

## A national outdoor recreation strategy Literature review

October 2015

### 1. Introduction

The Sport and Recreation Alliance and Outdoor Industries Association (OIA) was asked by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to consult the outdoor recreation sector on what could be included in a national outdoor recreation strategy for England. As part of our consultation we ran an online survey which included a question around what evidence, if any, is there to support what people said needs to change.

This review summarises the evidence that survey respondents highlighted and is set out under the key themes identified within the consultation. This is part of a package of reports that the Alliance and OIA shared with DCMS.

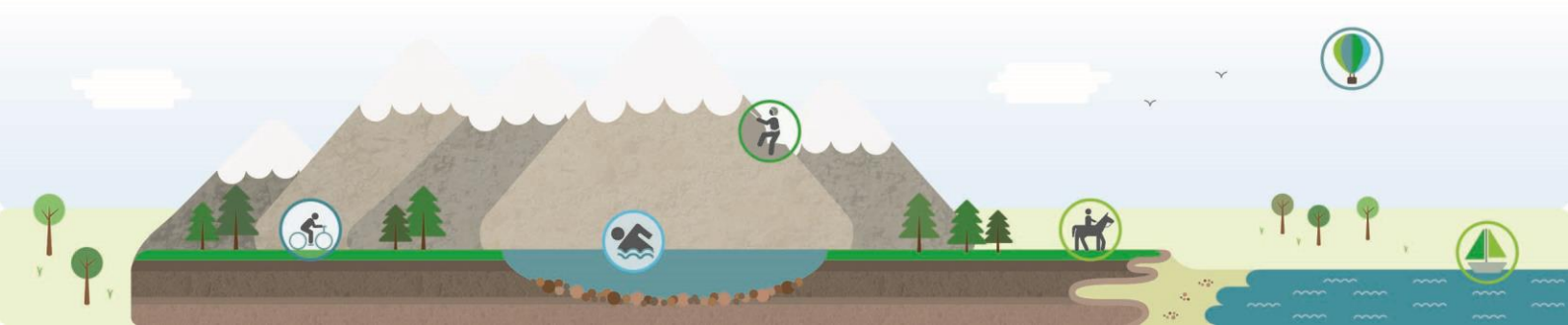
### 2. Outdoor recreation helps people be happy and healthy

This section summarises the benefits that outdoor recreation brings to an individual's health and general wellbeing.

Natural England (2012<sup>1</sup>), in its study into the benefits of outdoor learning, states that the diverse benefits of learning in the natural environment offer a potentially compelling rationale for increasing the amount of time children and young people are taught in the outdoors. Some of the benefits include:

- Making other school subjects rich and relevant and gets apathetic students excited about learning
- Studies have shown that exposure to the natural environment can lower the effects of various mental health issues, and even enhance the mental health and wellbeing of children and adults
- Hands on contact with nature also appears to be a means to cultivating community
- Teachers become more enthusiastic about teaching and helps them create more innovative teaching strategies after taking students into the outdoors

Some commentators noted the dangers of physical inactivity. The Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support (2014<sup>2</sup>) report that physical inactivity is responsible for 17% of premature deaths and can either cause a number of health conditions such as heart diseases, diabetes and cancer, or increase your chances of developing one or more of these conditions by up to 30%.



In contrast, if everyone in England was sufficiently active, nearly 37,000 deaths could be prevented, although some studies do suggest that only 6% of men and 4% of women currently meet Public Health England's suggested 150 minutes of physical activity a week. As a way of reversing these figures and getting more people active, NICE's (2006<sup>3</sup>) guidelines recommend Government and local authorities do more to encourage people to walk and cycle and promote the benefits of doing either one.

There is also evidence to suggest that where you live affects how much access you have to green spaces and even how healthy you are. A report by University College London (UCL, 2014<sup>4</sup>) into using natural solutions to tackle health inequalities says that people who live in the most deprived areas are ten times less likely to live in the greenest areas, while in contrast the most affluent 20% of wards in England have five times the amount of parks or general green space than the most deprived 10% of wards. Therefore, people who live in more affluent areas tend to have more exposure to green spaces and thus be more physically active and have better health outcomes.

