

# Dorset National Park Newsletter

## Summer 2020

### The Dawn of National Parks 75 years ago:

Professor Michael Dower

While WW2 was still raging, a man was often spotted in some of our most beautiful countryside, taking notes and photographs. Was he a spy? How did he get his petrol allowance? He was in fact my father, John Dower, researching for his report 'National Parks in England and Wales', which was published by the Government 75 years ago as a part of its plans for the postwar world.

My father set a vision for a future where people would be more connected with nature, where our flagship landscapes would be fully appreciated and conserved and would better serve the needs of the nation. He recommended the creation of at least 12 National Parks. This led indeed to the creation from 1951 onwards of the wide array of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which together embrace over one quarter of the land area of England and Wales. They have been described as a "Natural Health Service", sitting alongside the NHS as powerful contributors to the health and well-being of the nation.

The current pandemic has shown the high public appreciation of both the NHS and the role that nature can play in boosting health and the well-being of body, mind and spirit. People recognise that the long-term health of the nation is linked to the long-term health of nature. We rely on fresh air and exercise, clean water, good food, healthy soils, and the biodiversity which sustains these. We need the water retention and flood control provided by our heaths, moors, woods and fields, the carbon capture and oxygen release of our woodlands, and the opportunities for recreation – indeed, all the "ecosystems services" which a richly varied and sustainable environment can provide.

But the combined effects of climate change, population pressures, intensive farming and urban development have had a severe impact on nature. Ecosystems are being destroyed and we are experiencing major losses of wildlife. At the same time, a shift to a more sedentary lifestyle sometimes disconnected from nature has affected our physical, mental and social well-being. All of this has an impact on our economy. Scientists and young people have called, with increasing urgency, on governments, businesses and society to act decisively and effectively while there is still time.

Now is the time, as we look beyond the pandemic and into a post-Brexit future, for the Government to offer a reinvigorated vision of a better future. Helping people everywhere to value and enjoy the environment and green spaces – from our local parks to our flagship National Parks – should be central to this vision. Research by the National Parks, the Youth Hostels Association and others has shown that connecting to the natural world can help us develop resilient, confident and independent young people, contribute to improved physical and mental health for everyone, strengthen family and social relationships and improve life skills and opportunities.

Last autumn, the Glover Review panel recommended in its report to Government a radical strengthening of the present array of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the potential for the creation of new National Parks, particularly

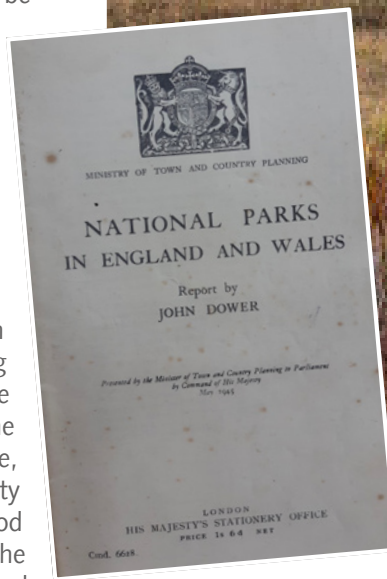


Image © Greg Farrington

near to centres of population in southern England. Action on these lines could be a central element in the Government's vision for the future. If strengthened and extended in these ways, National Parks can bring enormous benefits in terms of people's health, home-based tourism, the rebuilding of local economies after the pandemic, the protection of wildlife, the capture of carbon through skilful land management and the amelioration of climate change.

Within this broader vision, I personally hope, as a former Director of the Peak National Park and now a resident of Dorset, that the Government will embrace the proposal that has been made for the creation of a Dorset National Park, which was indeed envisaged by my father in his report of 1945 and which I believe would bring great benefit to the nation, the county and the public.

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*We congratulate the South Downs National Park on all they have achieved in their first 10 years for their communities, environment and economy.*

The South Downs National Park (SDNP) is providing strategic leadership on nature recovery at a landscape scale, working with partners to develop rich connected habitats for wildlife and diverse, living landscapes for people. Some achievements include:

**Working with farmers and land managers to:**

- Contribute to the development of the Government's new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS).
- Ensure that quality local food production can sit alongside sustainable land management that supports work to combat climate change and biodiversity decline.

The SDNP has seriously taken on its **education remit** with a dedicated team liaising with schools and others providing help, resources and more. It has had real success with a socially inclusive approach, providing financial support for less well-off schools to access the SDNP.

- The SDNP has engaged with 70 per cent of schools in and around the National Park.
- 21,177 young people have used their School Travel Grant to access outside learning since 2013.
- With SDNP support, over 4,500 have started a John Muir award to learn about caring for the environment.

