Appendix 2 to Item 2

Designated Landscapes Review – Response to Call for Evidence

Draft Response from Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA)

Introduction

NNPA would like to thank the Designated Landscapes Review Chair and Team for the opportunity to respond to this Call for Evidence.

We welcome the opportunity we have had to engage with the Panel and thank the Chair and Panel members for taking the time to visit Northumberland National Park and hear from so many of our stakeholders.

NNPA is keen to play a positive role in the Review in order to improve how our designated landscapes achieve on behalf of society. We would therefore welcome also the opportunity to have ongoing engagement with the Review and the Panel once you have had the opportunity to review this and the many other responses you will no doubt received through the Call for Evidence.

Likewise we have welcomed the Review Panel’s engagement with the English National Park Authorities on a collective basis and again would wish to see this continue as the Review progresses.

Northumberland National Park Authority has been an active partner in framing the National Parks England submission to the Review and we fully endorse this as a collective view of the English National Park Authorities.

Context

The vision for national parks set out in the “National Parks Vision and Circular 2010” remains forward looking and relevant. It sets out how we would like to see national parks develop and benefit society in the future.

Likewise the statutory purposes and duty of national parks, first set out in the 1949 Act, have stood the test of time and still provide a positive framework for the management of our finest landscapes.

Within this context National Park Authorities and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB’s) are unique in developing visionary plans for the future of our finest landscapes. Our National Park Management Plans set out an ambitious shared vision for supporting people and place.

These plans identify what is special about the place, the factors and forces at play around driving change and a framework for how stakeholders will work together to achieve a shared ambition for the future.

It is within this context and in a shared aim with the Designated Landscapes Review that the Authority has considered its response and how we might make Northumberland National Park ‘fit for the future’.

Fit for the Future (core elements of the NNPA response)

Public Awareness and Engagement

National Parks will celebrate the 70th Anniversary of their founding legislation in 2019, yet national opinion polls show low levels of awareness of our national parks (as low as 3% in some polls for Northumberland National Park).

There is a need for us to build greater awareness and engagement within our national parks at a national level and for individual national parks to provide means to engagement new audiences at a local level.
Northumberland National Park Authority would like to see a significant improvement for national visibility and voice for Parks. Our finest landscapes are after all a great part of what helps shape national and regional identities.

We do not believe that this needs to be delivered through a separate national body, but rather through the ten English National Park Authorities working with Defra and other government bodies and wider partners to promote our parks, both at home and abroad. A contribution from each National Park Authority (based on budget and visitor numbers for example) could help support this work.

At a local level Northumberland National Park Authority has witnessed how the provision of new and modern facilities like ‘The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre’ is already attracting new audiences, more first time visitors of different abilities and backgrounds and often several generations of the same family sharing a countryside and heritage experience.

We feel Parks should continue and further enhance their work in taking the Park to audiences beyond their boundaries. For example, 31% of all activity days currently run by Northumberland National Park happen outside of the Park boundary in the wider county or urban Tyne and Wear. We need to build further on this work and have the support of partners in doing so.

Public Health and Wellbeing

Like many rural areas, Northumberland faces the challenges of an ageing population and increasing levels of obesity, particularly growing among young people. In addition, life expectancy in the wider catchment of the Park shows great disparity between our market towns and former heavy industrial communities.

We believe Northumberland National Park is, and can be, a much greater resource for what could be a wider “national well-being” approach.

In addition to building awareness and outreach, national park authorities and our partners can do more to understand and remove some of the barriers (both perceived and real) to people accessing Parks. Several projects, including the Mosaic project which Northumberland National Park Authority has been involved with, have developed positive learning in this area which needs to be embedded and built upon.

The NHS and local health trusts also have a big role to play. We would ask that greater links are established between these bodies and national parks. The benefits of the “green prescription” for example, have been known for some time; however, the resource of the outdoors, particularly our most inspirational landscapes, remains an underused resource by health bodies.

Positive examples, both within the UK and abroad, already exist and we would propose a more structured approach, with national parks providing both general access and more bespoke programmes, for example, in areas of mental health, recuperation and weight loss.

Thriving Communities

Our national park communities are often among the most sparsely populated and remote (deep rural) in England. This is certainly the case in Northumberland National Park.

It is these communities which have cared for and shaped the Park prior to its designation and it is the health and wellbeing of these communities which will shape the future of our Parks. In Northumberland we believe a thriving community will result in a thriving park which is why we work with and through local communities.

