

POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF NATIONAL PARKS DESIGNATION WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE PROPOSED MOURNES NATIONAL PARK

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This briefing paper outlines issues surrounding the establishment of National Parks. It relates in particular to the potential impact of establishment of the proposed Mourne National Park and draws on experiences at a range of National Parks in the UK and elsewhere.

Research Papers are compiled for the benefit of Members of The Assembly and their personal staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2002 the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland announced its intention to process proposals for a national park in the Mourne area.

In 2007 the Mournes National Park Working Party reported the findings of its work to Minister Arlene Foster.

The predominant view of those in the Mournes and Slieve Croob who responded to the consultation area was one of opposition to a national park. This is particularly the case from the farming and landowning communities. Conversely, most Northern Ireland organisations, and many (but not all) business, tourism and environmental interests in the Mournes are in favour of a national park.

The designation of an area as a National Park can have a range of positive and negative impacts, neither of which are inevitable consequences of the designation itself.

The potential positive impacts of the Mournes National Park might include:

- £2 – 4 million of additional funding for the national park area
- Direct employment via an established National Parks Authority (up to 30 jobs)
- Landscape and built heritage protection and maintenance of the areas biodiversity
- Increased opportunities for recreation and increased numbers of visitors
- Increased visitor expenditure and employment associated with the tourism industry and countryside management
- Increased levels of visitor management
- Higher property values and of zoned land
- Support for local services
- Possible use of the National park 'brand' for local produce schemes and for attracting visitors

Conversely potential negative impacts may include:

- Increases in the number of second homes
- Increases in house prices with associated affordability issues and change in social mix; increases in rateable value of houses and property
- Increases in zoned land values and reversion of non-zoned values to that of agricultural prices
- Possible impacts due to visitor numbers on the landscape, biodiversity and built heritage unless careful management is put in place
- Potential conflicts between tourism/recreation and landowners, especially if access points are not adequate
- Potential increases in traffic congestion associated with increasing numbers of visitors
- Changes in employment profile – tourism jobs which tend to be lower paid and seasonal

Evidence from the impacts of national park designation elsewhere indicate that the degree of impacts (positive or negative) will, to a large extent, be affected by two factors: the nature of primary and subordinate legislation to establish the park, and the content of the national park plan and policy objectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2002 the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland (hereafter Department) announced its intention to process proposals for a National Park in the Mournes area, and began a consultation exercise on the nature of national parks in Northern Ireland.

In 2004 the Department produced a consultation paper on National Parks in Northern Ireland and three studies were commissioned (on impacts¹, changes to tourism numbers, patterns and income² and of socio-economic indicators³).

There is current statutory provision for the establishment of National Parks in Northern Ireland (under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Amendment) (NI) Order 1989 but this provides only for designation, with no accompanying statutory powers to establish a management mechanism for national parks, such as there are in Great Britain, many parts of Europe and elsewhere.

A Mourne National Park Working Party (MNPWP) was established to formulate detailed proposals on the proposed national park in the Mournes including on its boundary.

The aims of national park designations include:

- To promote and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area;
- To promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area;
- To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public; and
- To promote sustainable economic and social development of the areas' communities.

¹ Annett JA., Joyce J & Scott P. (2006) Potential Impacts of National Park Designation in Northern Ireland.

² Buchanan (2006) *Tourism in Mourne – Current and Potential Impacts*.

³ Rural Development Council (Toward an Management and Evaluation Indicator Framework for Social and Economic Aspects of a Mournes National Park Area: A Scoping Study to Examine the Availability and Use of Secondary Data

A public consultation ran between 31 August 2006 until 31 January 2007. The MNPWP submitted their report to the Minister in autumn 2007 and in their summary of consultation responses, concluded that:

“Taking all the representations into account, the predominant view of those on the Mourne and Slieve Croob area who responded to the consultation is one of opposition to any national park. This is particularly the case in the framing and landowning communities, and from those just living outside the proposed boundary. Conversely, most Northern Ireland organisations, and many (but not all) business, tourism and environmental interests in the Mourne are in favour of a national park”⁴

2. POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF NATIONAL PARKS DESIGNATION TO MOURNE

This paper reviews a number of impacts associated with national park designation in the UK, Ireland and elsewhere based on information in the available literature. Throughout it draws heavily on the paper by Annett *et al.* (2006) *Potential Impacts of National Park designation in Northern Ireland*⁵ which provided a detailed assessment of potential impacts drawing on extensive literature searches throughout parks in the world.