**Providing community support**

- £1.75m has been invested in 202 community projects across the National Park as part of its Sustainable Communities Fund.
- Through its planning function, £2.9m has been invested through Section 106 agreements, funding 109 projects.
- £2.5m of Community Infrastructure Levy was collected between 2017 and 2019, with £300,000 given to local parish councils to spend on dozens of community projects.

**Developing an award-winning Local Plan** and raising the bar in planning design.

- 56 Neighbourhood Development Plans were the building blocks of the Local Plan.
- Four national and regional planning awards recognise its excellence.
- The first Design Awards were held in 2019 to champion outstanding design in the National Park.

**Securing International Dark Sky Reserve status.**

- More than 15,000 people have visited, engaged in and learned about the importance of Dark Skies through its annual Dark Skies Festival.

**Inspiring volunteers** who are the lifeblood of much of National Parks' conservation work.

- Over 91,000 different volunteering days a year have been supported by many different organisations.



Image Credit: South Downs National Park



A new Partnership Management Plan includes tackling climate change, helping nature to flourish, supporting the rural economy, creating a National Park for all and providing a green health and well-being service. Ten key outcomes are outlined in their plan which focuses on bringing together environmental and community organisations, land managers, farmers, businesses and volunteers to make the South Downs National Park an even better home for people and nature.

### 1. Landscape and Natural Beauty

- Create a “people and nature network” that identifies key areas for investment in biodiversity, the local economy, tackling climate change and flood risk management.
- Bring farmers, foresters and estates together with Defra and Natural England to pilot the new Environmental Land Management System (ELMS), which focuses on nature-friendly farming.

### 2. Increasing Resilience

- Improve the soil and water of the South Downs through innovations such as winter cover crops, which can reduce nitrate pollution by 90 per cent.
- Improve the quantity and quality of trees in the National Park.

### 3. Habitats and Species

- Create corridors for species movement and enlarge existing habitats for wildlife including pollinators.
- Create a nature recovery network across the National Park and the wider South East.

### 4. Arts and Heritage

- Increase investment in the protection and interpretation of cultural heritage through Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy money.
- Promote awareness and encourage public custodianship of heritage assets.

### 5. Outstanding Experiences

- Enable everyone to experience the National Park and reduce barriers (physical, economic and social).
- Encourage the retention and expansion of rural transport services.

### 6. Lifelong Learning

- The highly successful South Downs Learning Network will continue to deliver high-quality learning outside the classroom for young people.

### 7. Health and Well-being

- Continue to build partnerships to encourage a better appreciation of the South Downs as a place for healthy outdoor activity and well-being.

### 8. Creating Custodians

- Increase volunteering, including more Youth Action Days where young people aged 16 to 25 can get hands-on conservation experience.

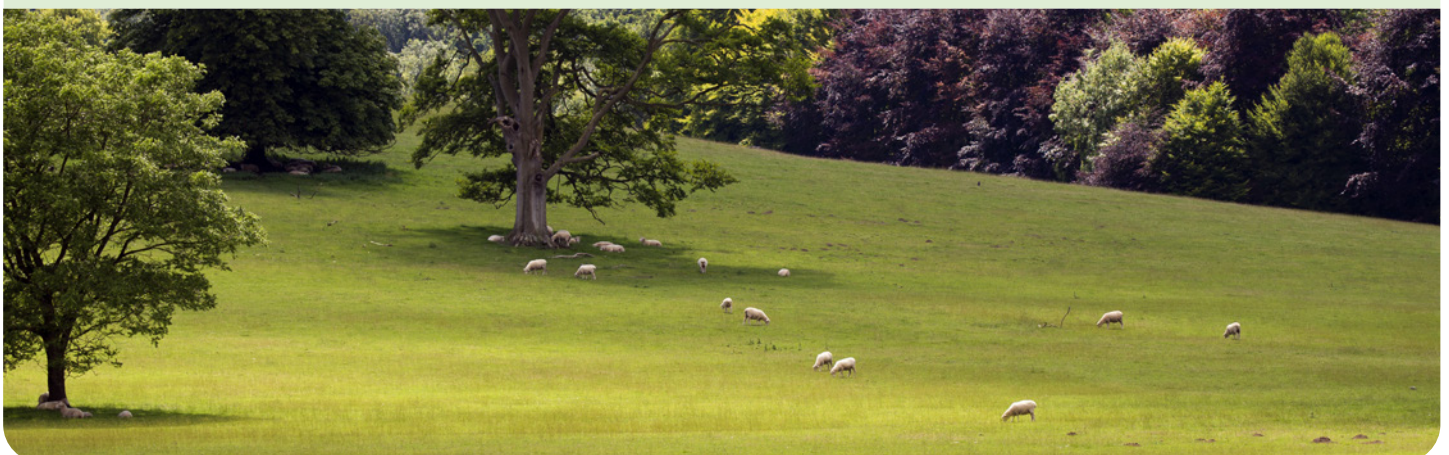
### 9. Great Places to Live

- Increase the affordable housing stock, with a focus on high-quality design and use of local sustainable materials.
- Support community-led initiatives which enhance the towns, villages and landscapes of the National Park.
- Grow and retain local businesses by improving digital infrastructure right across the National Park.

