable economic growth, develop Dorset's potential in the "green/blue" economy and help improve young people's health and life chances⁵.
- As in the South Downs, a Dorset National Park would value farmers as guardians of the countryside and producers of quality foods and products, as well as providers of vital ecosystem services (such as clean water, flood resilience, healthy soils and woodlands which contribute to carbon capture.) It would support them in securing new "public benefit" farm funding and in appropriate diversification⁶.
- National Parks promote local products, including food and drink, and a Dorset National Park could boost the Dorset brand at home and abroad.
- A National Park could help reverse the decline in the number of young people in Dorset. In the South Downs, the number of those aged 16 to 24 increased by around 5% from 9,832 to 10,311 between 2011 (when the South Downs National Park became operational) and 2018.
- It can help Dorset capitalise on investment in broadband and education, its colleges and nearby universities (strong in knowledge-based disciplines). 47.8% of the resident working age population of the South Downs National Park have a degree (Level 4) qualification or higher, compared to just over a third (34.6%) of the residents of the South East as a whole. Dorset Council says that 45% of the skills required by Dorset employers over the next decade are for level 4 and above.
- A report by Bournemouth University concluded that a Dorset National Park could add many millions of pounds in value to the county's economy in tourism and other sectors.

As a partner and investor in Dorset's natural, social and economic capital, a Dorset National Park can bring added value to Dorset's communities and families as well as economy.

Dorset National Park Team, May 2021

³ The Economic Benefits of a Dorset National Park, Cumulus Consulting, November 2018

<https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/post/economic-benefits>

⁴ *Dorset's Environmental Economy*, report for Dorset County Council by Ash Futures, 2016

⁵ <https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/post/national-parks-help-improve-young-peoples-health-and-life-chances>

⁶ See eg evidence from the South Downs www.dorsetnationalpark.com/post/new-farming-case-studies