### Case Study: Natural Devon

In 2012 Devon County Council set up the Natural Devon partnership to ensure that everyone in Devon has the opportunity and confidence to be 'naturally active' in order to improve their health and wellbeing. Since its creation, the partnership has:

- Helped to run wellbeing workshops at a care conference in Devon
- Organised the May 2015 half term Naturally Healthy Week, which provided information to children and their families on different outdoor activities they could do at half term and developing case studies of outdoor activities to demonstrate the positive impact of outdoor activities on someone's health
- Compacts signed in 2014 between Natural Devon and the Devon and Torbay Health and Wellbeing Boards to maximise the health and wellbeing impact of the natural environment

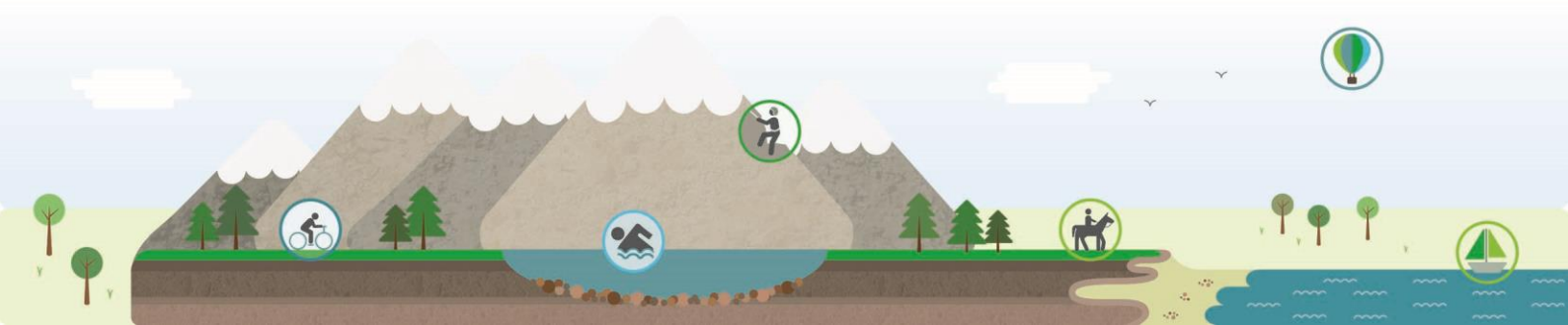
For more information, see here: <http://www.naturaldevon.org.uk/priorities-and-projects/naturally->

### Case Study: The Mosaic project

The Mosaic project is aimed at getting people from black and ethnic minority communities and introducing them to national parks and teaching them about the many benefits of the outdoors. One particular project, in Wales, recruited young people aged 16-25 from deprived urban areas to increase their use of their local national park and make them community champions in their local areas to spread the word about the benefits of outdoor recreation.

The young people recruited on this project found that they increased their confidence, developed professional skills, felt healthier and had a positive experience from using Exmoor Park. They also confirmed that people they brought back to the national park also felt better after visiting Exmoor.

For more information, see here: <http://www.cnp.org.uk/benefits-using-national-parks>



### 3. Outdoor recreation helps children and young people achieve their potential

This section summarises how outdoor learning can help children and young people achieve their potential and develop their skills in their academic, social or work life.

There is a wealth of evidence that demonstrates how the outdoors can improve children and young people's academic and social skills. The Education Endowment Fund (2014<sup>5</sup>), in a survey of over 800 primary and secondary school pupils, found that learning outside the classroom experiences, such as visits to farms or parks, can improve children's writing standards by nine months on average, increasing to 18 months for pupils on free school meals, showing how learning outdoors can help disadvantaged pupils in catching up with their peers.

