

## NATIONAL PARKS – OPEN FOR BUSINESS

An Offer to the Local Enterprise Partnerships  
from National Park Authorities in England



### A reason to work together

Our National Parks are pro-sustainable-growth and understand the vital role their stunning landscapes play in underpinning large swathes of the rural economy.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are responsible for driving economic growth and job creation in local areas. National Parks are home to an amazing variety of small businesses and where the natural environment is a major economic asset, supporting significant economies particularly in tourism and agriculture. The purposes of the National Parks include to protect and enhance the special qualities of these places. This ensures the effective maintenance of fantastic landscapes that contribute to people's quality of life, the health of workforces and underpins much economic activity.

While better known for their beauty, England's National Parks collectively generate up to £6.3bn GVA, equivalent to that of the UK aerospace industry, or a small city such as Plymouth or Sunderland.

Research commissioned by National Parks England has found that there are over 22,000 businesses in England's National Parks (with the number of businesses per unit of population being twice the national average). They are home to ambitious entrepreneurs and innovative start-ups, and are considerable assets for attracting investors to live and work. Yet they face undoubted challenges that both the LEPs and National Park Authorities (NPAs) are keen to address.

The nature of National Parks and our more remote rural areas means that they are most likely to create hundreds of jobs from growing lots of small and micro businesses, rather than from big developments. Where big development opportunities do arise they need to respect and be assessed against the protected status of National Parks. Providing support to small and micro businesses is crucial to create the jobs, real growth and prosperous, resilient and sustainable rural communities that are grounded in the wonderful landscapes they rely on.

There is real potential to work together to build on our respective strengths. This offer has been designed to use those strengths and the structures already in place to increase the impact of the LEPs' rural economic development programmes in a way that is fully compatible with the statutory purposes of National Parks.

NPAs and LEPs can deliver this together.

#### **Our Objectives**

1. To work in partnership to unlock the potential of National Parks to deliver sustainable economic growth and high quality jobs, including by acting as test beds for new approaches.
2. To ensure that the Strategic Economic Plans of the relevant LEPs are properly taken into account within the planning and policy-making of each National Park Authority.

## The National Park Authority Offer to LEPs

NPAs have a long track record in delivering:

1. Sustainable development in rural areas
2. Trusted relationships with widely dispersed small and micro businesses
3. Track record of working in partnership with other organisations and private sector businesses to bring innovative solutions to rural development
4. Attracting National and European funding to support projects
5. Strong partnerships across their communities with well-established links with local people and businesses.

The NPAs provide a valuable source of expertise and support, not just for fostering sustainable development and social well-being within the National Parks, but sharing that learning for rural areas more broadly.

The NPAs can support LEPs by providing:

<p><b>Access to rurally dispersed businesses</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing tangible support for businesses to grow, expand and re-locate into National Parks</li> <li>• Bringing clusters of businesses together (e.g. farming networks, Rural Business Hubs)</li> <li>• Supporting rural supply chains (e.g. for forestry and local food)</li> <li>• Promoting sustainable tourism initiatives and campaigns</li> <li>• Acting as trusted intermediaries between land owners, farmers, businesses, and local communities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strong community partnerships</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great access to local people to tackle issues like rural isolation</li> <li>• Providing contacts and partnerships (including with neighbouring AONBs)</li> <li>• Assistance with rural skills development</li> </ul>
<p><b>Capacity, expertise and a track record in delivering sustainable development</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practising a positive planning approach that supports affordable housing and sustainable development</li> <li>• Testing new ideas and new rural economic programmes, such as Community Land Trusts and rural self-build</li> <li>• Links with Local Nature Partnerships in support of paragraph 165 of the NPPF</li> <li>• Track record in securing investment to support development</li> </ul>
<p><b>A strategic partner</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to Ministers to support calls for rural investment</li> <li>• An additional voice and champion for rural businesses in their areas;</li> <li>• Access to local and regional rural and heritage networks including rural farming networks and destination management organisations</li> <li>• Respected knowledge to help ‘rural-proof’ economic strategies and delivery;</li> <li>• Access to the national network of National Parks that share advice and good practice.</li> </ul>

## **Aligning our plans**

LEP Strategic Economic Plans and National Park Management and Local Plans should be complementary, targeting key sustainable growth opportunities in local areas. As they are reviewed and updated, NPAs will take the opportunity to ensure that National Park Management Plans and Local Plans take full account of the Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs), European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) Strategies and other LEP policy approaches.

In addition, the NPAs will make available to LEPs their services as expert brokers on the rural dimension of the major economic projects within their SEPs, thus speeding the achievement of LEP targets and maximising the sustainability of their delivery. They will also be available to assist with cross-LEP projects and programmes, where requested, and be one of the range of trusted delivery partners that the LEP will draw on within its wider partnership 'team' approach.

## **Opportunities to accelerate rural development in National Parks**

Some SEPs and European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) Strategies already accord an economic development role to NPAs, such as the Cumbria and York, North Yorkshire and East Riding LEPs. However, if we are to accelerate rural development, we believe there is a real opportunity to strengthen the contribution of all NPAs.

### **In order to maximise the potential synergies, LEPs could assist by:**

- Recognising the unique economic value of our National Parks and AONBs and their potential to help grow a more sustainable economy.
- Working in partnership with NPAs and AONBs by:
  - Recognising their role within Strategic Economic Plans and their future revisions;
  - Co-designing tailored rural programmes;
  - Highlighting NPA growth priorities and National Park Management Plan objectives in future 'Growth Deals' and other plans; and
  - Co-investing with National Park Sustainable Development Funds (and their equivalents) to target support for rural SMEs.
- Involving NPAs in their formal governance arrangements, including by having a seat on:
  - Statutory joint committees (as already happens in a number of areas, such as Coast to Capital and the South Downs); and
  - ESIF Committees (as already happens in the South Downs, the New Forest, the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks).
- Working together to secure greater devolution (e.g. of powers, freedoms, policy, legislation or finance) to further support the rural economy and achieve sustainable development.

## Better Together

### Together we can:

- Create more, good quality jobs in some of the most remote rural areas;
- Make National Parks better for business by improving infrastructure and skills;
- Help entrepreneurs and local businesses to become more sustainable and resilient;
- Grow a high quality, more resilient visitor economy by linking world class environmental assets with world class customer service;
- Give a major boost to land-based industries and markets, including by supporting the development of supply chains;
- Use the National Parks' superb landscapes to enhance people's quality of life and attract new businesses and the highly skilled workforce they require; and
- Demonstrate how distinctive high quality environments can be a driver and inspiration for thriving businesses.

For more information and lead contacts in each of England's ten National Parks please contact:

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