- Advocacy and Influence

In Northumberland the national park has long been an advocate for local communities and we have seen increasing calls and expectations for us to be so. In order to support on advocacy we use evidence, and the agreed aims of the National Park Management Plan to make the case.
To support this role we would like to see more evidence, including official data sets, available for the national park boundary (including our Gateway settlements).

To further enhance our advocacy role we would like to see further weight given to the National Park Management Plan, requiring decision makers to take decisions in accordance with the aims and objectives of the Management Plan. In this respect we support the call by National Parks England for statutory bodies to have a requirement to ‘further national park purposes’.

- **Rural Development**

  Northumberland National Park Authority has a strong track record in working with and supporting local communities. Our Community Enterprise Officers and Farming & Rural Enterprise Officers have for years supported community and business initiatives which support and sensitively exploit the unique quality of the Park.

  We would ask that National Park Authorities should have a role in delivering future rural development initiatives through the Shared Prosperity Fund in the national park. Past experience of programmes such as Leader demonstrated little or no uptake of these programmes until the Park Authority developed a bespoke proposition for the Park and its rural hinterland (Northumberland Uplands). The development of initiatives targeted at the specific opportunities and challenges of the Park has proved successful and we would like the Park to have a role in this in future, as part of a bespoke ‘Growth Deal’ for our national parks.

- **A Third Purpose**

  We believe our existing statutory purposes have served parks well for the past 70 years. Our statutory purposes and duty have not limited out ambition or our ability to work with and support our local communities. The recent granting of a functionally specific ‘power of competence’ has helped support national park authorities in their aim to achieve more self-generated income. What have most often been missing have been the resources to support wider socio-economic development and, in the absence of resources, the need to concentrate on protecting the ‘fabric of the Park’.

  Society has changed and our rural communities face real challenges of connectivity and sustainability in an increasingly urban and global world. Northumberland National Park Authority is therefore not opposed to a third (socio/economic/sustainable development) purpose, however we only believe such an extension to the specific purposes should be considered if the tools and resources to achieve this are made available to national park authorities on an on-going basis, so as not to detract from the delivery of existing statutory purposes for which resources are already very stretched.

**Land Management and Environmental Enhancement**

National Parks are rightly regarded as important areas for biodiversity and amongst our richest environmental assets. Indeed, Northumberland National Park is home to England’s last great wilderness with England’s cleanest rivers, darkest skies, the title of the most tranquil part of England and is a last refuge for threatened species such as the red squirrel.

However we recognise the need to do more. Our ‘Vision for the Natural Environment’ sets a framework for achieving a measurable improvement of the natural environment (key habitats and species) within the national park. Our Business Plan sets out to ‘make greater space for nature’ in the national park and some landowners in the Park are already beginning to trail new land management approaches.

We believe, however, that we do not have the powers or all the tools at our disposal to achieve this currently.

Northumberland National Park Authority relies previously on agri-environment schemes to provide the bulk of the resources to deliver effective land management in the national park.

We would like to see national parks have a role in leading on the design and delivery of
Environmental Land Management Schemes in future. In this way more tailor-made approaches, together with greater land manager buy-in, and ultimately more appropriate outcomes can be achieved. The new Environmental Land Management Schemes can become a powerful means of achieving a step change improvement in the environment in national parks.

Beyond this new approaches to land management are, and can be, further explored through securing additional project and programmes approaches to achieve a dramatic enhancements of the natural environment in our national parks. National Parks should be recognised and embraced as leaders in this area and test-beds for the future. Government should help broker and match fund bespoke programme to achieve such gains in line with the objectives of the 25 year plan for the environment.

This should include not only traditional (productive) land management approaches but also new and experimental approaches including for example, making space for natural and supporting natural regeneration.

- **Forestry**

  Over 23% of the 405 square miles of Northumberland National Park is currently forested. Over 80% of this area is commercial forestry. Forestry is and will continue to be an important generator of income and employment, and supplier of raw materials in Northumberland National Park.

  Northumberland National Park does however currently have very little native woodland cover and the Authority has set itself ambitious targets to enhance native woodlands cover in the Park within the current Management Plan.

  We consider the further development and expansion of commercial forestry to be among one of the greatest potential threats to land management, biodiversity and landscape within the national park.

  The Authority has recently had examples of commercial forestry plantations taking place within previously agreed 'no plant' zones within the Hadrian’s Wall World heritage Site. The pressure for further forestry development only seems to be increasing in and around the national park.

  Northumberland National Park Authority believes that all forestry planting should take place on the basis of the ‘right tree in the right place’. We do not however, believe that the current mechanisms for regulation of forestry are adequate to delivery this.

