

Dorset and East Devon National Park – Proposal for Consideration by Natural England

Note by the Dorset and East Devon National Park Group

Introduction

The proposal has been made that Natural England [NE] consider the designation of a National Park in Dorset and East Devon, as part of NE's review of designation proposals.

This note summarises the case for a Dorset and East Devon National Park, and the background to this proposal.

Overview of the Case for Designation of a Dorset and East Devon National Park

A request has been made that Natural England - the body which has responsibility for overseeing the conservation of England's landscapes and a duty to designate a National Park where the criteria for this are met - consider the case for a National Park in Dorset and East Devon.

A National Park on the basis now proposed would have economic, social and environmental benefits; support increased open-air recreational use with national and community health, economic and social gains; promote sustainability and protect geology, landscapes and habitats, ensuring vital increased connectivity between designated areas in line with Natural England's Designations Strategy.

Key points include the following:

- At the heart of the proposal are the World Heritage Coast and the Dorset and East Devon AONBs. These are areas of extraordinary geological, landscape, biodiversity and cultural richness and importance. This was recognised in the 1940s when these areas were recommended for National Park status, and only administrative difficulties prevented the designation when other National Parks were designated in the years after the war. Subsequent designations do not yet do justice to the outstanding quality and importance of the area proposed for a National Park, nor its potential for open-air recreation and its need for protection.
- The varied geology, landscapes and habitats of the proposed National Park area support great richness and diversity of wildlife, including species not found elsewhere. It is a telling illustration of the biodiversity richness and importance of this area that one 10km grid square of land in Purbeck contains more species than any other 10kms square in the country. The proposed NP would promote vital connectivity between the many different reserves and designated areas - so helping designations across Southern and SW England collectively to deliver crucial national conservation objectives [a key aim of NE's Designations Strategy.]
- The proposed National Park area offers great and expanding recreational opportunities, opportunities which can be managed within a National Park context to optimise their health, social and economic benefits, with sensitivity to the environment. The suggested NP area includes additional heathland between Wareham and Dorchester, not in the Dorset AONB, but important for recreational potential, not least given its proximity to centres of population.
- National Park Authorities have not only a duty to conserve and enhance the beauty of the NP area; they have a duty also to promote the area's enjoyment, eg through open-air recreation, and a duty to seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities. NPAs have powers and funding to pursue these objectives, and the opportunity to undertake more coherent and effective planning, promotion and protection across the whole NP area.
- The many economic, social and environmental benefits associated with National Parks and NP Authorities are well researched and documented [eg DEFRA 2011.] These benefits

include: benefits to the area's economy, increased governmental resources and funding, the beneficial direct economic impact of National Park spending on the local economy, improved health and wellbeing, a better informed society, sustainable recreation and tourism, social inclusion, improved transparency and democracy. The local authorities and other partners in the long-established and the newest National Parks have access to such advantages.

- A National Park has the potential to act as a catalyst and beacon for sustainability in all its forms, and as a catalyst and beacon for joined-up thinking and partnership working in a wide range of policy areas and functions. Sustainability is the key to the survival of cherished landscapes and species. More than this, sustainability is increasingly seen as fundamental to the future by communities and governments, consumers and businesses, farmers and retailers, recreation and wildlife enthusiasts. This agenda resonates with key policy concerns and objectives of the government and key stakeholders, national and local, in all sectors of society, statutory, commercial and not-for-profit.
- Through promoting sustainability, a National Park can make a significant contribution to the conservation and enhancement of the environment, biodiversity and natural resources, to the enjoyment and appreciation of the area and its recreational value, to social and economic well-being, and to climate change mitigation. The Dorset and East Devon landscapes – which include the spectacular World Heritage “Jurassic” Coast as well as the beautiful and unspoilt heaths, chalk ridges, deep valleys, woods, wetlands and traditional farms - invoke a positive response among visitors and residents alike. They contain dramatic views, spectacular wildlife and historic buildings. Moreover, these areas contain assets of intangible but “priceless” value. Thus the landscapes of Dorset and East Devon are important in themselves, and are also of great economic value, as the source of ecosystem services, and the foundation for a successful tourism industry. Sustaining this landscape, natural and cultural heritage, and the recreational opportunities it provides, is therefore vital.
- To achieve this, inter-organisational co-operation and good communication are important to ensure a shared understanding in the key fields of policy, forward planning, and day-to-day operations. In all these areas, a National Park has the potential to assist the various stakeholders of Dorset and East Devon to do more and do better for this outstanding area.

It is clear that many stakeholders in all sectors of the community and society see the potential for a Dorset and East Devon 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.