Available information on the effects of designation is limited primarily due to the fact that accurate assessment requires that there is a detailed and accurate baseline of information prior to designation, and follow-up studies. Proving cause-and-effect is often difficult and more often than not effects have been inferred within empirical evidence that the process of National Park designation was directly responsible.

There are a range of potential positive and negative impacts associated with the designation of an area as a National Park. These include but are not limited to effects on tourism, agriculture, the economy, the natural and built heritage, access and recreation and planning.

⁴ Mourne National Park Working Party report to the Minister. Sect. 3.3, Pg. 13.

⁵ Annett JA, Joyce J & Scott P. (2006) *Potential Impacts of National Park Designation in Northern Ireland*. Countryside Consultancy, John Joyce and Peter Scott Planning Services Ltd., Killeel.

2.1 ECONOMIC EFFECTS

An obvious positive effect of national park designation is the potential availability of direct government funds for the establishment and running of respectively, a National Park and the management body (in this instance a Mourne National Park Authority).

The trend in national park support in Great Britain shows a general year on year increase; in the case of the Lake District National Park, the increase has been of 2.51 million over an 8-year period (from £3.78m in 1997-98 to £6.29 million in 2005-06⁶).

There is also potential for additional special funding initiatives associated with issues or activities within the Park. English National Parks, for example, have a Sustainable Development Fund which encourages community-based sustainable development projects. The report by Annett *et al.* (2006) illustrates some case studies to illustrate these funding programmes with parks in Romania and the UK. Case Study 1 below describes a business fund operational in the Cairngorms National Park.

Case Study 1: Cairngorms National Park Authority – Training for land-based businesses

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) runs a scheme to assist land-based workers within the National Park to identify and meet their training needs and attain qualifications relevant to their jobs in the areas of – estates, crofts, nurseries and woodlands. Through provision of funding, advice and training, over 600 individuals and 80 businesses were assisted between 2003 and 2006. Additional support was available through the European Social Fund (ESF) to help improve efficiency, competitiveness, flexibility and qualifications.

Source: Annett et al. (2006) Sect. 3.15 Pg. 34

The economic effects of national park designation are generally positive though studies on the negative effects are infrequent. The positive effects include:

- Effects on property values
- Increases in numbers of tourists, increased visitation by visitors and people recreating and concomitant tourist/visitor spend

⁶ Ibid. Section 3.12, Pp. 31

- Employment associated with management of the National Park and visitor services
- Direct government expenditure in support of the establishment and running of the National Park Authority.

The economic impacts of visitors to national parks fall into three main areas:

- Direct expenditure on travel, eating (cafes, restaurants etc.), accommodation and the service sector (entertainment, guided walks etc.)
- Indirect expenditure by businesses from purchasing, transportation, training etc.
- “induced” effects from the injection and cycling of visitor income through the local economy in and adjacent to the National Park (e.g. increased expenditure by the catering sector)

Whilst National Parks often provide statistics on the money generated through visitor expenditure, the lack of a comparator (pre-designation) limits the accuracy of estimates. The fact that the designation as a “National Park” provides a visitor focus and the effect of branding means that the prospective visitor expects to find a landscape of high quality. Annett *et al.* (2006) indicates that 280 million people visited 388 sites in the American National Park System in 2001, spending \$10.6 billion during their visits. This spending generated \$4.5 billion in wages, salaries, and payroll benefits, and 267,000 jobs in tourism-related businesses.

