

## **Proposed Dorset and East Devon National Park**

### **Statement of Consensus**

#### **Overview**

From modest beginnings, and with the encouragement of many contacts and opinion-formers in various spheres, support has grown with increasing momentum and solidity for the request to Natural England to assess the case for the possible future designation of parts of Dorset and East Devon as a National Park.

The Group now has a strong and encouraging base of support for our proposal. We have firm plans to continue to build up and sustain constructive relationships with all stakeholders.

The Group has engaged with depth and seriousness with a wide range of stakeholders, setting out our case in a reasoned, responsible way. The Group genuinely wants to listen to and understand all stakeholders' point of view. Our approach has been met with respect and constructive responses.

The expressions of interest in and support for the request to Natural England have come from organisations at national, regional, county and local level. They include local authorities, and economic and business organisations including some farmers and landowners, in addition to many conservation, recreation and amenity organisations. And they include organisations, and key individuals representative of relevant groups and organisations, across the entire area of the proposed National Park, along the World Heritage Jurassic Coast from East Dorset to East Devon, and from the coast to inland rural areas.

The Group is constructively engaged on a continuing basis with both the Dorset and E Devon AONBs, and in regular contact with them. The Group is committed to keeping the Partnership Boards informed and to consulting with them. Both Boards see our proposal as an item for inclusion and on-going consideration in their revised Management Plans for the period 2014-19.

Group members have already met personally with many stakeholders, including most of the relevant local authorities in the AONB forum and key conservation and amenity groups, and we have plans to meet others, including local authorities individually, key landowners and other economic stakeholders, and the Local Nature Partnerships and Local Enterprise Partnerships for both Dorset and Devon, with which we are in contact.

The Group has firm plans to continue to build up and sustain constructive relationships with all stakeholders, including existing supporter organisations and other stakeholders. 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 short email newsletter to keep them informed of developments and to invite stakeholders' views.

Although the Group has not engaged in any public "campaign," the proposal has received expressions of support from many individuals and positive and supportive coverage in local media.

The Group will be pleased to keep Natural England informed of the continued development of support and of our on-going relationship with stakeholders.

#### **How the Group approaches the building of support**

The Group has approached the building of a support base for its proposal in a reasoned, responsible, moderate way which has met with respect and constructive engagement among stakeholders. The Group genuinely wants to listen to and understand all stakeholders' point of view.

The Group identified a wide range of key stakeholders in the National Park proposal, including stakeholders in a variety of relevant sectors, and wrote to these explaining our proposals and providing supporting information. The stakeholders concerned are organisations at national, regional, county and local level.

The Group has engaged with depth and seriousness with a wide range of stakeholders. These have included in particular:

- The Dorset and East Devon AONBs, and all Partnership Board members individually.
- A wide range of conservation, amenity and recreation organisations
- Economic stakeholders, through representative bodies, and certain individual organisations
- Farmers and landowners through representative bodies, in addition to a number of small farmers, organic and conservation farmers, and certain large estates.

The Group has not yet engaged in any "campaign" in the public arena. We have not approached individual members of the public for expressions of support, nor have we approached the media to publicise our proposal. The proposal has, nonetheless, received expressions of support from many individuals and positive and supportive coverage in some local media.

### **The Response from Stakeholders and Stakeholder Groups**

The Group has been encouraged by the response we have received from all stakeholders. The responses by different stakeholder groups are summarised below.

Group members have already met personally with many stakeholders, including local authorities and other Partnership Board members in the AONB forum, key conservation and amenity groups and some economic stakeholders, and we have plans to meet others, including local authorities individually, the NFU and CLA, further landowners, farmers and other economic stakeholders, and the Local Nature Partnerships and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

#### **Dorset and East Devon AONBs**

The Group is constructively engaged on a continuing basis with both the Dorset and E Devon AONBs, and in regular contact with them.

All members of both AONB Partnership Boards, including local authorities at officer and member level, have received individual letters and supporting papers setting out the Group's proposals and key considerations. The Group's approaches to the AONBs have been received with serious engagement by all parties.

The Group is committed to keeping the Partnership Boards informed and to consulting with them. Both Boards see our proposal as an item for inclusion and on-going serious consideration in their revised Management Plans for the period 2014-19.

The Group has met collectively the members of the **Dorset AONB** Partnership Board, and Group members are in the process of meeting with member organisations of both AONB Partnerships, including the local authorities [see also below], in order to hear and discuss their views.

The **East Devon AONB**, because of its meeting timetable, held an early, preliminary discussion of the proposal. Following the Group's writing, with supporting papers, to individual AONB members, the AONB staff prepared an overview of responses in a considered, constructive and forward-looking response from the Chairman, a response which looked forward to continuing engagement and to further discussion of the Group's proposal. The Group has agreed to attend a future meeting of the Board, and looks forward to continuing engagement.