These points resonate with national policy imperatives as well as with regional and local policy drivers.

Natural England has already recognised parts of the Dorset AONB as having particular qualities as well as facing certain challenges, and thus as deserving more of NE's focus and resources. NE has also recognised the need for improved conservation and management of the Heritage Coasts.

The proposal is timely, as Natural England, under its Designations Strategy, plans an assessment of designation proposals which will get under way shortly. The Group suggests that it is now "especially desirable," in NE's words, for NE to consider the case for a Dorset and East Devon NP and to proceed to designation.

National Parks in England and Wales: Background to Designation

A proposal to set up National Parks in England and Wales was made in 1929 and resulted in the Addison Committee's report to the Government in 1931.

The wartime Government requested a White Paper on National Parks by John Dower, and this was presented to the Minister of Town and Country Planning in 1945. The Dower report suggested that "... the wilder country most suitable for National Parks is predominantly in the North, West and South-West." The Dorset Coast and Heaths were considered by the Dower Report to be of National Park quality and deserving National Park designation.

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was passed in 1949, following a report by Sir Arthur Hobhouse. The Hobhouse Committee recommended that twelve areas be designated as National Parks in England and Wales, and ten National Parks were designated within a decade. In recent years, the New Forest and the South Downs have been awarded National Park status.

The 1995 Environment Act revised the statutory purposes of National Parks as follows:

"To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Parks; and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities [of the National Parks] by the public."

This revision was considered very relevant to the New Forest and South Downs, the status of which during the previous fifty years had failed to provide adequate protection. It is relevant also to the proposed Dorset and East Devon National Park. The idea of enhancement, the importance of wildlife, biodiversity and the cultural heritage, and the promotion of enjoyment in ways consistent with the special qualities of the designated area – all these factors are relevant to Dorset and East Devon.

National Park Authorities were also given a duty – important and welcome to those within their areas – to foster the social and economic wellbeing of the local communities within the National Park.

Only "administrative difficulties" prevented the 1947 Hobhouse Committee's report from recommending the designation of a National Park for the SW Peninsula coast from Ilfracombe to Poole harbour.

The designation of the Dorset and East Devon AONBs and, subsequently, of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site [Britain's only landscape World Heritage Site] gave recognition to this area of outstanding natural beauty. The desirable development of greater administrative and policy coherence across the suggested NP area would be greatly advanced by the designation of the proposed National Park.

Dorset and East Devon: An Area of Outstanding Geological, Landscape, Biodiversity, Cultural and Recreational Importance.

Geology, Landscape, Biodiversity

The area's extraordinarily rich biodiversity and its national and international importance for landscape, geology, and nature conservation, have been reflected in a range of designations. The designation of a

National Park would further protect geology, landscapes and habitats, promoting vital increased connectivity between designated areas. For example:

- The Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site in Dorset and East Devon provides a unique record of earth history; it is easy to read, in its rocks, the story of millions of years of geological processes and species evolution. Mary Anning (1799 – 1847) of Lyme Regis, the pioneer paleontologist, became known around the world for her study of the Jurassic marine fossil beds. Her work contributed to fundamental changes in scientific thinking about prehistoric life and the history of the Earth.
- The Lyme Regis (Dorset) to Orcombe Point (East Devon) stretch of coastline is of international importance for its marine Jurassic succession and fossils, its marine Cretaceous rocks, and Devonian succession, and has the largest and most important landslip (mass movement) areas on the British coast. It also contains the nationally important Permo-Triassic succession and reptilian fossils.
- The varied geology of Dorset gives rise to many important habitats such as lowland heath, calcareous grassland and chalk streams, which support a great diversity of wildlife. The county is well-known for its important populations of Smooth Snakes, Sand Lizards, Early Spider Orchids and Lulworth Skipper butterflies, and the 10km grid square which includes Wareham and Corfe Castle has the highest number of recorded plant species in the country.
- The Dorset Wildlife Trust has 42 nature reserves in the county of Dorset, while many others are owned or run by organisations such as the RSPB, National Trust, Amphibian and Reptile Trust, and DCC. East Devon AONB has significant areas of internationally important habitat. The East Devon AONB manages ten Nature Reserves, including heathland, grassland, reedbeds, wooded valleys and saline lagoon.
- Dorset and East Devon's protected sites provide outstanding wildlife conservation, besides acting as habitat strongholds from which wildlife can spread if surrounding land becomes more favourably managed for environmental and wildlife protection. Such reserves also reflect the fact that many wild places have been lost or damaged due to human activity, and that, without protection, other wildlife havens may be lost forever.
- Dorset's extraordinary range of high quality habitats include fine chalk downland and valleys, ancient meadows, woodlands, bog habitats, pastures, heathland, wetland, coast and cliffs. Dorset has 80% of British mammal and butterfly species, and 90% of British bird species. RSPB's Arne reserve is home to over 220 bird species; Poole harbour and the Fleet near Abbotsbury are key sites for over-wintering birds; red squirrels thrive on Brownsea Island; Dorset's heathlands support all of Britain's six species of reptiles; the Amphibian and Reptile Trust has several reserves in Purbeck's ancient wetland woods; in Spring, the Jurassic Coast and Dorset's downs and woods display a wide range of orchid species, while in summer, clouds of beautiful butterflies can be seen, some of these found only in Dorset.
- Its outstanding hedgerows are a feature of the East Devon landscape and vital to wildlife, including bullfinches, dormice, small egg moth and brown hairstreak butterflies, all of which are in decline. The Axe Estuary Wetlands is one of the south-west's premier wetland sites and is rich in varied wildlife, including birds, small mammals, bats, dragonflies, damselflies and other insects, including the recently discovered 13-spot ladybird.
- East Devon's woodlands support many rare invertebrates, such as the purple emperor butterfly, the waved carpet moth and the white-line snout moth. Lichens provide homes for other species,