Typically the National Park Authority (NPA) would be allocated an operational budget which would be spent primarily in the local economy, paying for salaries, conservation work, countryside recreation, management and access work, fuel, vehicles and office-running costs. Examples of staffing levels in UK NPAs include The New Forest NPA (37 staff), Lake District (over 200 staff) and the Northumberland NPA (74 staff)⁷. Some NPAs have sought to increase the value of their role in providing local training and employment; the Brecon Beacons National Park⁸, for example, sought to stem the loss of young people from the area by running a modern apprenticeships scheme to provide countryside training.

⁷ Ibid. Section 3.21, Pp. 37

⁸ <http://breconbeacons.org/content/learning/what-we-do>

The study by Buchanan (2006)⁹ on the impacts of a national park designation on tourism in the Mourne suggested that such designation would bring an increase in visitors to the National Park itself and surrounding wider area (into the District Council areas of Newry & Mourne, Banbridge and Down). Estimates of tourism and day visitor expenditure total some £57-82 million in the wider area of which some £30 - 43 million may be spent in the proposed National Park area. The study also suggested that the designation would bring an increase in visitors that would support an additional 800 jobs in the tourism and hospitality sector by 2020, 500 of which would be within the National Park area itself.

Case Study 2: Strengths and weaknesses of tourism's contribution to the economy of the Exmoor National Park

Tourism is now the primary industry in the Exmoor area following a decline in the importance of agricultural, fishing and forestry sectors. Exmoor National Park Authority considers that tourism brings the following advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages include –

- Tourism brings employment
- Use services which may not be viable if relying on an otherwise exclusively local market
- Purchase local produce, supporting other sectors of the local and wider economy
- Brings grant aid and support specific to the tourism industry and otherwise unavailable to other sectors of the economy

Disadvantages include –

- The seasonality of the tourism industry means that services must be able to meet peak demands, whilst may be little used at some times of the year
- Local people have to pay for services for the benefit of others
- Jobs tend to be low paid and seasonal, often with long hours; the consequence is that many people cannot afford to live in the area
- The distribution of visitors can lead to problems including traffic congestion, path erosion, noise, litter, crime and health problems, the management of which requires additional resources.

Source: Annett et al. (2006) Sect. 3.26 Pg. 40

⁹ Buchanan (2006) *Tourism in Mourne – Current and Potential Impacts*.

2.2 PLANNING

In respect to the issue of planning within a proposed National Park it is likely that a NPA would have a consultee role and not be involved in day-to-day planning administration and enforcement. The Mourne National Park Working Party (MNPWP) Report is responsibility should 'rest with the New Councils or Council for the area. Any new management body for the Mourne area should be a statutory consultee for the area development plan and for planning applications¹⁰.

In these situations, in which a NPA has only a statutory consultee role in development proposals – such as in the Cairngorms National Park – , the ability of the NPA to positively influence planning decisions will be limited. In opposing development proposals the NPA would have a more high profile and public role in the interests of park protection¹¹.

Impacts on property values

A considerable body of evidence indicates that designation of a National Park would increase property values. This is due to the fact that prices tend to be increased where the property has a view of the coast, mountain, river, lake or park.

However, the impact on prices is likely to be related to whether or not the property market is already well-developed in the area. There is some evidence from the USA that property prices have increased on the fringes of National Parks¹².

In addition the degree of increase will be dependent on the 'desirability' of the area as a place to live, to invest, or have a second home in.

Impacts on housing stock/affordability

An issue of concern to respondents to the national park consultation was in relation to affordability of housing and the associated likelihood that local people would be unable to afford to live within a National Park and would be forced to live adjacent to it, typically in neighbouring towns and villages. In addition to the potential increases and unaffordability of existing or newly built properties, the restrictive policies on development within park boundaries (in the interests of landscape protection) also

¹⁰ Recommendation 21 of the MNPWP report, pg. 29

¹¹ Annett *et al.* (2006)

¹² Economic Research Associates (2005) Real Estate Impact Review of Parks and Recreation for Illinois Association of Park Districts.

has the effect of reducing the availability of affordable housing within the park boundaries.

Annett *et al.* (2006) suggests that the serious shortage of affordable housing within English and Welsh National Parks has had a particularly acute effect on young people and key workers. In all the local authority areas within England's National Parks, average gross full-time earnings are nearly 15% below the national average¹³. At the same time house prices in six of the Parks are above the national average.