### 10. Great places to work

- Work with Government to increase the amount of business support and ensure a good supply of employment space through the South Downs Local Plan.
- Help visitors delve deeper and connect with wildlife, history, culture and cuisine to benefit our communities and businesses.

These and other benefits could also be ours with a Dorset National Park....





## Youth Engagement, Health and Well-being: The Role of National Parks

A forthcoming discussion paper from the Dorset National Park Team will highlight how National Parks, in partnership with local authorities, communities and others, can support the government's aim of improving the health and well-being of young people and their families.

The family of National Parks has, from the outset, embraced the importance of supporting and helping to improve health and wellbeing. They bring expertise, partnership working and valuable resources which enable them to have outreach, education and ranger services on a scale not possible for AONBs, just as they bring their considerable resources to bear on the vital work of conserving and enhancing the special landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage of their areas.

The future health of millions of children, the sustainability of the NHS, and the economic prosperity of Britain require a renewed focus on illness prevention and public health.<sup>1</sup> The coronavirus epidemic brings this into sharp focus. As Michael Dower's article notes, when National Parks were created, they were seen as a "Natural Health Service" to parallel the creation of the NHS and help promote the health and well-being of the nation. Positive partnership approaches by our National Parks, local authorities and the health sector can be complementary, mutually beneficial and reinforcing in their effects.

Dorset, a county with exceptional landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage, faces the linked challenges of the climate and ecological emergencies, the decline in natural capital<sup>2</sup>, challenges to the health and well-being of communities – including some which experience particular deprivation – and the rising costs associated with adult and child social care. A Dorset National Park could help councils to resource and deliver a shared agenda Dorset-wide, addressing these linked challenges. It would bring additional resources and expertise and work in partnership with the Dorset Council, Public Health Dorset, communities and other stakeholders to help promote and invest in the health and wellbeing of our young people and communities, as well as the health of Dorset's environment, wildlife and natural capital.

A Dorset National Park offers a very special opportunity to better connect people with nature at local, regional and national level, while in the process providing exceptional value for money and returns on investment for the nation, society and communities.



### Sources:

1. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/healthy-children-transforming-child-health-info.pdf>
2. Natural Value, The State of Dorset's Environment (2014). Dorset Local Nature Partnership



## Towards a Better Future

As a nation we face the triple emergencies of health, climate change and a decline in the state of nature. As the government's Committee on Climate Change has said, the UK must avoid lurching from the coronavirus crisis into a deeper climate crisis. How should future policies address these triple challenges? Will we move to a future that is more sustainable and responds better to the concerns and priorities of local people and their communities?

There is a growing realisation that while the future is very uncertain, it will not be a return to "business as usual". The triple challenges require a new approach that offers a relevant, effective and linked response. In recent months, people have shown a growing awareness of the benefits offered by the natural world and of the role nature plays in improving the nation's health and well-being as well as addressing their concerns about the effects of climate change and the declining state of nature.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, polls indicated that well over 90% of Dorset residents thought that a high-quality natural environment and thriving wildlife were of great importance to them.<sup>3</sup> Concerned by the continuing deterioration of our natural world, the decline of wildlife and of Dorset's natural capital – including the quality of our soils, rivers, streams and harbours – the Dorset Council and many local town and parish councils declared a climate and nature emergency.

Many communities, at the same time, have expressed concern about plans for development which seemed unsustainable and damaging to the environment and which did not reflect their local needs.

The pandemic seems to have increased people's awareness of the health and well-being benefits offered by a healthy natural world. A survey of community spirit and attitudes to green spaces commissioned by CPRE and the National Federation of Women's Institutes finds that some 65% of people in the South West of England think protecting and enhancing green spaces should be a higher priority after the lockdown.<sup>4</sup>

Equally, there is a pressing need to rebuild the economy. Some businesses may not reopen, some sectors will take time to recover, some families will struggle and those in deprived communities may well be particularly hard hit. Slower economic growth than previously forecast will mean that earlier expansion and investment plans will need to be re-examined. The already evident pressures on local authority finances are likely to increase since, while business growth and local income streams will be from a lower base, the demands on the social care budget will continue to rise, perhaps at a higher rate than previously forecast.