such as spiders and mites. East Devon has some very rare lichens dependent on trees, particularly on ash.

- Both Dorset and East Devon are rich in species of British bats. The Greater Horseshoe Bat, one of the rarest British bats, feeds along hedgerows, woodland edges and streams, important elements of these landscapes. East Devon is rich in the tree species that are particularly valuable to bats, including oak, ash, and beech, and in hedgerows which form a “bat highway”.

In recent initiatives under its policy of spatial prioritisation, Natural England has identified the Dorset Coast and Wild Purbeck as a Focus Area, and Wild Purbeck as a Nature Improvement Area, and has declared its aim to prioritise and focus more of its resources in these two categories.

Open-Air Recreation

The Dorset and East Devon NP area offers an important resource and growing opportunity for open-air recreation. For example:

- Dorset’s coast and 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.
- 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 optimised and broadly-based economic and social benefits.
- 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, linking Purbeck to London and all parts of UK, will expand direct rail access to Dorset and the Jurassic Coast. Initiatives to introduce a Jurassic Coast ferry service would further enhance the sustainable transport options across the proposed National Park area.
- 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. National and local cycling routes cross the area and offer exceptional scope for on-road and off-road cycling experience.
- 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.

Cultural and Historical Heritage

Visitors and residents enjoy the area’s exceptionally rich history and cultural heritage. For example:

- The Dorset and East Devon coastal landscapes and Dorset ridgeways abound in important pre-historic sites and monuments such as Maiden Castle. The South Dorset Ridgeway, a ceremonial landscape of international significance, is within one of the most diverse Neolithic and Bronze Age landscapes in Europe. This includes Neolithic causewayed enclosures and unique bank

barrows, immense henge monuments and smaller stone circles, a dense group of almost 1000 Bronze Age round barrows, as well as later Iron Age hillforts.