Case Study 3: Existing and Proposed Second Homes Policies in England and Wales

A review by Johnston (2002) established that eight out of 12 national parks in England and Wales has no specific policy towards second homes. Of the remaining 4:

- Gwynedd County Council has a policy whereby any proposals that would lead to an increase in second homes should be refused in communities where the level of second homes has reached 10%
- Dartmoor NPA did not have a specific policy, but a change of use from a holiday home to residential use would be viewed positively
- Yorkshire Dales NPA had a policy whereby houses built under their local needs policy should not become second homes and the occupation of housing to meet local needs would be restricted to prevent subsequent sale to those without a local connection. It was reiterated that such dwellings would not be available as second or holiday homes.

Source: Annett *et al.* (2006)

2.3 IMPACTS OF TRAFFIC AND ROADS

The consultation highlighted that a large number of respondents felt that increased visitors to the Mourne area would have a detrimental impact, arguing that 'the existing infrastructure is poor and neither roads nor hotels are adequate to cater for increased numbers'¹⁴. The Working Party Report recommends that 'with existing visitor numbers likely to grow irrespective of any future designation, there is a need to ensure the provision of facilities adequate for the demand, and located to guide visitors to where there is capacity, or capacity can be provided' (Pg. 23).

This potential impact has been a well described negative impact at parks in Britain. In many cases, the level of impact is dependent on the current infrastructure and

¹³ Cairncross *et al.* (2004) Planning for Affordable Housing. Lessons from the English National Parks – paper to the Housing Studies Association Conference, Belfast 2004.

¹⁴ MNPWP report, pg. 22

pressures prior to designation as a national park. It is understood that conferring national parks status will serve to increase the number of visitors considerably. An example is illustrated in Case Study 4 (Lake District National Park) where the main increase in visitors was associated with people seeking easy access to particular natural attractions, and the increased traffic associated with formal tours and tour packages being attracted to the area. Since it is very often the case that key features are going to act as the key attractants in visits (e.g. Loch Lomond in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and Pen Y Pass and Snowdon in Snowdonia National Park), the provision of adequate road networks and parking facilities to, at and from major attractions is important in design and management considerations.

In most National Parks, traffic management plans and the National Parks officers group has developed an accord with the County Surveyor Society agreeing the following principles:

- Transport planning for the national parks should be undertaken strategically;
- Transport to, within and across the national parks should be integrated;
- Traffic management measures in national parks should make the best use of the road network, through the development and implementation of a local road hierarchy;

Case Study 4: Traffic issues in the Lake District National Park

Since 1981 traffic volumes have doubled in the Lake District National Park, a pattern consistent with the general increase across the UK. Congestion arises due to the increased volume of traffic which are trying to be accommodated on small vernacular roads. The mitigation approaches acceptable in other situations (e.g widening, realignment and increases in parking availability) are much more strictly controlled in National Parks.

When it was designated as a National Park in 1951 the primary users were expected to be walkers, cyclists, riders and naturalists rather than motorists. Now almost 90% of the Park's 12 million visitors annually arrive and travel at least through part of the Park by car.

The Park Authority has installed traffic counters to try too get a more detailed understanding of the way traffic moves within the Park and also measure volumes.

They have also undertaken a number of traffic management projects including restricted parking zones, area action plans, providing alternatives to the car, initiating a 'gateway' scheme (where the visitor arrives at the Park boundary but uses public transport thereafter). Though the rate of growth of traffic has slowed, it has continued to increase.

Buses are seen as one of the major solutions to the issue of people getting around the national park, but new and restored rail links are also being explored.

The potential impacts of increasing traffic volumes include noise, pollution, reduced road safety and hazards to vulnerable road users, inconvenience in accessing work, leisure and services, parking problems, and visual intrusions.

Source: Annett et al. (2006)

- Public transport should be actively developed and promoted;
- Non-motorised modes of transport should be actively developed and promoted;
- A parking strategy should be developed, covering visitors and resident parking issues
- There should be a jointly agreed local transport strategy¹⁵

Retention of the extant road network and associated features (e.g. stone walls, verges) may form an integral part of the park management plan. However, these features are often incompatible with the capacity required should traffic levels increase. Congestion can cause problems for visitors and local alike.