Image Credit: Greg Farrington

### Sources:

3. 94% of Dorset residents think a high-quality natural environment is of great importance to them. (State of Dorset 2015, DCC) 95% of people felt it was important for wildlife to thrive in the wider countryside not just in man-made reserves or gardens (YouGov survey sponsored by Poole company Lush)
4. Surge in appreciation for green spaces and outpouring of community spirit amid lock-down. (May 2020, CPRE and the National Federation of Women's Institutes).

## Enhancing Dorset's Greatest Economic Asset

It is widely recognised that Dorset's environment is its greatest economic asset.<sup>5</sup> It is a key reason why people live and work in and visit the area. Dorset's landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage are unrivalled; they are the bedrock of our economy and can underpin economic recovery. But our landscapes, biodiversity and natural capital have suffered and been deteriorating for decades.

Important work has been done by many organisations including the Dorset AONB Partnership. But, as Michael Dower has noted, they have acknowledged that their powers and resources are limited in the face of the major challenges of conservation posed by caring for and turning around the decline in Dorset's diverse environment. Their current management plan confirms that some parts of the landscape are in a poor state. Many habitats are degraded. There has been heavy loss of wildlife. There is a clear need for more effective management of tourism, particularly around the coast.

The Glover Review proposes the strengthening of purposes, powers and resources of AONBs. But as Michael has said "I believe that the scale of the challenge of stewardship of this great area demands the more substantial resource of funding and expertise which can be marshalled by a National Park." He notes that the two AONBs which already have the enhanced responsibilities proposed by Glover – the Chilterns and Cotswolds – are seeking National Park status because their enhanced AONB powers and resources do not suffice.

A partnership between a Dorset National Park, the Dorset Council, the BCP conurbation, the Dorset LEP, local communities, businesses and others would offer a step change in how we care for, enhance and build on Dorset's very special inheritance and greatest economic asset. Such a partnership can develop a shared agenda for a prosperous and sustainable future. A new approach based on cooperation and the strengths which each partner would bring can deliver real benefits for Dorset's environment, economy and communities. It would offer the step change needed to tackle the triple emergencies of health, climate change and ecological decline.

## Bringing the Resources Dorset Needs

The South Downs National Park has annual core funding from Defra of over £10 million. It has successfully doubled this through project and other funding from a range of sources. (National Parks are not a call on local business or residents but are core funded by the Government.)

Securing a similar level of funding has always been the aim of the Dorset National Park Team based on the similar area, population and other characteristics of the South Downs. Such central Government funding would represent a fundamentally different scale of support for and investment in Dorset's world-class environment and its communities and economy. An injection of such support would in turn release Dorset Council funds to invest on other pressing priorities. A shared Local Plan and planning team would be part paid for by the National Park while partnership planning would be taken to a new level as both authorities work together to secure a more sustainable and vibrant future for the whole of Dorset.

Jim O'Neill<sup>6</sup> considers that to gain competitive advantage, areas need to differentiate themselves. He considers that National Park status for Dorset would offer such a distinguishing characteristic. It would put Dorset and Dorset's products and services more on the national and international map given the brand recognition that National Park status confers. Independent reports by economists<sup>7</sup> have noted, on the basis of evidence from other National Parks, that a Dorset National Park would help attract investment, businesses, jobs and skills. Research suggests that about a third of the economic benefits accrue to areas outside a National Park. The brand would help the marketing and promotion of Dorset produce, products and services. Evidence from the South Downs suggests that National Park designation would lead to higher value eco, heritage, cultural and dark skies tourism, extend the season, spread the benefits to all of Dorset and lead to better management of tourism pressures including in coastal hotspots.

### Sources:

5. Dorset's Environmental Economy, Ash Futures for Dorset County Council, 2016
6. Lord O'Neill was Commercial Secretary at the Treasury, is a leading figure in the Northern Powerhouse and Chair of Chatham House. He lives in Dorset.
7. See eg The Economic Benefits of a Dorset National Park, Cumulus Consulting Nov 2018 <https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/post/economic-benefits> and The Economic Opportunities, Benefits and Wider Impacts, Dixon & Deane, 2016, <https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/post/2016/04/28/the-economic-case-for-the-national-park>



## Supporting a Healthy and Prosperous Farming Community

Farming faced an uncertain future even before the coronavirus pandemic. Brexit, uncertain markets, changes in consumer habits, increasing environmental concerns and a new farm funding regime all create uncertainty. Yet a thriving land management and farming community lies at the heart of rural Dorset. Support for farmers and landowners should reflect and respond to their different aims and the realities of the varied soils and landscapes they farm.<sup>8</sup>

Future Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) farm funding aimed at delivering public benefits should reflect this diversity. A National Park would help develop and deliver a scheme tailored to Dorset's needs. Such a scheme can help improve the viability of Dorset farming, as well as promote the future health of Dorset's countryside and natural capital. It should encourage and support farmers in the provision of public benefits through a range of ecosystem services and encourage and reward the work of farmers and land managers for nature conservation and improvement, including through cooperation at a landscape scale.

