



Image courtesy of Ben Buxton

A Dorset National Park - for People and Nature

Did you watch Sir David Attenborough's TV programmes on "A Perfect Planet?" These remind us that nature does so much for us all, in ways we can see and feel – fresh air, clean water, healthy soils to grow nourishing food, not to mention the mental and physical health and wellbeing benefits of the natural environment, which we've all appreciated more than ever during the past year. Other important ways in which nature helps and supports us include natural flood prevention, the contribution of biodiversity to successful medicine, and the fact that nature has absorbed much of the carbon that mankind's activities have produced.

Nature can continue to support us, but only with our help - for example, caring for and planting woodlands and hedgerows, ensuring soils are healthy and land use sustainable, and using energy and water carefully so we don't overload nature's ecosystems. Many organisations here in Dorset and nationally are understandably concerned about climate change and the decline in nature. The Government and local councils have declared climate and ecological emergencies.

We in Dorset are fortunate in our lovely environment. TV programmes have showcased the amazing wildlife that local people and visitors alike can enjoy. The Dorset Wildlife Trust, the RSPB, the National Trust, Birds of Poole Harbour and others do great work helping to look after habitats and wildlife and some very special places. Research for Dorset County Council showed that Dorset's natural environment and heritage are our greatest economic asset, worth well over a billion pounds a year to the local economy. But we can sometimes take nature for granted. Wildlife in Dorset has suffered serious decline over many years. We need to help our natural environment and wildlife to recover.

The Government has called for a green economic recovery and sees National Parks as part of a successful, thriving greener economy of the future. In November 2020, the Government reaffirmed its manifesto commitment to create new National Parks for England. The proposed Dorset National Park should be part of this future. Evidence suggests it would bring great opportunities and benefits and attract investment and jobs. It would benefit all of Dorset and help ensure a thriving, healthy future for our communities, economy and environment.

A National Park would work in partnership, bring additional resources and support the work of the Dorset Council and a wide range of community and voluntary partners. It would help people to thrive and help nature recover. It would support and contribute to the delivery of local services such as sustainable transport, education, health and social care. It would work in partnership with Dorset Council and communities in a new partnership approach to planning for rural Dorset. National Parks have a duty to respond to local housing needs, including for the truly affordable homes for young people and families that Dorset's communities and economy need.

Please ask your MP and Dorset Councillor to support a Dorset National Park and encourage your town or parish council to arrange a presentation and discussion with the Dorset National Park Team. Please support the proposed Dorset National Park and help to make this a reality – for people and for nature!

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Dorset CPRE highlights the benefits of a Dorset National Park

Dorset CPRE supports a National Park to benefit all of Dorset. For example, it says a National Park would:

- Partner with the Dorset Council to support its work, bringing additional resources and expertise including additional central Government funding; this would free some council funding for other priorities. National Parks are government-funded and are not a charge on residents or businesses.
- Partner with the Dorset Council to develop and consult on a future shared Local Plan reflecting housing and economic needs for the whole Dorset Council area, including for affordable homes.

Dorset CPRE wants a National Park to include as much as possible of rural Dorset. It points to the exceptional interest, qualities and attributes of all rural Dorset. You can read [HERE](#) the interesting study by respected Dorset planner Jo Witherden

The Dorset National Park Team is clear that the proposal originally submitted to Natural England in 2013 was just a starting point. Other areas of Dorset are pressing to be included in the National Park and have made a strong case. Inputs, discussion and comments by communities and all stakeholders will continue to be immensely important and welcome.

A National Park would work in close and supportive partnership with the Dorset Council, communities, businesses, farmers and other stakeholders, to help secure a thriving, prosperous, successful and sustainable future for all Dorset's communities, economy, environment and heritage. Whatever the area of the National Park, all rural Dorset and its communities would benefit.

The Business Benefits of a National Park

The Government sees creating new National Parks as part of its future economic plans, including for opportunities in the "green/blue" economy. A summary of independent research on the business benefits a National Park would offer Dorset is now on the website [HERE](#).

The evidence suggests:

- National Parks are home to successful, vibrant businesses including small businesses¹. They work in partnership with economic stakeholders and communities to plan for and meet their needs for economic and employment spaces.
- National Parks promote local products, including food and drink, and could boost the Dorset brand at home and abroad.
- A majority of businesses in National Parks believe that the quality of the landscape and environment has a positive impact on their business performance, and that National Park designation has a positive impact on their business².
- The economies of National Parks are more resilient in economic downturns and their overall unemployment rate has been half the national rate.
- 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 sectors³.
- A NP would value farmers as guardians of the countryside and producers of quality foods 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 diversification⁴.

1. 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
2. The Economic Benefits of a Dorset National Park, Cumulus Consulting, November 2018 <https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/post/economic-benefits>
3. A Report on the Economic Cost-Benefit Analysis etc op cit
4. See eg evidence from the South Downs <https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/post/new-farming-case-studies>



Image courtesy of Ben Buxton

Connecting Young People with Nature

Last July, the Dorset National Park Team produced a report on the wide-ranging work National Parks do to promote the health, well-being and life chances of young people. The report is [HERE](#).

When Covid arrangements allow, the National Park team will help coordinate a pilot programme 'The Purbeck Challenge' with the National Trust, John Muir Trust and others to help some young people enjoy a range of outdoor experiences and get closer to nature.