- Beautiful villages and small towns, including Abbotsbury [with its Iron Age hill fort, St Catherine's Chapel, Tithe Barn, and Swannery], Cerne Abbas, Corfe Castle, Lulworth, Shaftesbury, Sherborne, and many others, are testimony to Dorset's importance in Roman, medieval and later times, and display Dorset's rich built heritage. Ottery St Mary is one of the oldest and most historic towns in Devon, and Honiton was famous for its lace-making industry. Seaton is known for its heritage tram railway.
- The historic seaside towns of Exmouth, Budleigh Salterton, and Sidmouth in East Devon, and Swanage, Weymouth, Bridport and Lyme Regis in Dorset, are charming and interesting destinations for visitors, and offer good walking nearby.
- The nineteenth and twentieth centuries further enriched Dorset's and East Devon's cultural history. The novelist and poet Thomas Hardy was born, lived and worked in the county, taking its landscape and people as his inspiration. Other writers inspired by Dorset include: Jane Austen, John Fowles, William Wordsworth, William Barnes, Enid Blyton, PD James and Ian McEwan. T. E. Lawrence [Lawrence of Arabia] chose the intimate cottage Cloud's Hill [now National Trust] as his retreat in the years after the First World War. In East Devon, Jane Austen, John Betjeman, William Thackeray and Beatrix Potter all wrote in Sidmouth. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born at the vicarage of Ottery St Mary in 1772 and his early years were spent in East Devon. Budleigh Salterton has associations with Noel Coward and P.G. Wodehouse. Sir Walter Raleigh was born nearby.
- Many artists and sculptors have been and are inspired by Dorset's landscapes, including JMW Turner, John Constable, Paul Nash and Anthony Caro. Dorset's vibrant musical and arts scene finds expression in festivals throughout the year. The "Drawing Inspiration" project is one of many such initiatives to celebrate how Dorset's physical, cultural and social landscapes have inspired artists, authors, poets, scientists over many years through exhibitions, walks, talks and other events across the county.
- Both Dorset and East Devon offer many excellent museums in towns and villages throughout the area, from Dorchester's historic and important county museum, to the unique Purbeck Stone Museum in Langton Matravers. East Devon's Allhallows Museum has a fine collection of Honiton Lace in a building dating from the 13th century, and Axminster Museum's exhibits ranging from agricultural tools to Axminster carpets.
- Dorset's military history spans millennia, from prehistoric hillforts, through Roman garrison towns, Saxon town walls, Norman castles, Napoleonic fortifications, and great naval ports, to the county's frontline position in World War II. In 1943, the MOD acquired its Lulworth Ranges, visited today for their spectacular range walks and biodiversity, and the evacuated "lost village" of Tyneham, its story interestingly interpreted today by a MOD-supported Trust.
- During the Second World War, Purbeck became England's Silicon Valley when the development of radar technology, vital to Britain's war effort and the inspiration for technologies familiar today in every microwave oven and mobile phone, took place at Worth Matravers. From a special bunker at Dorset's Studland beaches, King George VI, Churchill and Eisenhower watched allied rehearsals for the D Day landings.

Sustainability

- Climate change and sustainability are possibly the biggest issues facing humanity. The Dorset

and East Devon National Park would work, with partners, to ensure that these issues are addressed and that practical solutions are developed.

- A National Park has the potential to act as a catalyst and beacon for sustainability in all its forms, and for joined-up thinking and partnership working in a wide range of policy areas and functions.
- Sustainability is the key to the survival of cherished landscapes and species. More than this, sustainability is increasingly seen as fundamental to a thriving future by communities and governments, consumers and businesses, farmers and retailers, recreation and wildlife enthusiasts.
- This agenda resonates with key policy concerns and objectives of the government and key stakeholders, national and local, in all sectors of society, statutory, commercial and not-for-profit.
- As the evidence note on biodiversity indicates, the designation of a National Park would:
 - protect geology, landscapes and habitats
 - promote landscape-scale conservation and vital connectivity between designated areas across the South of England, and
 - optimise the valuable ecosystem services provided by the NP area and their contribution to national policies for sustainability.
- Through promoting sustainability, a National Park would make a significant contribution to:
 - the conservation and enhancement of the environment, biodiversity and natural resources
 - the enjoyment and appreciation of the area and its recreational value
 - social and economic well-being and public health, and
 - climate change mitigation.
- The Dorset and East Devon landscapes – which include the spectacular World Heritage “Jurassic” Coast as well as the beautiful and unspoilt heaths, chalk ridges, deep valleys, woods, wetlands and traditional farms - invoke a positive response among visitors and residents alike. They contain dramatic views, spectacular wildlife, and historic villages and buildings.
- Moreover, these areas contain assets of intangible but “priceless” value. Thus the landscapes of Dorset and East Devon are of intrinsic value, and are also of great economic value, as the source of ecosystem services, and the foundation for a successful tourism industry. Sustaining this landscape, natural and cultural heritage, and the recreational opportunities it provides, is therefore vital.
- To achieve this, inter-organisational co-operation and good communication are important to ensure a shared understanding in the key fields of policy, forward planning, and day-to-day operations. A National Park offers the potential, throughout the NP area, to provide a coherent strategic approach to policy across the spectrum of sustainability issues, and to promote a systematic approach to policy delivery across a wide range of stakeholders and partners.
- NE specifically envisages that designated areas should operate at a sufficient scale to enhance connectivity and facilitate coherence. The proposed Dorset and East Devon National Park would do this, operating at an appropriate scale for effectiveness and efficiency, bringing increased coherence to governance across the proposed NP area, and offering vital

connectivity stretching from East Hants to East Devon, with significant potential benefits of many kinds.