Similarly, Natural England (2011<sup>6</sup>) found that by far the greatest proportion of research findings showed that students who learn in the natural environment generally perform better in reading, mathematics, science and social studies and show a greater enthusiasm for studying science, as well as getting apathetic students more interested in learning. This also illustrates the role learning in the environment can play in helping to motivate pupils who were previously not interested in school and giving them an interest and a vocation to pursue when they leave school.

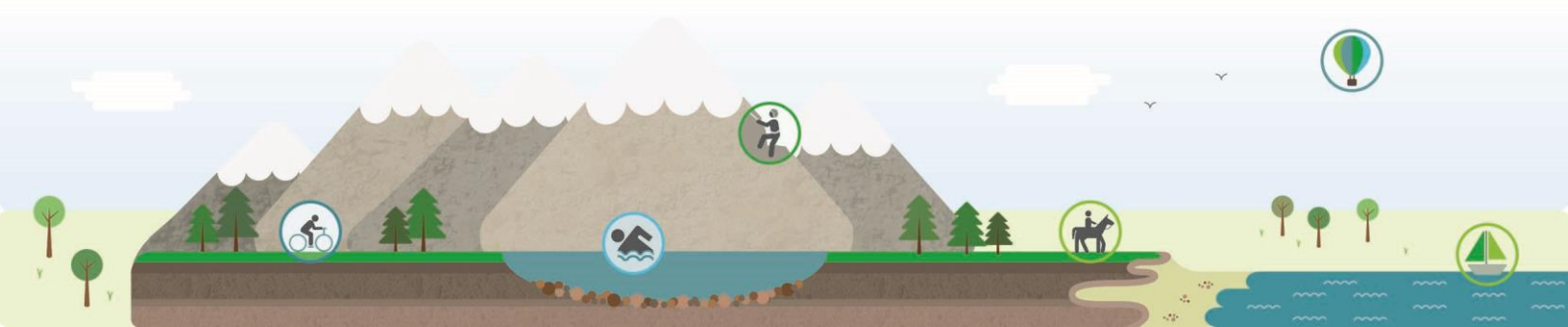
The report also mentions the contribution learning in the natural environment makes to the economy through its contribution to lifetime earnings associated with outdoor jobs. The estimated annual value of environmental knowledge in 2010 was £2.1 billion, of which learning outdoors makes a significant contribution.

Natural England also mentions research which suggests that teachers benefit from introducing their students to the natural environment. Studies have shown that teachers who have taught in the natural environment become more enthusiastic about teaching and start to develop more innovative teaching strategies back with them into the classroom, while Dillon et al, quoted in a National College for School Leadership report into outdoor learning (2012<sup>7</sup>), found that teachers reported an improved relationship with students and a personal development in their teaching. Giving teachers a confidence boost, making a teacher more enthusiastic about their profession and giving them fresh inspiration for how to teach illustrates how beneficial outdoor learning can be to a child's education.

However, others warned of the barriers that face teachers who want to take their pupils into the natural environment. A report published by the House of Commons' Education and Skills Committee (2005<sup>8</sup>) into education outside the classroom found that many teachers were deterred by the (false) perception that outdoor education is high risk, as well as by cumbersome bureaucracy and funding and time management issues. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Skills and local authorities do more to publicise the benefits of education outside of the classroom.

Furthermore, the National College for School Leadership (2012<sup>9</sup>) stated that some newly qualified teachers had no experience of using the outdoors in their teaching, despite the benefits of them doing so, and needed training for them to be able to exploit the opportunities of outdoor learning. The report recommended that teachers are given training in, and experience of, outdoor learning.

There is also evidence that outdoor learning can help develop a child's personal and social skills, as much as their academic ones. Natural England (2011<sup>10</sup>) states that a broad range of skills, from technical to social ones, have been identified as broad outcomes of learning in the natural environment. M Rickinson et al (2004<sup>11</sup>) in a review of research on outdoor learning found that fieldwork can have a positive impact on long-term memory as well as lead to an improvement in a person's social skills.



