

Proposed Dorset and East Devon National Park

Evidence and Sources used to support the Proposal

Theme: Recreational Opportunities

1. General

The area proposed comprises the Dorset and East Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which include the World Heritage Coast [the “Jurassic Coast” World Heritage Site,] together with an additional area of heathland between Wareham and Dorchester, not currently within the Dorset AONB, which offers further recreational potential, given proximity to the Poole-Bournemouth conurbation and other centres of population.

The designation of a National Park would provide an opportunity for the National Park, working in partnership with other stakeholders, statutory, private and voluntary, to promote the enjoyment and understanding of the area, in particular through the potential to extend open-air recreational activity, with sensitivity to the environment.

2. Summary of Key Characteristics relevant to recreational interest and potential

The county of Dorset:

- covers 2653 square kilometres
- 50% of the County is in the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- coastline, virtually all of which is defined as Heritage Coast
- 143 Sites of Scientific Interest
- 9 National Nature Reserves
- 861 Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- 224 Conservation Areas
- 50% of the population of the county is in the Bournemouth/Poole conurbation
- 3,000 miles of rights of way made up of approximately 4700 footpaths, 1700 bridleways and 37 byways open to all traffic. The majority of these are maintained by Dorset County Council, the remainder by the Unitary Authorities of Poole and Bournemouth.

The East Devon District:

- covers an area of 314 square miles
- sits between the River Exe and outskirts of Exeter to the west, Somerset to the north and Dorset to the east
- some 33% of the District is in the East Devon AONB
- there are 135 Country Wildlife Sites in the AONB, representing 49% of those within the District
- the Devon County Historic Environment Record contains information on over 3,200 sites of archaeological and historic interest within the AONB
- there are 58 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and 4 Registered Historic Parks and

Gardens.

3. Travel

There are train stations at Poole, Holton Heath, Wareham, Wool, Moreton, Dorchester, Upwey, Weymouth, Yeovil, Crewkerne, Honiton, Axminster, Exmouth and Exeter. The year 2015 will see the completion of a multi-year project to re-connect the rail line from Swanage with the main-line to London at Wareham. The Swanage Heritage Railway has been operated by dedicated volunteers for the past 41 years since closure of the line ended the main-line connection.

There is a regular coastal bus service which runs along the World Heritage Coast from Poole in Dorset to Exeter in Devon, as well as many bus services which link large towns to smaller towns and villages.

There are national coach services which link the main towns in Dorset and East Devon with the main cities in the Midlands, North and West, and with London Victoria.

Cycle routes, nationally designated and local, of varied length and grade, make use of the many minor roads of Dorset and East Devon, and of bridleways and tracks.

The area's rich network of footpaths and bridleways reflects the deep history of Dorset and East Devon. The South West Coast Path National Trail, also part of the European E9 Footpath, runs through Dorset and East Devon along the heritage coast.

The area's well-developed public transport services – to receive a significant boost in 2015 with the re-connection of the Swanage heritage railway with main line services to London and throughout the UK – together with its potential for cycling and walking, present a major opportunity for a Dorset and East Devon National Park to become a beacon of sustainability, promoting and demonstrating the potential for sustainable transport, sustainable tourism and recreation and sustainable energy utilisation in this important south coast holiday area.

4. Visitor statistics

In 2009, survey data indicate that visitors from Great Britain spent 11.8m visitor-nights in Dorset and visitors from overseas spent 3.6m visitor-nights, making 15.4m visitor-nights in total in Dorset [including Bournemouth and Poole]. Tourist expenditure totaled £1,530m, and tourism directly supported employment of 31,600. There was an increase of 3% in the number of visitors from overseas. UK visitors most frequently originated from the South East (29%) and the South West (28%). Overseas visitors most frequently originated from Germany (19%), Holland (18%) and Ireland (9%).

The majority of visitors to Dorset reported staying in the area. This remains consistent from previous years. 19% of visitors were on a day trip and 81% were on a staying trip. The average journey to reach the area was 136 miles.

Reasons for visiting Dorset were overwhelmingly for the scenery and walks, and for the seaside and coast, both 62%. The next highest scoring reason for visiting Dorset was for its wide-ranging cultural heritage.

There is evidence that Dorset provides opportunities for holidays and outdoor recreation for people of modest means.

(Dorset Visitors Survey, 2009, carried out by The Market Research Group, Bournemouth University for SW Research Council.)

5. Outdoor Activities - for Health and Enjoyment

The proposed Dorset and East Devon NP area offers an important resource and growing opportunity for open-air recreation. There are many and varied activities so that there is something for every age, ability and income. For example:

- The Dorset and East Devon coast and inland countryside, including Dorset's heaths, offer visitors the opportunity for physical and spiritual recreation in an environment which is both wild and beautiful, and which is easily accessible from major population centres across Southern England and beyond.
- The area's nearest population centres – the large and expanding Bournemouth-Poole conurbation to the east, Exeter and Plymouth to the west – offer great potential for the National Park to promote:
 - understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities by the public
 - public engagement with nature, and public understanding of ecological connectivity and climate change issues
 - understanding of farming and appreciation of good, local food production. Many farms in the suggested NP area provide high quality local produce such as organic milk and milk products. Locally sourced farm products which are widely available for sale include milk, cheese, ice cream, honey, fish, meat and cured meats, eggs, bakery products, vegetables, fruits, fruit juices, cider
 - a wide range of public benefits associated with a healthy natural environment, and
 - to make significant contributions, formal and informal, to the health, wellbeing, and lifelong learning of generations of residents and visitors.
- An expanding range of outdoor activities and a developing active recreation business sector, across the area, offer the potential for economic, social, educational and health benefits, on a national and community level. The proposed National Park creates scope for coherent strategic promotion of this exciting recreational potential, and its management for responsible interaction with the landscape and habitats, to ensure broadly-based economic and social benefits, for visitors and local communities, with sensitivity to the environment.
- Good public transport gives access to the area for visitors by train, coach, and bus from all parts of UK – SW, W, Midlands, NE, NW, E and SE. Recent approval for the reconnection of the Swanage Heritage Railway to the main-line at Wareham in 2015, linking Purbeck to London and all parts of UK, will expand direct rail access to Dorset and the Jurassic Coast.
- Dorset and East Devon include a long section of the South West Coast Path national trail [also part of the E9 European route], as well as long-distance walking routes along the magnificent Dorset Wessex ridgeways, the Purbeck Way, Hardy Way and many local and community routes.