- The Dorset and East Devon National Park initiative has, as a mainstream objective, to work towards sustainability in all areas, including the following: the economy; communities; green infrastructure; transport; biodiversity; tourism and recreation; the natural, cultural and built heritage; natural resources; farming; energy; planning; land use; development and the built environment; governance and administration.
- In all these areas, a National Park has the potential to assist the various stakeholders of Dorset and East Devon to do more and do better for this outstanding area.
- This is the Group's vision and commitment for the Dorset and East Devon National Park.

Natural England's Designations Strategy

The Dorset and East Devon NP Group considers that the designation of a National Park for Dorset and East Devon would make a significant contribution to achieving NE's aims in its 10 Key Principles, and its Designations Strategy, ie to:

- Fulfil the Government's national and international obligations;
- Deliver Natural England's statutory general purposes;
- Secure protection and enhancement of our finest landscapes along with their wildlife, and cultural heritage. They will provide opportunities for everyone to experience, learn from and simply enjoy nature;
- Protect important wildlife habitats so that they support the recovery of species that are highly threatened and which, once lost, are impossible to recreate or restore, even in the long-term;
- Conserve sites important for their geological interest;
- Deliver designated sites and areas that actively contribute to ecological connectivity and better management and restoration of ecosystems;
- Focus, subject to statutory requirements and scientific imperatives, on areas where we can work in partnership with others to improve management of the wider landscape so that connectivity increases and better ecological networks are created.

The area's exceptional quality, character and potential, illustrated above, are evidence of its qualification for early consideration for designation as a National Park.

The Heritage Coast

In its Designations Strategy, NE has recognised the particular demands and opportunities for improved conservation and management which are presented by the Heritage Coasts. NE's strategy says on this issue:

“The management, conservation and enhancement of Heritage Coasts need to be reviewed and set in a new context reflecting increased recognition of the importance of the marine and coastal zone.

Heritage Coasts are nationally important stretches of our finest coastal scenery. They are highly valued by their local communities and large numbers of visitors, and contribute significantly to local economies. They can provide places for innovation, integrated planning and management, sustainable adaptation to coastal and climate change, and high quality access and recreation without compromising the natural beauty of their landscape or seascape. Fully realising this potential requires strong support from the spatial planning system and good join up between terrestrial and marine planning.

We will work collaboratively with interested partners to explore and seek consensus on the most effective ways to secure the conservation and enhancement of the special qualities of Heritage Coasts. The scope for an improved role for protected landscapes in management of the coastal zone and their seascapes will need to be explored within the context of an emerging and more holistic marine and coastal policy agenda.”

The Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site Jurassic Coast presents great opportunities for NE, with partners, to implement its aims for improved coastal conservation and management, with increased opportunities for sustainable recreation, and to recognise the importance of this uniquely special coast, through National Park designation.

The Advantages and Benefits of National Park Status

The area of the proposed National Park deserves and needs the positive advantages which National Park status would confer.

National Park purposes are clear:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park.
 - To promote opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities.
- And in addition:
- To foster the social and economic wellbeing of the local communities within the National Park.

National Park status confers a more positive and effective, statutory framework of policy, governance, protection and relevant powers, than can be achieved by an AONB. National Park Authorities are planning authorities in their own right, able to give appropriate weight to environmental factors, alongside others, in considering planning applications. The National Park would be responsible for promoting the area’s exciting recreational potential, while safeguarding the landscape and habitats.

National Park Authorities receive funding from central government in recognition of their statutory purposes and duties. They work successfully and effectively in partnership with a range of other local and statutory authorities.

Independent research has documented the benefits which designation as a National Park brings to the areas concerned: benefits to the environment and heritage, and to the economy and income of these areas. In addition, DEFRA’s 2011 report identified the broad economic, social and environmental benefits associated with National Park status and National Park Authorities as including the following:

- Recreation and Tourism
- Health and Wellbeing
- Better informed society
- Rural development
- The economic impact of National Park spending on the local economy

- Social inclusion
- Transparency and democracy.

The time has come for a Dorset and East Devon National Park

The area proposed for inclusion in the National park is of acknowledged, exceptional landscape, biodiversity, cultural and historical quality and importance. National Park designation would allow the area's exceptional quality and character to be safeguarded and enjoyed, and its opportunities for increased open-air recreational use to be realised. There is an overwhelming case for the area to be considered a candidate for National Park designation under Natural England's Designation Strategy.

NE has expressed its intention, by August 2014, to: "Carry out a strategic review of the extent and diversity of the existing set of AONB and National Park designations to establish whether there is potential scope for future new designations."

It is, in Natural England's terminology, "especially desirable" for Natural England to consider quickly the case for a Dorset and East Devon National Park, and to proceed with designation.

Dorset and East Devon National Park Group

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