Other benefits from outdoor learning come from Ofsted, who in *Learning outside the Classroom: how far should you go?* (2008<sup>12</sup>), argues that learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development, if lessons are properly planned and implemented well. The RSPB, in *Every Child Outdoors* (2010<sup>13</sup>), reveals that research has found that experience of the outdoors has the potential to develop a child's positive self-image, confidence in their abilities and experience of dealing with uncertainty.

### Case Study: Duke Of Edinburgh award

The benefits of outdoor learning and activity do not just have to come from activities organised with an academic purpose in mind. A report by the Pears Foundation and the Duke of Edinburgh award (2007) found that 74% of young people who took part in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme said they developed higher levels of self-esteem after participating in the scheme, while 71% identified improved self-belief and 64% felt as a result of the scheme they are better at sport and physical activity.

For more information, see here: <http://www.dofe.org/en/content/cms/about-us/our-impact/>

## 4. The outdoors is accessible to all

This section summarises research conducted into how accessible our outdoor spaces are.

Research reveals that a large number of people are taking advantage of the great outdoors. Natural England's (2015<sup>14</sup>) monitoring of engagement with the natural environment tells us that 58% (24 million) of the English adult population claimed to visit the outdoors at least once a week, while an estimated 2.93 billion visits were made to the natural environment between March 2013 and February 2014. Support for open green spaces also remains strong, with 94% of the adult population agreeing that having open green spaces near to where they live is important, while 88% say that spending time outdoors is an important part of my life.

Furthermore, another Natural England report, *Meaningful Engagement in the Natural Environment survey* (2015<sup>15</sup>), reveals that overall visits to the natural environment were up 9.6% from last year (2014), from 685.8 to 751.8 million visits, while the proportion of the population visiting the natural environment was 38.9 million.

In addition, the Heritage Lottery Fund's (2014<sup>16</sup>) report on the state of the UK's public parks found that 2.6 billion estimated visits are made to the UK's parks each year. However, it also warns that the quality and condition of many parks will dramatically decline due to:

- 86% of park managers report cuts to revenue budgets since 2010 and they expect this trend to continue for the next three years
- 71% of households with children under 10 are concerned that reductions in council budgets could have a negative impact on the condition of their local park
- 45% of local authorities are considering selling parks and green spaces or transferring their management

Similarly, the Natural Environment White Paper in 2011, released by Natural Choice (2011<sup>17</sup>), says that, despite the social value of people being able to access the countryside being in excess of £10 billion, over 30% of the services provided by our natural environment are in decline. The report recommends that the Government does more to protect and improve our natural environment, such as by establishing local nature partnerships to strengthen local action on the natural environment and reconnecting people and nature through making it easier for people to access nature.





There is also evidence of how accessible national parks are. A report by Visit England (2014<sup>18</sup>) on the accessible tourist market reveals that, in 2013, one in five of all tourism day visits in England included someone with a health condition or impairment, and spending £9.4 billion, showing how providing easy access to people with a disability can also provide economic benefits to the tourism industry.

## 5. The outdoors is protected

This section is about the protection of the countryside and national parks.

The National Parks Survey, conducted by the Peak District National Park (2012<sup>19</sup>), reveals that 96% of respondents say that it is important for us as a nation to protect areas of the countryside from development. This research clearly shows that people value the countryside enough to want to protect it from being built over by developers.

Despite this, there is evidence that more of the countryside is being earmarked for development. Research carried out by the National Trust (2014<sup>20</sup>) suggests that the Government's planning policy contains loopholes that allows developers to build housing in the wrong locations, and side-stepping sites allocated in local plans.

Furthermore, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE, 2013<sup>21</sup>) has highlighted four threats to national parks and areas of outstanding beauty, as well as landscapes that lack national protection but are deeply valued by local communities. It reports that the threats are energy, housing, transport and tourism.

