

Dorset and East Devon National Park Group

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John Butterfield
Designations Team
Natural England

Dear John

Dorset and East Devon National Park: Evidence in Support of Proposal

Thank you for Maddy Jago's letter of 18 March and yours of 20 June, setting out the stages of NE's assessment process, and the information which the Group should aim to provide as our evidence and input to the coming review of designations under NE's Designations Strategy.

We are pleased to provide the information requested.

The area suggested for designation in Dorset and East Devon satisfies the statutory designation criteria of being an extensive tract which, for reasons of its natural beauty, and for the opportunities it affords for open air recreation having regard both to its character and to its position in relation to centres of population, it is especially desirable that it be designated for the purpose of a) conserving and enhancing its natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage, and b) promoting understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public.

The proposed National Park would include the whole of the World Heritage Jurassic Coast as part of the uniquely varied and internationally important landscapes, geology, habitats and biodiversity of the two AONBs. The suggested NP also includes most of Dorset's exceptional heathland habitat: 80% of heathland habitat has disappeared – most of what remains in the UK is in Dorset and would be within the NP. We have no doubt that the area deserves the recognition of National Park status.

The Group considers that the case for the proposed National Park powerfully addresses the 10 guiding principles set out in Natural England's Designations Strategy.

The area's natural assets deserve the improved and "joined-up" protection which a National Park would provide. The great opportunities and potential which the suggested NP area offers, for increased recreational use and enjoyment, and for public engagement with nature and understanding of the natural environment, require the coherent governance and focus of a National Park for effective delivery.

The Dorset and East Devon National Park has the potential to be a catalyst and beacon for the things both local people and government want for the future: thriving local communities and a strong and diverse economy, a strong tourism sector, recreational opportunity and improved health and wellbeing

for local people and visitors, broadly-based sustainability, connectivity for wildlife, and sensitivity and respect for the environment and biodiversity.

It is clear to us that many stakeholders in all sectors of the community and of society share our view of the potential for the National Park:

- To act as a catalyst and beacon for a sustainability agenda , for example for the economy, biodiversity, planning and land use, transport, tourism and recreation;
- To help deliver landscape-scale conservation and connectivity, potentially forming a vital link in a connectivity chain stretching from E Hants, through the New Forest NP, through Dorset and into Devon;
- To promote recreational opportunity, health and wellbeing, for local people and visitors, with sensitivity to the environment;
- To help economic and social partners, including local communities, farmers and business interests, to make the most of opportunities in challenging circumstances;
- Through the coherent governance of a single NP Authority, to promote “joined-up” thinking and planning, and effective, partnership-based realisation of the great opportunities and potential which the suggested NP area offers: for sustainability, landscape-scale conservation and connectivity; for increased recreational use and enjoyment; and for public engagement with nature and understanding of the natural environment.

We suggest that these points resonate with national policy imperatives as well as with regional and local policy drivers.

NP designation would also enable the area to have access to the benefits of National Park status which have been demonstrated in existing NPs, most recently in the first evaluation of the South Downs NP. National Parks are associated with a wide range of economic and social benefits, including good quality employment, increased resources for investment in the area, improved health and wellbeing, sustainable development, and planning policy which is sensitive to the environment. We want the communities, the people and businesses of the Dorset and East Devon NP area to have access to such benefits.

Our material is organised as follows:

- **The Key Points document:** this provides an overview of key aspects of the case and the evidence supporting designation of a NP.
- **Evidence notes and sources** on the following specific themes:
 - Sustainability
 - Biodiversity
 - Landscapes
 - Geology
 - Recreational Opportunities

- Cultural Heritage and Activities
- Archaeology and Built Heritage
- Farming
- Industrial, Railway and Military Heritage
- Photo-Gallery
- **Outline maps:** maps are attached which show the proposed area of the Dorset and East Devon National Park, ie:
 - The Dorset AONB and East Devon AONB, which together encompass the full extent of the World Heritage Jurassic Coast, as part of their uniquely varied and internationally important landscapes, geology, habitats and biodiversity, and
 - An area of additional heathland habitat in east and central Dorset.
- **A statement of consensus:** this outlines the Group's approach to building stakeholder relationships and support, the response of stakeholder groups, and the Group's future plans.

Evidence and Sources Notes

The evidence and sources notes provided with this letter represent a wide-ranging set of material. We are grateful to NE for indicating that we might, if appropriate, provide additional material. The Group will be pleased to keep Natural England informed of further developments.

We shall particularly welcome feedback from Natural England on the coverage of the evidence notes which we have provided, and an indication of any additional or supplementary material which we could helpfully provide.

Our evidence notes have benefitted from consultation with and inputs from some supporter organisations and groups, to whom we are grateful.

Outline Maps

In addition to the stand-alone outline maps provided, individual evidence notes also include, where appropriate, maps which relate to the specific topic under consideration.

As Natural England is aware, and the Group fully appreciates, the boundaries of a future National Park would be for detailed further consideration and discussion like other aspects of the proposal.

Statement of Consensus

The Group is very encouraged by the expressions of support for and interest in the proposal, and the enthusiastic encouragement, which we have received.

The Group is continuing to build constructive relationships with all stakeholders. The Group is constructively engaged on a continuing basis with both the Dorset and East Devon AONBs, and in regular contact with them. The Group is committed to keeping the Boards informed and to consulting with them. Both Boards see our proposal as an item for inclusion and future consideration in their revised AONB Management Plans for the period 2014-19. The Group is in the process of meeting with member organisations of both AONB Partnerships in order to hear and discuss their views. Group members have already met with many stakeholders, and have firm plans to meet others, including individual local

authorities, key landowners and other economic stakeholders. We are in contact with, and look forward to meeting, the Local Nature Partnerships and Local Enterprise Partnerships for the suggested NP area.

We are pleased to report that the Group has received letters and messages of support from a wide range of stakeholders, around 50 groups and organisations to date, including those at national, regional and local level. The supporters of our proposal include some local government bodies and economic and business organisations, in addition to many conservation, recreation and amenity organisations. No local authority has adopted a position of opposition to the proposal.

The Group has firm plans to continue to build up and to sustain our relationships with all stakeholders, including existing supporter organisations and others. Many stakeholders have told the Group that they will welcome this sustained contact, being kept in touch with developments, and being engaged in further discussions. We intend keeping in touch with stakeholders through a periodic email newsletter to keep them informed of developments.

Conclusion

We look forward to learning of progress with NE's review and consideration of our proposal. Please don't hesitate to get in touch at any time if there is any way in which we can contribute to or assist further with the review, for example by the provision of further information.

We and our key supporter organisations would be delighted to welcome NE to the proposed National Park area and to provide a guided tour so that NE can experience at first hand the area's exceptional qualities – and all the many reasons why it is especially desirable for Natural England to take forward the designation of a National Park.

Sandra Brown

For the Dorset and East Devon National Park Group