Farmers in the South Downs secured twice the amount of high-level stewardship farm funding that might have been expected, given the area involved. A Dorset National Park can be the facilitating and coordinating agency that helps landowners and farmers access appropriate levels of ELMS funding.



## Sustainable Development

Dorset needs to develop the green economy and sustainable policies for transport, energy and development. Energy Secretary Alok Sharma has already spoken in favour of a green recovery to the recession while the South West LEPs have suggested that the area could create a competitive advantage through showing leadership towards a greener future – including with greener energy and sustainable transport. The Government has encouraged National Parks to take a lead in addressing climate change, growing the natural capital of their areas and better connecting people to nature.

Dorset requires sustainable development that can meet the needs of local communities. This includes the need for additional truly affordable homes to retain and attract young families as well as suitable accommodation for older people and units for small and growing businesses. Neighbourhood plans are a good approach to establishing the needs, priorities and concerns of local communities, and such plans deserve greater durability and regard than seems currently to be assured by the national planning framework. National Parks are under a specific duty to “respond proactively to local housing needs” including for truly affordable homes for local people and their plans build on what communities say they need.

The National Planning Guidance under the NPPF provides the opportunity – with a National Park – for all of rural Dorset to develop its own assessment of housing need and regain local control of planning, rather than having to adopt central government housing targets. A shared Local Plan could be based on agreed local assumptions of demographic and community needs, economic growth and the most appropriate locations for developments. Economic growth need not be at the expense of the environment. A Dorset National Park in partnership with the Dorset Council can ensure necessary development both meets the needs of communities and does not harm Dorset's environment, heritage and natural capital but rather respects, enhances and adds value to each.

Sources:

8. See Mark Kibblewhite's article in Voices for Dorset, Dorset Local Nature Partnership, 2020.

## Improving Health and Well-being

Connecting people with nature and enabling young people in particular to enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of spending time out of doors is a national priority. It features in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and in the Glover Review of Landscapes. The work of National Parks, for example through their education, outreach and ranger services, has produced positive and clearly evidenced benefits. Partnership approaches between National Parks, local authorities and the health sector have been complementary, mutually beneficial and reinforcing in their effects.<sup>9</sup> Evaluation of "social returns on investment" showed that, in one project in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park, for every pound of investment, there was 6 times as much value created for participants, society and communities.

Other organisations also undertake projects and work with young people. Bringing together their experiences and insights with those of National Parks and others, including Public Health Dorset, can inform future pilot projects in for example Weymouth/Portland and the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole [BCP] conurbation. The Government and the Glover Review want the family of National Parks to extend their benefits and to increase their work in improving the health of the nation. As a part of this family, Dorset can benefit from what others are achieving.

## Valuing the Thomas Hardy Heritage

We opened this Newsletter with an article from Dorset National Park Patron Michael Dower. We close with a quote by Julian Fellowes, also a Patron and supporter.

*"Hardy would surely want us to conserve and enhance these very special places and the cultural heritage that is entwined in our landscapes and communities, and so should we all. To live here is a great privilege, and this brings with it a duty to protect his story and look after and pass on to future generations what we should all hold so dear."*

Thank you for your interest and best wishes for the future from the Dorset National Park Team.



Image Credit: Greg Farrington

## A Partnership for a Healthy and Prosperous Dorset

A Dorset National Park would bring additional resources and expertise to help councils to resource and deliver a shared agenda Dorset-wide, creating opportunities and addressing the challenges we face together, and helping to secure a thriving, prosperous and sustainable future for our communities, economy and environment. A National Park would be uniquely positioned to work in partnership with a wide range of organisations to help promote and invest in the health and well-being of our young people and communities, as well as the health of Dorset's environment, wildlife and natural capital.

Sources:

9. See Youth Engagement, Health and Well-being, The Role of National Parks, Dorset National Park Team pending.

### *It's time for Dorset's National Park*

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Dorset & East Devon National Park CIC. Co Number: 10563714

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