To solve this, the CPRE calls for the Government to strengthen national planning policy by giving greater weight to the protection of nationally designated and locally valued landscapes.

## 6. Outdoor recreation contributions to the economy

This section summarises the evidence on the contribution outdoor recreation makes to the UK's economy.

Evidence shows that the outdoors makes a significant contribution to the UK's economy. The Sport and Recreation Alliance's *Reconomics* report (2014<sup>22</sup>) found that

- In 2012/13 the 42.4 million adults who visited the natural environment spend £21 billion
- Of all overnight trips taken in Britain in 2012, 37% related to trips involving outdoor recreation, equating to a figure of £10 billion
- In 2012, the outdoor specialist market was estimated to be worth £1.43 billion
- Walking tourism alone supports up to 245,000 equivalent full-time jobs, and contributed up to £2.76 billion for the English economy

Furthermore, National Park England, in *Much More than a View* (2015<sup>23</sup>), found that the 260 million people who visit national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty spend in excess of £6 billion and support over 85,500 businesses and more than 120,000 jobs.

## 7. Outdoor recreation demonstrates its economic and social value

This section summarises the evidence on the economic and social value of the outdoors.

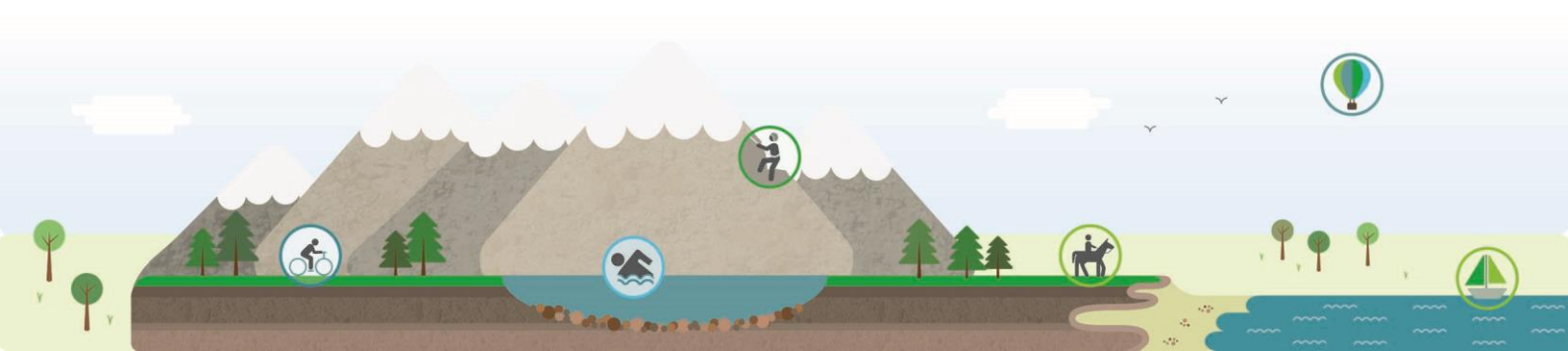
A review of the social value of sport written by the Sports Industry Research Centre (SIRC, 2015<sup>24</sup>) for the DCMS found that there is strong evidence that sports participation improves pro-social behaviour and reduces crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as having a positive effect on educational outcomes by improving children's self-esteem and confidence.



There is also evidence that shows that national parks deliver value for money for the taxpayer. A report produced by National Parks (2013<sup>25</sup>) states that public expenditure on national parks in England equates to less than £1 per year per head of the population, which is excellent value for the benefits they deliver.

## 8. Conclusion

This review illustrates the many benefits that outdoor recreation can bring to those who take advantage of it and explore it. The outdoor recreation sector identified benefits to an individual's health and wellbeing, in helping children and young people to achieve their potential and develop their academic, work-based and personal skills, in being accessible to all, protected from development, the contribution it makes to the UK's economy and its economic and social value to all.



## ENDNOTES

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