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Defra's 8-Point Plan for England's National Parks

Executive Summary

This spring Defra published a [report '8 point plan for England's National Parks'](#). The report was endorsed by National Parks England, Natural England and Environment Agency. The document sets out their collective ambition to put National Parks '*at the heart of the way we think about the environment and how we manage it for future generations.*'

The 8 point plan (Summary in Annex 1) sets out laudable ambitions for National Parks of connecting people with nature, improving the rural economy and encouraging visitors to the National Parks. At no point is it recognised that farming underpins the landscape and all the activities suggested in the 8 point plan.

The NFU believes that farming is at the heart of all activity in the National Parks. Without a viable farming industry there would not be the beautiful landscape on which the National Parks are based. Without that managed landscape National Parks would not have the offer that Defra's plan aims to promote.

In the NFU's view the plan should recognise that:

- Farming creates and maintains the thriving natural environments supporting the beautiful, semi-natural landscapes of the National Parks.
- Agriculture is the driver of National Parks vibrant rural economy. The plan should acknowledge that a thriving agricultural sector in and around the National Parks is part of a wider agri-food and fuel industry that is both economically and strategically important.
- Farming produces the food the National Parks want to promote.
- Agriculture supports health and well-being providing outdoor recreational opportunities.
- Farming is central to providing the national treasures on which a vibrant rural tourism sector within the National Park is built.
- Farming maintains the 'world class' landscapes for international visitors and landscapes everyone recognises as our National Parks.
- Positive house policies so that there are clear rules as how the communities living and maintaining these environments and buildings can continue to do so.

What does this mean for members?

The 8 point plan (Summary in Annex 1) sets out laudable ambitions for National Parks of connecting people with nature, improving the rural economy and encouraging visitors to the National Parks. It does recognise that there are over 17,000 people are employed on commercial farms across the English National Parks. It goes on to say National Parks are a working landscapes and National Parks support farming. At no point is it recognised that farming underpins the landscape and all the activities suggested in the 8 point plan.

What is the NFU doing?

The NFU believes that farming is at the heart of all activity in the National Parks. Without a viable farming industry there would not be the beautiful landscape on which the National Parks are based. Without that managed landscape National Parks would not have the offer that Defra's plan aims to promote. The NFU has raised these directly points with Defra.

Background and Supporting Information

This spring Defra published a [report '8 point plan for England's National Parks'](#). The report was endorsed by National Parks England, Natural England and Environment Agency. The document sets out their collective ambition to put National Parks '*at the heart of the way we think about the environment and how we manage it for future generations.*'

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The NFU would like to see:

- Improved engagement between the National Parks with farmers and land managers. To foster good relationships and develop a mutual understanding of farming business needs and National Park priorities.
- Recognition of the wider benefits provided by farming. Farming manages the thriving natural environment supporting the beautiful, semi-natural landscapes of the National Parks. Changes made on farm benefit the environment. For example, changes to farmyard buildings so they are more resilient providing water quality benefits.
- High speed broadband and mobile phone coverage throughout the National Parks so that rural businesses are not commercially disadvantaged.
- The streamlining of the planning process and for national planning policy to recognise the strategic importance of food production. Concerns about landscape protection should be balanced with an understanding of the need for farm businesses to change with the times. Retaining viable farm businesses enables the continued management of the wider landscape that the National Parks are valued for. We need imaginative and flexible planning policies in the Parks that:

- strike a sensible balance between landscape protection and the modern infrastructure needs of farming in a competitive world market;
 - enable farm businesses to diversify within agriculture to respond to market pressures to retain a viable business;
 - facilitate diversification into non-agricultural business enterprises to support core agricultural activity;
 - allow farm businesses to remain compliant with evolving environmental and public health legislation;
 - support and encourage renewable energy and climate change adaptation project.
- Greater simplicity and flexibility in the delivery of rural development schemes to support farm competitiveness and diversification.
 - Positive house policies so that there are clear rules as how the communities living and maintaining these environments and buildings can continue to do so.
 - For new areas of National Parks, for example, the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks, existing policies will need to be consulted on and refined to reflect the needs of the new communities, before they are implemented in those areas e.g. removal of permitted development rights. There needs to be transitional arrangements in place where there are substantive changes.
 - Tourism strategies that recognises the potential of farm-based tourist activity, accommodation and catering provision.
 - Resources directed toward better maintenance and visitor management of existing access rather than the creation of new routes. This needs to be supported with:
 - Awareness campaigns aimed at dog walkers
 - A robust local strategy for managing tourist honeypot sites and other problem areas.
 - Local food strategies, embracing a range of produce within National Parks, linked to tourism opportunities and local authority procurement policies
 - Continued emphasis on cost-effective, industry-led initiatives to improve biodiversity and resource protection such as the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, Tried and Tested nutrient management planning and the pesticides Voluntary Initiative.
 - The National Parks assisting schools to build and maintain links with local farms to encourage young people into the food and farming industry. This should be supported by a strategy to encourage new recruits in to the farming industry.
 - The National Parks working with farmers and growers to boost understanding of agriculture.

Next Steps

The NFU has raised our concerns about the 8 point plan directly with Defra. For members involved in National Parks it would be constructive to raise similar concerns and ideas for improvements with your National Park contacts.

End

Annex 1 - Summary: 8-Point Plan for England's National Parks

Inspiring Natural Environments

1. Connect young people with nature

- Double the number of young people to experience a National Park as part of National Citizen Service by 2020.
- A new package of teaching materials for schools based on National Parks.
- National Park Authorities to engage directly with over 60,000 young people per year through schools visits by 2017/18.

2. Create thriving natural environments

- National Park Authorities, with the Environment Agency and Natural England, to champion integrated management of the natural environment, showcasing the benefits that designated landscapes can bring.

Drivers of the Rural Economy

3. National Parks driving growth in international tourism

- Promote National Parks as world-class destinations to visitors from overseas and the UK.
- Increase annual visitors from 90m to 100m, generating an estimated £440m for local businesses.

4. Deliver new apprenticeships in National Parks

- Develop three new apprenticeship standards led by National Park Authorities.
- Double the number of apprenticeships in National Park Authorities by 2020.

5. Promote the best of British food from National Parks

- National Parks will be known for, and visited as, great food destinations.
- Work with National Park Authorities and the Great British Food Unit to deliver more Protected Food Names for National Park products and increase exports.
- The Government will celebrate National Park produce.

National Treasures

6. Everyone's National Parks

- Complete the designation to extend the boundaries of the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.
- Encourage more diverse visitors to National Parks.
- Promote volunteering in National Parks.
- Celebrate the 70th Anniversary of National Parks' creation.

7. Landscape and heritage in National Parks

- Work with the Heritage Lottery Fund to achieve their objective of encouraging more fundable projects in the Natural Heritage sector.
- Enhance people's involvement in the interpretation of the historic environment and natural beauty in National Parks.
- Support the Lake District's bid for UNESCO World Heritage Status.
- Tell the story of cultural landscapes in England's National Parks.

8. Health and wellbeing in National Parks

- Promote innovative schemes for National Parks to serve national health.
- Realise the immense potential for outdoor recreation in National Parks.

