

Dorset and East Devon National Park Team

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John Butterfield

Landscape and Geodiversity Team

Natural England

Dear John

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

Thank you for your letter of 12 June. The Dorset & East Devon National Park Team is pleased to know that Natural England's assessment of our proposal is in progress.

We are very pleased to provide additional information, as requested, using the two tables which you provided, ie:

- **Recreation evaluation factors and indicators** for the entire landscape of the proposed Dorset & East Devon National Park;
- **Natural Beauty evaluation factors and indicators** for the area which is not within the AONB designation, ie the additional Dorset lowland heath which is suggested for inclusion in the National Park.

We hope that both evaluation tables make an interesting and helpful contribution to your assessment.

We also attach, and hope you find helpful, the following brief photographic evidence:

- Dorset & East Devon National Park: **Dark Skies**
- Dorset & East Devon National Park: **Dorset Lowland Heaths**
- Dorset & East Devon National Park: **Recreation**
- Dorset & East Devon National Park: **Photo-Gallery 2013**

Please don't hesitate to let us know if you have any comments or queries on our material, or if there is any additional information that you need. We shall be very pleased to help you further in any way.

In relation to the **Recreation evaluation**, we would emphasise that:

- In the proposed Dorset & East Devon National Park, people of all ages, abilities, interests and income are assured of exceptional recreational opportunities and experiences, of landscape, natural and cultural features, including unique and outstanding natural beauty, geology, geomorphology, biodiversity, arts, heritage, countryside and communities.

- The Dorset & East Devon National Park, including the World Heritage Jurassic Coast, historic ridgeways and internationally important lowland heaths, offers outstanding potential for leadership within the National Park family through its combination of wide diversity and exceptional quality of landscape experiences, and its potential for increased recreational use and public engagement with nature.
- Situated near the centre of Southern England, with sustainable and affordable public transport links with the South East, South West, Midlands and North, the proposed Dorset & East Devon National Park is readily accessible to centres of population throughout the UK. The Poole/Bournemouth conurbation, the largest non-industrial conurbation in the UK, is both a gateway to the proposed National Park and a source of huge demand for its attractions and services. A hub for digital and financial service businesses, with two universities and many schools and colleges, the Poole/Bournemouth conurbation has an active young population as well as being attractive to families and more senior residents.
- The area's accessibility to many population centres offers great potential for the National Park to promote:
 - Greater understanding and enjoyment by the public of the area's special qualities, including its outstanding landscapes and biodiversity
 - More coherent and coordinated promotion of the area's exciting recreational potential, in particular for walking, cycling and outdoor recreation, offering economic, social, health and wellbeing benefits, for local communities and visitors
 - Increased public engagement with nature, and public understanding of ecological connectivity and climate change issues. Understanding of and support for the National Park's significance as a "green bridge" for southern England, promoting landscape-scale conservation, and providing a link between the South Downs and New Forest National Parks to the East and the Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks to the West, and
 - Partnership-based strategies and plans for improved access and increased recreational provision which are designed and implemented with sensitivity to nature and the environment.
- An expanding range of outdoor activities and a developing active recreation business sector, across the area, offer the potential for economic benefits, on a national and community level. The Dorset Coast Forum's recent research into the economic value of recreational activities finds that both local people and visitors value highly the area's environment, and consider the environment to be the prime consideration in a decision to use this area for recreation and in their overall visitor experience. They do not want the environment of the area to be damaged.
- Natural England's research, "Microeconomic evidence for the benefits of investing in the environment," 2014, evidences benefits across a wide range of themes including: economic growth, health, social cohesion, and resilience to climate change.
- A National Park partnership, with a duty to promote the conservation, enjoyment and understanding of the area, would be the most effective vehicle to promote and facilitate the area's potential for increased recreational use, within a balanced framework which ensures sensitivity to environmental considerations.

