

## The Dorset Council and a Dorset National Park – Working in Partnership for all of Dorset.



This note addresses some questions about the proposed Dorset National Park:

### Is a National Park another layer of bureaucracy?

No. The Government would surely not have made a commitment to create new National Parks had it thought that would be the case. A Dorset National Park, with its focussed responsibilities and its funding to care for our unique environment and heritage, promote health and wellbeing, and foster the economic and social wellbeing and vitality of communities, would complement and partner with the Dorset Council. The Dorset Council would remain the lead local authority throughout rural Dorset. It would retain responsibility, for example, for overall strategy, education, social care, public health, highways and various other functions. The Dorset Council and National Park, with a shared planning team part-funded by the National Park, would work together and with communities on planning, including on a joint Local Plan. This partnership approach would reflect the National Park's responsibility for planning in its area.

The Dorset AONB recognises the scale of the challenges it faces. Upgrading the AONB to a National Park would not add a new layer but would continue the close partnership working with the Dorset Council. The National Park would support the Council and communities in their aims for a thriving, healthy and prosperous future.

### Why should Dorset reorganise again?

We should not overstate what is involved. A National Park is a specialised local authority with focussed responsibilities. The Dorset Council would remain the lead local authority throughout rural Dorset. It would retain responsibility, for example, for overall strategy, education, social care, public health, highways and various other functions. A Dorset National Park, with its duties and funding to care for our unique environment and heritage, promote health and wellbeing, and foster the economic and social wellbeing of communities, would partner with and complement the Dorset Council. The National Park would work with the Dorset Council and with communities on development planning, with a shared planning team part-funded by the National Park.

The Dorset Council already works in partnership with many organisations including the Dorset AONB. Upgrading the AONB to a National Park would continue the close partnership working with the Dorset Council and support the Council and communities in their aims for a thriving, healthy and prosperous future. Future generations will surely ask whether Dorset had the foresight and ambition to seize the opportunities a National Park presents to benefit nature, our communities and the local economy.

### How would the Dorset Council and the National Park work together on planning?

Dorset offers the opportunity for a very special partnership approach to future planning through the co-development by Dorset Council (DC) and a Dorset National Park (DNP) of a shared Local Plan which would be developed, consulted on and implemented through a shared planning team. The DNP's additional resources would partly pay for such planning work, releasing DC's resources for other pressing priorities. The South Downs National Park works closely with its partner local authorities and delegates the delivery of most planning in the NP to them. Dorset can take this partnership working to a new level.

National Parks are not subject to central Government housing targets, but that does not mean that communities outside the National Park would be subject to additional housing pressures. The National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) provides that where an area is shared by a National Park and a neighbouring planning authority (in this case the Dorset Council), a local methodology for assessing housing need may be used **for the whole area**, in place of the government's standard methodology. So a NP would enable a local assessment of housing need to be developed for **the whole of the Dorset Council area**. A

National Park would enable all of the Dorset Council area to determine its own housing needs and develop a shared Local Plan accordingly. The local methodology would be based on such factors as population projections and economic plans and would be tested at the examination of the shared Local Plan.

National Parks have a duty to 'respond proactively to local housing needs' and plan in partnership with local communities, including on the basis of Neighbourhood Plans. The South Downs National Park Local Plan was informed by around 60 Neighbourhood Plans. A Dorset National Park would help meet communities' housing needs, including for the truly affordable homes that local people including young families need.

### **Would local involvement in planning be reduced?**

No. In the South Downs National Park (SDNP), the great majority of day-to-day planning work and planning decisions for the National Park area are delegated to the partner local planning authorities, under agreements which include the SDNP paying for this work. The SDNP sets the policy framework under which such delegated decisions are taken and reserves for the NP planning committee the most significant planning proposals in the NP area - about 10% of applications.

National Parks are specialised local authorities and 75% of the SDNP members are elected councillors, two thirds of these are Members of first tier authorities (in Dorset's case, this would be the Dorset Council) and one third are Members of town or parish councils. This gives town and parish councillors a say for the first time in establishing the Local Plan and in planning decisions, thus increasing local involvement and accountability. The presence on the National Park Authority of Dorset Council and town/parish councils' elected councillors helps to ensure a common purpose and shared agenda between the councils and the NPA.

### **Who funds a National Park?**

National Parks are core funded by central Government and are not a charge on residents or businesses. A National Park would bring additional resources and enable Dorset Council funds to be released to spend on other county-wide priorities. For example, a NP could deliver and pay for some work such as ranger services, tourism information and public rights of way, acting as a partner and agent for the Dorset Council and freeing up Dorset Council resources. The South Downs NP (England's newest National Park) receives around £10m p.a. in central Government core funding, and has secured substantial additional project-related funding, including for sustainable transport. Independent studies have suggested that a National Park would boost Dorset's economy by many million pounds every year.

### **What is the scale of the economic benefits?**

Reports by independent experts suggest that the direct financial and indirect economic benefits of a Dorset National Park would amount to many million pounds a year. All of Dorset would benefit. The economic benefits are summarised in the Autumn Newsletter at <https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/post/autumn-newsletter> For further information, please see the Dorset National Park website: [www.dorsetnationalpark.com](http://www.dorsetnationalpark.com)

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