



Public Health  
England



# **An Accord between National Parks England and Public Health England to support joint action on improving health and wellbeing through our national parks**

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## A National Accord

The Accord represents a high-level commitment between National Parks England and Public Health England to work proactively and practically together to secure better public health outcomes. It draws on the strength of both organisations to deliver this shared goal by capitalising on the significant opportunities for people to improve their physical and mental health and overall wellbeing through interaction with National Parks; and recognising the role which the National Parks play as part of our wider natural environment that can support keeping people healthy.

The Accord sets out the proposed terms of the collaboration and timetable for implementation. It is not intended to be legally binding.

### Roles and responsibilities

**National Parks England** is a not for profit company that exists to support policy and practice by coordinating the views of the nine National Park Authorities (NPAs) and the Broads Authority across England. It does this by providing a collective voice for the views of the English NPAs (hereafter to include the Broads Authority); raising the profile of the work of the authorities to policy and other decision makers; facilitating discussion amongst NPAs on issues of common concern; supporting the development and capacity of the NPAs to effect change; and working in partnership with other bodies where this adds value.

**Public Health England** is the expert national public health agency which fulfils the Secretary of State for Health's statutory duty to protect health and address inequalities, and executes his power to promote the health and wellbeing of the nation. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. It executes its role through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE has a specialist public health workforce with a wide range of experience and expertise with a national team working across government and with national partners to improve health. PHE has 9 local Centres whose role is to work with local government and key partners to support them to improve the public's health across all sections of the community.

### The National Parks and Health

Taken together the National Parks cover 9.7% of England and represent some of our most beautiful and inspiring landscapes. They are home to over 330,000 people; to over 22,000 businesses and host around 90 million visitors every year.

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They provide opportunities for adventure and relaxation alike – are generally free at point of access, and open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. And with half of the country's population within an hour's travel of a National Park, the opportunities for engendering a greater opportunity for better physical and mental wellbeing are immense. The parks represent a significant proportion of the green lungs of the country and are also very much able to support a more proactive approach to preventing ill health and improving physical activity.

There is significant and growing evidence of the physical and mental health benefits of access to good quality green space in town and country with a range of positive health outcomes. There is also evidence to show that some of the environmental benefits of green spaces include improved air and water quality, access to tranquility and decreased risk of flooding. These may all become more important with future expected changes in the climate. Accessing green spaces can also bring other benefits such as greater community cohesion and less social isolation.

The National Park Authorities that help manage these fragile areas, in partnership with a wide range of people and organisations, do so in ways that contribute to public health outcomes. Some examples of this include:

- a) promoting accessible opportunities for walking, cycling, and a host of other activities to residents and visitors including those living in the major urban conurbations that surround the National Parks;
- b) working within and leading multi-agency partnerships to support local Walking for Health initiatives with 'stepping stone projects' that support and allow for gradual, achievable increases in levels of exertion and challenge;
- c) employing dedicated link staff who are working with General Practitioners, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Health and Well Being Boards to run programmes that aim to reduce health inequalities in targeted groups amongst nearby populations;
- d) facilitating capital investment in infrastructure and on-going management for walking and cycling routes and networks in National Parks;
- e) providing dedicated outreach programmes to support those with particular accessibility needs or who otherwise encounter obstacles to accessing our National Parks in order that they can have safe, fulfilling experiences in these inspirational and life-affirming places;
- f) working with schools, the John Muir Trust, and a host of other education providers to enable young people to benefit from a closer connection with nature and memorable outdoor activities from an early age;
- g) encouraging and facilitating economic development that supports employment for people who are often living in deep rural areas where opportunities are few;
- h) providing opportunities for meaningful volunteering experiences – approximately 43,000 volunteer days every year, that encourage physical activity, social interaction, confidence and a sense of purpose; and

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- i) adopting health and wellbeing outcomes with partners amongst the priorities in National Park Management Plans.

This activity involves all teams within our National Park Authorities. As well as the benefits received by individuals and communities; our National Parks further public health outcomes by providing other 'ecosystem services' for society. Examples include being the locations for the rearing or production of high quality healthy food; areas that sustain pure drinking water; and significant stores of carbon that mitigate against climate change.

## **Next Steps: Working together to effect change**

PHE and NPE share a desire to unlock and maximise the huge opportunity that National Parks provide for delivering public health outcomes. Many of these will be determined by local circumstances and priority setting by individual NPAs, and by local authorities as they develop health and wellbeing strategies for their localities. Co-ordination and mutual support at a national level can help provide a supportive framework for this work. Areas that we wish to focus on during the timeframe of this Accord include the following:

### **i. Policy, Investment and Linkages**

- a) work together to ensure key Government Policies and Strategies for public health test and acknowledge the potential contribution of National Parks to the achievement of their goals.
- b) Support the strengthening of links between Public Health and National Park professionals through suitable mechanisms (eg. local awareness raising, visits, sharing of contacts, workshops etc.)
- c) investigate opportunities to support investment in National Parks that will support the achievement of public health outcomes and National Park purposes as they arise;
- d) to identify opportunities for PHE to support a NPE bid (with partners) to the Big Lottery themed around supporting young people's mental health, including through identifying suitable experts in healthy places, mental wellbeing and health inequalities;
- e) identify opportunities for PHE to support partnerships and projects at a local level between individual National Park Authorities and Public Health Teams aimed at tackling local health and wellbeing priorities;

### **ii. Data**

- a) exploring how public health data sets can assist National Parks decision making at a local level;
- b) drawing on public health data sets to support decision making for the development of outreach/ health and wellbeing programmes by NPAs;

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**iii. Evidence**

- a) Identify opportunities to identify suitable partnerships with NPE as PHE develops its 'What Works for Wellbeing Centre';
- b) Providing case studies and research findings (e.g. from pilot programmes) to add to the evidence base on the extent to which green prescription models can act as a primary health care intervention;

**iv. Communication**

- a) Promote awareness of this Accord (e.g. through PHE blog, twitter, digital and social media) within our own networks in order to strengthen our people's understanding of the links between National Parks and public health; and to advocate –appropriate use of our National Parks;
- b) Identify opportunities to raise awareness of the work of NPE with PHE Centres
- c) Promote opportunities to facilitate links between local authorities and NPAs during visits by PHE's CEO and staff;
- d) Explore a joint communications campaign within organisational resources to raise awareness of the benefits of interacting with the natural environment as a primary health intervention aimed at GPs and public health professionals
- e) PHE and NPE to explore merits of preparing a joint publication (possibly in collaboration with the LGA and Association of the Directors of Public Health) that collates case studies of promising partnerships between NPAs and local authorities.

**Operation and review of this Accord**

This Accord may be amended at any time by agreement between the two organisations and shall be reviewed by the end of December 2018 to ensure it remains an accurate description of our shared commitment.

The Chief Executive of PHE and Executive Director of NPE will meet once a year, with day to day business being managed by PHE's National Director of Health Improvement and NPE Executive Director and others as requested to ensure momentum is maintained.



Margaret Paren  
Chair  
National Parks England



Duncan Selbie  
Chief Executive  
Public Health England

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