  The development of new or restructured forestry plantations change the landscape and land use for a generation. In view of this and the potential pace of such changes, as evidenced by past planting, we believe within National Parks that forestry planting and related activities should be subject to planning control. This would ensure forestry development is fully considered in the wider environmental and socio-economic context within which it takes place in all national parks, and ensure proper alignment with the Northumberland National Park Management Plan.

  **A ‘fit for purpose’ boundary**

  The boundary of Northumberland National Park was established over 62 years ago. Since then there have been a number of reports which have looked at potential changes to the boundary, including merging within the adjacent Kielder Border Trust Park; however, no boundary changes have ever been made.

  The NNPA still continues to receive calls for boundary changes and we are aware that there are calls emerging for changes to the national park boundary by individuals and communities who have engaged with this Review.
In truth, the boundary of the national park is not an altogether logical one. To operate effectively the NNPA has often had to work beyond its boundary, for example, with gateway towns such as Bellingham, Rothbury and Wooler which provide important services to the national park and its communities, but which sit immediately adjacent to its boundary. Whilst the NNPA has been relatively comfortable in working in this way, we have never had official endorsement of the need to operate somewhat ‘fuzzy’ boundaries when we work with communities, businesses and their supporting services.

Whilst the NNPA does not have a formal position on changes to the boundary of the park and do not, therefore, wish to propose any changes as part of a boundary review, we believe that this Review should be open to boundary reviews.

It would also be useful for the Review to consider and comment upon the opportunity and indeed the need for national park authorities to work beyond their boundaries when benefit to the park, its purposes and its communities can be clearly demonstrated.

Resources

Our national parks enjoy core ‘grant-in-aid’ form the government and whilst this is currently much less than prior to 2010, it is still critical for the effective operation of national park authorities.

NNPA, like other national park authorities, is committed to increasing the proportion of its budget from self-generated income. To this end the Authority has initiated a series of commercial income generation initiatives, supported the establishment of charitable foundation and directly fund-raised for a great number of projects.

Between 2013 and 2017 the Authority successfully raised £14.8 million to develop and deliver The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre without any additional Defra support. During this period the Authority raised an additional £1.10 for every £1 of ‘grant-in-aid’ provided by Defra funding.

‘Grant-in-aid’ does, and will remain, critical to our national parks; however, the distribution of ‘grant-in-aid’ has never fully been distributed on the basis of a fair funding formula, as set out in the Sarah Wooller Report (Defra 2003). We believe it is time now for government to re-visit this funding formula and the business model on which ‘grant-in-aid’ is based. We also believe this should look not only at the burdens (needs) of each Authority but also, at the income generation potential within each park (as this varies greatly from park to park) thus giving an overall assessment of the relative spending power of each national park authority.

Such a review should consider an irreducible minimum level of resource which a national park authority needs in order to effectively deliver on its statutory purposes and duty. We rightly are ambitious for our national parks and what they can deliver for the benefit of society. We also should constantly be looking for new and novel partnerships and the means to deliver and resource our ambitions.

Where government provides ‘grant-in-aid’ as the foundations upon which to carry the ambitions forward, we believe that it is important that this is done in a fair and consistent basis. We believe the current allocation of the budget across national park authorities does not do this.
Other elements – not agreed as part of the stakeholders workshop to consider in NNPA response

Governance

There is some evidence that this has become an area of focus for the DLR Panel.

- Do we need to comment on the size, composition or means of appointment to the Authority Boards?
- Might the Authority want to make a positive suggestion in respect of governance?

Learning from experience elsewhere

- What examples do we have from the operation of designated landscapes elsewhere which we might suggest to the DLR Panel and which might support the key points we have made above?

Cultural heritage

The historic environment and wider cultural heritage is one of the very special qualities of NNPA. However, discussions either local or national level has not highlighted any focus on this as part of the Review.

- We have drawn attention to the DLR Panel of our key partners in the historic environment at a national and regional level, however, do we wish to say something as an Authority?

Access and recreation

The quality of our access, recreation and visitor facilities has rightly been a focus for national park authorities since their designation. Their effective provision is essential to us in attracting and managing visitors and as such, this underpins a lot of our first and second purpose delivery.

Effective access infrastructure is essential to parks supporting areas such as health, engagement and education as well as conservation, yet nothing is currently being said to the Review Panel either at a national or local level, on this. Rights of way, for sample are critical to national parks.

- Is this an area upon which we need to comment?

Other designations

The Call for Evidence asks how designated landscapes work other designations such as National Trails, National Nature reserves etc.

- Is this an area we wish to comment on?

Tony Gates
Chief Executive (National Park Officer)
29 November 2018