



January 2024

Dear Party Leader,

The future of National Parks is in your hands

This year, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of National Parks in the UK, we urge you to set out a programme of action to safeguard this legacy and ensure these landscapes can thrive into the next century. In the face of climate breakdown, a nature crisis, growing inequality and a hollowing out of rural communities, National Parks can play a vital role in tackling some of the biggest challenges the UK faces. 2024 is an opportunity for a new deal for our great National Parks, to ensure that they deliver for people, society and the planet.

Our movement began over 100 years ago, to campaign for the safeguarding of the nation's most beautiful and special landscapes. We recognise that each National Park has a unique character and faces its own set of challenges, but we are committed to working together in securing the changes that will meet the needs of all the Parks. At the end of last year, we met in the Lake District National Park to agree a set of actions that we believe the future of National Parks depend upon. We urge you to show your commitment to National Parks and adopt these policies as your own.

1. A new deal for National Parks

Cuts in Government funding over the last decade have enfeebled all National Park Authorities, many have been forced to sell off National Park land to balance the books and shut down vital services such as Park Rangers. It's clear they cannot effectively deliver their statutory purposes and are unable to leverage the full potential of private sector investment without a sufficient core government grant. We are calling for restoration of funding, in real terms, to 2010 levels and a long-term funding commitment for the next decade and beyond. In return, Government should set out clear expectations for delivery on nature recovery, inclusion and other key outcomes.

2. Every child to have an adventure in a Protected Landscape

National Parks provide huge health and wellbeing benefits. Their simple joy and wonder should be available to every citizen of our nation. Yet, just 6% of visitors are under the age of 25, compared to around 29% of the population. We are calling for every child and young person to have an adventure in a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with an outdoor learning experience being a core part of the National Curriculum.

3. Bring an end to water pollution in our National Parks

Many rivers and lakes are polluted across our National Parks – water companies are failing to recognise their international status as protected areas for nature. We are calling for water companies to prioritise action and end water pollution in National Parks. Peatland catchments must be recovered at scale to address Net Zero targets.

4. Back farmers' efforts to restore nature in National Parks

From lowland agriculture to upland hill farmers, National Park land managers and catchment neighbours are currently crippled by uncertainty. Yet these people are the solution to managing National Parks for nature's recovery. We urgently need to offer much greater rewards for farmers and land managers, with payments targeted in National Parks tied to delivery of management plans. Such payments need to swiftly enable appropriate management in stocking densities and inputs, including reductions in the use of pesticides and fertilisers.

5. Ensure that rural communities have the homes they deserve

High levels of second homes and holiday lets have afflicted rural communities in some areas and made it impossible for many working people to live in National Parks. This has created a demographic divide, with families and young people forced to leave. It can also make it hard for employers in some areas to recruit the staff they need. We urgently need effective regulation to control the negative impacts of holiday lets, Air B&Bs and second homes, with National Park Authorities empowered to implement solutions.

6. Manage visitor numbers for the long-term health of the parks

The nation is in danger of loving our National Parks to death. With over 100 million visitors each year, and a skeleton ranger service, they are not being managed effectively to promote responsible activities. National Park Authorities need stronger powers to manage visitor numbers and offer innovative solutions. Charges or levies designed to reduce unsustainable visitor pressure must be implemented in a way that is proportionate and ensures all income raised in National Parks is reinvested into education, advice and park maintenance.

7. Improve sustainable travel to tackle the climate crisis and ensure the National Parks are truly available for all

Car travel by visitors is the greatest source of CO2 emissions in National Parks, and nationally 24% of households do not have access to a private car. We are calling for innovative charging schemes to reduce car travel where needed, with monies invested in public transport to enable everyone to enjoy and experience National Parks.

8. Reaffirm the planning protections that keep our National Parks safe

Now is the time to retain and improve existing planning controls within National Parks; this includes removing National Parks from Freeport zones and retaining exemptions for permitted development for conversions of barns and rural buildings within National Parks.

We urge you to put National Parks at the heart of your election manifesto and plans for Government over the coming year. We invite you to meet with us to discuss these policies, to share these commitments with the public and revel in the wonders of National Parks, to mark their 75th anniversary.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Rose O'Neill, CEO, Campaign for National Parks

Mark Collins, Chair, The Broads Society

Michael Hill, Chief Executive, Friends of the Lake District

Adrian Leaman, Chair, North York Moors Association

Dr Bruce McLeod, Chair, Friends of the Dales

Kate O'Sullivan, Chair, The Exmoor Society

David Sawyer, Chair, Friends of the South Downs

Les Sturch, Acting Chair, CPRE Peak District and South Yorkshire

Tom Usher, CEO, Dartmoor Preservation Association

John Ward, Chairman, Friends of the New Forest