

# Landscapes Review (National Parks and AONBs): Call for Evidence: Submission by the Sport and Recreation Alliance

## The Sport and Recreation Alliance

The Sport and Recreation Alliance believes that the power of sport and recreation can change lives and bring communities together. Together with our members and in partnership with the wider sector, we make the most of opportunities and tackle the areas that provide a challenge. We provide advice, support and guidance to our members and the sector, who represent traditional governing bodies of games and sport, county sports partnerships, outdoor recreation, water pursuits, and movement and dance exercise. As the voice of the sector, we work with Government, policy makers and the media to make sure grassroots sport and recreation grows and thrives. Having an active nation is important as it delivers huge benefits to society and the millions of participants, volunteers, staff and spectators.

## Part 1 – Opening Thoughts

*We would like any opening thoughts on the role played by National Parks and AONBs - you may want to make a more detailed suggestion further on.*

### **7. What do you think works overall about the present system of National Parks and AONBs in England? Add any points that apply specifically to only National Parks or AONBs.**

Being active outdoors is proven to support physical and mental wellbeing, and drive significant financial flows into local economies – visitors spent more than £17 billion in 2013/14 ([Reconomics Plus](#), 2017). National Parks and AONBs provide invaluable opportunities for the population to be active in the natural environment, and increasing this form of engagement should be a priority for the Review.

### **8. What do you think does not work overall about the system and might be changed? Add any points that apply specifically to National Parks or AONBs.**

Engagement with National Parks and AONBs is not consistent across the different geographies and population demographics ([Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment](#), September 2018). Driving greater engagement with the natural environment, by improving access and encouraging more people to participate in physical activity and outdoor recreation, particularly those from underrepresented groups, should therefore be a priority for bodies with responsibility for National Parks and AONBs.

Government made its intent clear in the 25 Year Environment Plan, through the proposed 'Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing' programme, to promote the natural environment as a pathway to good health. The Review should consider how National Parks and AONBs' vital role in providing opportunities to be active in the natural environment can be optimised.

## Part 2 – Views

*We'd like to hear views on particular issues.*

**11. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in working with farmers and land managers and how might this change as the current system of farm payments is reformed?**

Farmers and land managers have a key role to play in supporting recreational activities and working with National Parks and AONBs to optimise this should be carefully considered within the Review. Allowing responsible access is essential to enabling the public to engage with the natural environment, and this can only be optimised through more joined up working with landowners – National Parks and AONBs must do all they can to deliver this at a local level.

There is an opportunity for farmers and land managers to work in partnership with outdoor recreation networks to support the delivery of physical and recreational activities and provide social action opportunities, which also enable these networks' users to help improve water quality, ensure healthy woodlands and support habitat restoration. National Parks and AONBs will often play a key role in facilitating and mediating these relationships, and strengthening this facilitative role should form an important part of the Review.

**12. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in supporting and managing access and recreation?**

The natural environment provides crucial opportunities for everyone to be active and in doing so generates an important public good. Responsible access within National Parks and AONBs also provides members of the public with the opportunity to connect with the natural environment and improve their health and wellbeing. Driving greater engagement with the natural environment should be a priority for the Review and for those organisations with responsibility for National Parks and AONBs. The natural environment plays a vital role in providing opportunities to be active, with evidence from Natural England ([Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment](#), September 2018) suggesting that health and exercise is the most frequently cited motivation for visiting the outdoors.

There is also strong evidence ([Reconomics Plus](#), 2017) to demonstrate that being active outdoors contributes significantly to individuals' physical and mental health and provides a wide range of social and economic benefits. As such, optimising access to National Parks and AONBs for as many people as possible is vital to support broader social, health and economic policy objectives – it is important that bodies with responsibility for National Parks and AONBs recognise sport and recreation organisations' contribution to these agendas and actively engage with them moving forwards.

Likewise, the Alliance would encourage further consideration of how bodies responsible for National Parks and AONBs might expand existing educational access to enable more children and young people – particularly from underrepresented groups – to enjoy physical activity in, and engagement with, the outdoors.

**14. What views do you have on the role National Park and AONB authorities play on housing and transport in their areas?**

Limited connectivity severely restricts the public's physical access to large parts of the UK's natural environment. The Review should consider how bodies responsible for National Parks and AONBs can provide improved infrastructure to connect the public with the natural environment, recognising the prosperity which this could drive for rural communities and the wider social and economic benefits which are delivered through individuals' pursuit of outdoor recreation experiences ([Reconomics Plus](#), 2017).

### **Part 3 – Current Ways of Working**

*We'd like to ask some specific questions about the way National Parks and AONBs work at the moment.*

**17. What views do you have on their efforts to involve people from all parts of society, to encourage volunteering and improve health and well-being?**

Eco-social action programmes have the scope to support priority environmental outcomes, alongside driving enhanced social and economic outcomes. Government made reference to pursuing youth social action

projects in the 25 Year Environment Plan, explicitly stating the intent to make 2019 a year of social action for the environment. The youth sector and the #iwill campaign were both cited as identified partners, but we would ask that National Parks and AONBs go further and engage the outdoor recreation sector as a primary partner for social action initiatives as these organisations will often have large pre-existing networks of potential volunteers.

There is some good outreach and partnership working with the outdoor recreation sector at present – for example, the Ramblers' [Big Pathwatch](#) campaign and the British Mountaineering Council's [Mend our Mountains](#) campaign – but the Review should consider how National Parks and AONBs might do more. They might for example, integrate eco-therapy programmes to deliver improved health outcomes or incentivise greater partnership working with local and national outdoor recreation networks to better engage underrepresented groups.

**Sport and Recreation Alliance  
December 2018**