### **Local Authorities**

All local authority members of both AONB Partnership Boards, at officer and member level, have received individual letters and supporting papers setting out the Group's proposals and key considerations. The same documents were sent also to the Chief Executives of the local authorities.

Group members have already met personally with most of the relevant local authorities in the AONB forum and have plans to meet further with local authorities individually. Most authorities have said they will welcome such further contact and discussions. A number of Councillors on local authorities have indicated strong support. However, Council officers have not wished to take a view at this stage.

The Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils [DAPTC] has expressed keen support for the proposal and looks forward to being kept informed. Swanage Town Council was the first local government body to give its support. A number of parish councils have expressed interest and asked to be kept informed.

Some local authorities, understandably, have not felt in a position at this stage to express a view on the proposal for a National Park, and so have adopted a neutral or "wait and see" approach. These include the two counties, Dorset and Devon County Councils, both of which have indicated constructively that, while not wishing at this stage to take a formal view, they wish to continue in dialogue with the Group, to receive further information and to be kept informed of developments. The Group welcomes this balanced approach on their part. This is also the case with the combined West Dorset DC and Weymouth and Portland BC, and with Purbeck DC, which have not taken a position on the proposal at this stage.

The District Councils have therefore said that they are unable at this stage to form a view, and wish to continue in discussion and to be kept informed of developments. Some District Council officers have expressed concern about the possibility of their planning functions being assumed by a National Park Authority. The Group thinks that an understanding of the flexible ways in which NPAs may approach their operations, including the approach of the South Downs NPA, may help the DCs in further consideration of the proposals.

No Local Authority has adopted a position of opposition to the proposal.

### **Economic and Business Community including Farmers and Landowners**

Support from the economic and business community and among farmers has been growing as they see the potential benefits of a National Park.

The Group has received expressions of interest and support from a number of economic stakeholders and representative bodies, including the following:

- Purbeck District and Swanage Chamber of Trade and Commerce
- Heart of Devon Tourist Board

- Sidmouth, East Devon Chamber of Trade and Commerce
- Sidmouth Hospitality Association
- Swanage Heritage Railway Trust
- Small businesses across the proposed NP area

The Group is in constructive dialogue with the NFU's SW Region, and with farmers and landowners, including a number of small farmers, and certain large estates. The Group looks forward to continuing discussions with this sector. Dr Philip Mansel, a member of the Historic Houses Association, whose family has owned and farmed Dorset's Smedmore Estate since the 1600s, keenly supports the NP proposal.

The Group has provided information to the Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Local Nature Partnerships covering the suggested NP area, and will be pleased to meet their representatives.

### **Conservation, Amenity, Heritage and Recreation Organisations**

Around fifty organisations and groups, including organisations which we consider very significant for this purpose, have responded expressing interest in and support for our proposal and the request to NE. These organisations include a wide range of conservation, amenity, heritage and recreation organisations.

Organisations which have expressed their support and interest include the following:

- The National Trust Wessex Region
- The John Muir Trust
- The Ramblers Association nationally, Dorset Ramblers, Devon Ramblers, and Ramblers groups in the NP area and beyond
- The Camping and Caravanning Club
- Dorset CPRE and CPRE branches
- Dorset Wildlife Trust
- Purbeck Association of the National Trust
- The Purbeck Society
- The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
- Long Distance Walkers' Association
- The Cyclists' Touring Club, West Dorset
- British Athletics Ultra-Distance Running Team

Although the Group has not approached individuals or the media for support, we have been heartened by the number of people who have taken the time and trouble to let us know of their support, to express understanding for the long-term nature of the project, and to provide encouragement.

The proposal has also received positive and supportive coverage in some local media.

### **Future Plans**

The Group has firm plans to continue to build up and sustain constructive relationships with all stakeholders, including existing supporter organisations and other stakeholders. 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.

Group members have already met personally with many stakeholders, including local authorities and other Partnership Board members in the AONB forum, key conservation and amenity groups and some economic stakeholders, and we have plans to meet others, including local authorities individually, the NFU and CLA, further landowners, farmers and other economic stakeholders, and the Local Nature Partnerships and Local Enterprise Partnerships covering the suggested NP area, to whom information has been provided.

We intend keeping in touch with stakeholders through a periodic short email newsletter to keep them informed of developments and to invite and welcome stakeholders' views.

The Group will be pleased to keep Natural England informed of the continued development of support and of our on-going relationship with stakeholders.

**Dorset and East Devon National Park Group**

**July 2013**