In relation to the **Natural Beauty evaluation** for the additional area of Dorset lowland heath, we would emphasise the following points:

- We are very fortunate indeed that this area - part of England's rare and endangered lowland heath landscape which survives almost exclusively in Dorset and is the subject of extensive nature designations for its high biodiversity value - remains remarkably intact, so that we have a second chance to recognise its importance, with the National Park designation which John Dower in 1945 saw that it deserved.
- John Dower's 1945 report, National Parks in England and Wales, recommended the Dorset Coast and Heaths for future National Park status. The Report of the National Parks Committee [England and Wales] [The Hobhouse Report], 1947, proposed the Dorset Downs, Heaths and Coast for Conservation Area [later called AONB] status. In both the 1945 and 1947 reports, the supporting maps clearly show the "additional Dorset heath-land" area as included in the areas proposed for designation.
- In the 1950s, the intactness and importance of this heath-land area were recognised when the area was under consideration for inclusion in the Dorset AONB. The inclusion of this area of heath-land in the AONB was advocated by the National Parks Commission, and by Dorset County Council and the then Dorchester Rural District Council. The area's omission from the Dorset AONB designated in 1959 reflected the interests of:
 - the Ministry of Defence, which had for many years leased heath land at Bovington for military training purposes; and
 - the UK Atomic Energy Authority [UKAEA] which in 1957 began to develop experimental nuclear reactors in the secluded environment of Winfrith heath.
- Ironically, perhaps, the presence of the MOD's facilities at Bovington and those of the UKAEA [now Research Sites Restoration Ltd, RSRL] at Winfrith has helped to protect the area and to safeguard its internationally important biodiversity. The last of the Winfrith experimental reactors closed some years ago, and the site's restoration to wet and dry heath land, with open access, is well under way.
- Today, the MoD and Research Sites Restoration Ltd [Winfrith] are valued partners in the conservation and interpretation of Dorset's heritage.
- The omission of this beautiful and internationally important area of heathland from current landscape designation is an anomaly which should be rectified by the inclusion of this area in the Dorset & East Devon National Park.

Key Developments since 2013

We wish to remind Natural England of the letter of 18 July 2013 which accompanied our original evidence submission and of the key points made there. The letter is attached again for your convenience.

Key developments since our submission of evidence in 2013 have included a steady and continuing increase in expressions of support for and interest in the proposal. Further major organisations, including the RSPB, Butterfly Conservation, and the CTC, have expressed their support. These join a large number of supportive and interested stakeholders which include economic organisations as well as conservation and recreation organisations,

national and local, including the Wildlife Trusts, National Trust, CPRE, Ramblers Association, Commons and Open Spaces Society, SPAB, John Muir Trust, Chambers of Commerce, farmers and landowners, and many others. Amongst the many individuals to have lent their enthusiastic support are Professor Denys Brunsden and Malcolm Turnbull, who worked together to achieve World Heritage designation for the Dorset and East Devon Coast, and who see the National Park proposal as the logical next step in the area's better protection and promotion.

As part of the Team's strategy to increase awareness and understanding of the proposal, and of sustained engagement with stakeholders, we have met with and given presentations to various groups, with valuable opportunities for discussion. These have included meetings with conservation, recreation and economic stakeholders. Further presentations have been arranged for the coming autumn and winter. Articles about the proposal have been featured in various local and regional publications, and others are in the pipeline.

The Dorset AONB and East Devon AONB

You asked whether the Team has discussed our proposal with the affected AONB Partnerships and how these responded.

The National Park Team engaged at an early stage - well over a year ago - with the two AONBs which would be included in the proposed National Park, ie the Dorset AONB and the East Devon AONB. The Team has given presentations to both AONB Partnership Boards and has discussed the proposal with them. Members of the Team have met with representatives of the two AONBs on several occasions and keep in regular contact with them. Our contacts with both AONBs have, at all times, been very constructive.

Both AONB Boards have expressed their interest in the National Park proposal and their wish to be kept informed about its progress and to continue in discussion with the Team. The Team fully understands, of course, that the AONB Boards represent a wide range of interests. We understand and respect the fact that neither Board would wish, at this stage, to express a unified view on the proposal. We warmly welcome the open-minded approach of both Boards towards the proposal, and their position as interested stakeholders, wishing to be engaged in and consulted about the proposal, and to continue in discussion with the Team. We are wholly committed to keeping both AONBs informed and to consulting with them, and we look forward to continuing to build our relationship and dialogue with them.

Conclusion

We look forward to learning of progress with NE's assessment 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 opportunities – and all the many reasons for Natural England to take forward the designation of a Dorset & East Devon National Park.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Brown

For the Dorset and East Devon National Park Team