Teachers both within and outside the South Downs National Park are being offered free online training support to prepare for a summer of outdoor learning to help connect young people with nature. The South Downs National Park's Education Officer explained: "We want to help teachers feel confident stepping outside the classroom. There is a wealth of evidence that outdoor learning improves attainment for pupils and benefits the health and wellbeing of pupils and staff."

Other News from the South Downs National Park

Communities Recovery Fund

Set up by the South Downs National Park in 2020, the £375,000 Recovery Fund supports local communities and organisations to recover from the pandemic. The Fund has various themes including the economic recovery of local communities.

Helping the most vulnerable

The South Downs National Park is working with partners to help some of the most vulnerable in East Sussex's communities. The SDNP says: "We know this pandemic has hit some people much harder than others." Thirteen community groups, charities and local services will receive over 1,000 free kit bags of art materials and activities. The SDNP hopes these will help people to enjoy quiet space in the natural world, whether that's the landscape of the National Park or connection to nature on their doorstep.

Tackling climate change

What sustainability can mean and how to pursue it is being explored through a South Downs valley with its communities and ecosystems, from north of Lewes to the sea. A partnership of the South Downs National Park Authority, Local Authorities, communities, wildlife organisations and others, is spearheaded by the South Downs National Park Trust (the SDNP's charitable arm). See further details [HERE](#).

People and Nature Network

Since Autumn 2020, the South Downs NP has led an extensive partnership on a nature recovery programme for the SE region – the People and Nature Network. The SDNP and partners are committed to this benefiting communities and the rural economy as well as nature and the environment. The National Park is also supporting community energy initiatives to help address the climate emergency and benefit communities. See further details [HERE](#).

Expanding the Wind Farm offshore from the South Downs National Park

Rampion is the only wind farm off the south coast of England and is sited offshore from the South Downs National Park. In autumn last year, it was announced that an offshore 'Area of Search' was being assessed to double the size of the existing wind farm with up to 116 turbines, the same number as the existing Rampion Offshore Wind Farm. The promoters say offshore wind energy is now cheaper than nuclear power.



Some Questions Answered

Would a National Park be another layer of bureaucracy?

The Prime Minister would surely not have confirmed the Government's manifesto commitment to create new National Parks if he thought that would be the result. A Dorset National Park would upgrade the Dorset AONB; it would not add another layer but would bring greatly increased resources and expertise. The Dorset Council would remain the lead Local Authority, and the National Park would contribute, as a partner, to the Council's aims and its work. There would be no overlap.

Would a National Park increase pressure for development in adjacent areas?

A Dorset National Park would offer a new partnership approach to planning. The Dorset Council and the National Park could work with communities to assess the numbers of houses Dorset needs for its communities and the economy. The Dorset Council and National Park could then together develop and consult on a shared Local Plan that meets what our communities, businesses and environment need.

Are National Parks museums or living landscapes?

The South Downs National Park is, like Dorset, a living, farmed landscape with many town and village communities including substantial settlements such as Petersfield and Lewes. The SDNP's Local Plan provides for several thousand houses, including affordable homes, in communities across the NP area to meet housing and economic needs. The Plan was prepared in consultation with communities, the SDNP facilitating about 60 neighbourhood plans. Land management and farming lie at the heart of National Parks and the South Downs Local Plan aims to help improve the viability of farming, including by helping farmers diversify and convert redundant buildings. In planning matters and in schemes for farm funding, the SDNP works with farmers and land managers and involves the CLA and NFU.

Would house prices rise with a National Park?

House prices are high in areas of the country that are desirable places to live. National Parks are not alone in being such places. In Dorset, house prices are high both within and outside designated areas like the AONB and Green Belt. National Parks have a duty to be proactive in meeting local housing need, including for truly affordable homes.

Would a National Park increase visitor pressures?

Dorset experiences seasonal tourism pressures especially around coastal hot spots. The South Downs NP helps promote a longer season, extends visitor interest across its area and encourages a wider offering such as eco, heritage, cultural and dark skies tourism. National Parks work with others to develop sustainable policies on tourism and transport. They support rural bus services, integrated transport solutions and more cycling and walking routes. National Park rangers help visitors, farmers and local communities by providing information, advice and apps.

Would a National Park reduce local accountability?

Currently some 25% of the Board of the Dorset AONB are Dorset councillors (Dorset Council, town and parish councillors). With a National Park that would rise to around 75%. Town and parish councillors would for the first time be involved in making decisions on planning, including on a shared Local Plan and planning proposals.

Would establishing a National Park involve a major reorganisation?

No. The Dorset Council would remain the lead authority for all rural Dorset responsible for major functions such as social care, education and highways. A National Park would bring additional funding and work in partnership to help councils and communities tackle Dorset's environment, eco and climate challenges, support planning and other local services, and provide a multi-million-pound economic boost to all of Dorset. The benefits make a Dorset National Park a compelling investment in Dorset's future prosperity, its communities and environment.

It's time for Dorset's National Park

You can support the National Park Team CIC with time, contacts, knowledge and funding.

For more information and to be kept in touch, visit

www.dorsetnationalpark.com

Contact us at: info@dorsetnationalpark.com

Dorset & East Devon National Park CIC.
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