- Nationally designated and local cycling routes cross the area and offer exceptional scope for on-road and off-road cycling experience and events.
- Dorset's minor roads, its trails and tracks, offer scope for the promotion of recreational and "adventure" events, on foot and by bicycle. An example of such an event is the Long Distance Walkers' Association's annual 100 miles cross-country event, with 500 participating walkers plus families and friends, which in 2016, for the first time, will take place in Dorset. A National Park, with a duty to promote the enjoyment and understanding of the area, would be better placed than an AONB to promote and facilitate such events, to the benefit of visitors and local people, within a guiding framework which ensures sensitivity to environmental considerations and which encourages sustainable transport options.
- The 2012 Olympic Games showcased the Dorset coast as an outstanding venue for sailing and water sports. Approval in principle for the designation of a National Park would give great impetus to securing the Games "legacy," and achieving the best return on the very substantial national and local investment in the Games.

5.a. Walking as recreation

According to Britain's most comprehensive survey of sport and recreation participation, 9.1million adults in England, or 22% of the population, walk recreationally for at least 30 minutes in four weeks. This is almost twice the number of people who swim (5.6million, 13.4%), more than twice the number that go to the gym (4.5million, 10.7%) and nearly three times the number that cycle (3.5million, 8.5%).

More people aged between 25 and 55 walk recreationally than those in other age groups. Walking is more likely to be maintained later in life than sport – sports participation drops from 16% in the 35-54 age group to 7.6% in over 55s.

5.b. An Overview of Outdoor Recreational Opportunities

The opportunities in Dorset and East Devon are almost limitless. They include:

- Abseiling
- Ancient places such as Maiden Castle, one of the biggest iron age hill forts in Europe
- Ball sports such as rugby, football, cricket, bowls and croquet
- Bird watching (for example at Arne RSPB reserve and Brownsea Island)
- Botanical gardens (such as Abbotsbury and Compton Acres) and garden centres
- Cycling on the area's many local and national cycling routes and trails
- Coast guard and lifeboats including RNLI's educational activities
- Canoeing, kayaking and sea-rowing
- Carnivals, classic car and steam shows
- Farm education visits showing, amongst other things, where our food comes from
- Farmers markets, and food producers including Blue Vinney cheese, Dorset Knob biscuits, Purbeck Ice Cream, Chococo Chocolate and Dorchester Chocolate producers
- Fishing, on rivers and coast

- Gardens to visit, for example at historic houses, and under the National Gardens Scheme
- Guided nature walks
- Monkey World and rescue centre in Wool, Dorset; 250 primates of 18 species in one of the largest such rescue centres in the world
- Nature reserves, including Dorset Wildlife Trust's 42 reserves
- Orienteering
- Museums offering guided walks and outdoor activities, including Lyme Regis Museum's Fossil Festival
- Painting and drawing
- Paintballing
- Pony trekking and horse riding
- Rock climbing
- Rowing: the 33 rowing clubs within 30 miles of Poole Harbour include rowing on lakes and rivers and coastal rowing. Bridport's gig rowing and Swanage's sea rowing clubs illustrate the growing popularity of these sports.
- Sailing, including at the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy, the site for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games
- Scout, Sea-Scout and Guide Camps
- Swannery at Abbotsbury, near the remains of the priory established in 1040
- Swimming, snorkelling (especially at Kimmeridge Marine reserve)
- Tennis
- Walking
- Windsurfing, for example in Poole Harbour.

6. Activities - Indoor

See also the Cultural Heritage Evidence Note for some of the many examples of indoor recreation and activities available in Dorset and East Devon's attractions, including Arts, Music, Literature and Folk Festivals, concerts, art galleries and museums (featuring, for example, the stone industry, fossils and dinosaurs, lace making, rope making, teddy bears, pottery, shipwrecks, smuggling, transport, tanks, plastics, radar,) historic houses, historic churches, quarry visits and stone working.

Sources include the following :

Abbotsbury Swannery and Sub-tropical Gardens

Bovington Tank Museum

Britain's Finest.co

Bridport Rowing

British Horse Society

British Rowing

Churches Conservation Trust

Dorset AONB

Dorset Cycling Network

Dorset Visitors Survey 2009

Dorset Wildlife Trust and Dorset Local Nature Partnership

East Devon AONB

East Devon Hub

Go Get Adventure (Devon)

Long Distance Walkers Association

National Trust

Ramblers Association

Rail Network and Swanage Heritage Railway

RSPB

RNLI

SW Research Council: Dorset Visitors Survey, 2009, carried out by The Market Research Group, Bournemouth University for SW Research Council's "Volume and Value of Tourism 1990 – 2009"

Weymouth and Portland visitor guide

Dorset and East Devon National Park Group

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