2.4 IMPACTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND BUILT HERITAGE

The protection of the landscape and its nature conservation interest at the heart of the rationale for National Park designation. The designation brings a local focus and generates a deeper appreciation of the natural environment by local communities and, via the management authority, enhanced levels of protection of the environment are central to park management plans.

In addition to EU-supported agri-environment schemes, specific opportunities for further support for meeting specific park management objectives may be available.

The designation of National Park may increase the emphasis on habitat management or restoration within sites with additional designations (e.g. sites designated under the EU Birds or Habitats Directives), than within areas outwith the national park.

A potentially negative impact of designation is that associated with increased visitation pressure which can lead to environmental damage, indirect problems (e.g. disturbance to species). Consequently National Park Authorities (NPAs) need to

recognise the importance of nature conservation in their management plan and ensure that this work is adequately resourced.

The built heritage is often an important component within a national park. The designation and land use policies within the national park plan would be expected to provide improved protection for the built heritage and a greater incentive to maintain vernacular buildings. This aspect has been a particular success in national parks in England and Wales, with a high level of retention of architectural styles having the result that the majority of vernacular houses were retained within the housing stock. The use of traditional building skills and often locally sourced materials has resulted in retention of local traditional skills and employment.

Case Study 5: Environmental effects of tourism in the Brecon Beacons National Park

One of the most common and highly visible impacts of tourism is erosion caused by walkers on footpaths. Newer activities, including mountain-biking have also caused considerable damage to footpaths and the development of 15 new routes has been designed to remove pressure from sensitive sites.

Cars remain important for sightseeing. At busy times visitors and their cars have an impact on the environment and quality of life of local residents. In the most popular areas, traffic causes congestion and frustration for local residents, and damage to vegetation. The provision of car parks throughout the Park is designed to minimise the environmental impacts of cars.

The use of public transport is encouraged through buses to provide transport to hikers/walkers and other visitors.

Source: Mooney The Impacts of Leisure and Tourism on the Brecon Beacons National Park¹⁶

2.5 AGRICULTURAL IMPACTS

Europe-wide many of the regions designated as National Parks are predominated by landscapes which have farming industries which are on marginal land (e.g. moorland) and relatively remote from markets. Less Favoured Areas payments and agri-environment schemes have acted to support farming in national park areas and resulted in maintenance of the sector and thereby the landscape character and related benefits including rural skills, language and culture.

¹⁵ Annett *et al.* (2006)

¹⁶ The Impacts of Leisure and Tourism on the Brecon beacons National Park; Available at: <http://www.breconbeacons.org/content/learning/educators-information/factsheets-1>

With the decoupling of subsidies and production and some uncertainty about the future support mechanisms for the farming industry the additional support in National Park areas through Park-specific agri-environment schemes (top-up schemes) may provide a welcome additional support mechanism for the industry.

In England and Wales a top-up scheme was agreed in 2003 with the EU to run initially for a 5 year period and making available £22.3 million between all the parks. Available only to individuals and businesses within the park boundaries, the aim of the measure is to provide support to promote¹⁷:

- Conservation of high-value threatened farmed environments
- Extensification and management of low-intensity pastoral systems
- Upkeep of the landscape and historical features on agricultural land
- Use of environmental planning in farming practise
- Ways of using agricultural in a way by which the environment, landscape and landscape features, natural resources, and biodiversity can be protected

In the proposed Mourne National Park the potential availability of top-up agri-environment schemes may be a welcome additional sourcing of farming income for the industry. This is not without 'cost' however, as the associated conditions and lack of freedom have the potential to be onerous to farmers – but these circumstances are not restricted wholly to National Parks and may be equally an issue in other protected areas (e.g. ASSIs).

¹⁷ Annett *et al.* (2006) Sect. 3.69 Pg. 55

Case Study 6: Agri-environment scheme for Snowdonia National Park

Entitled Rhaglen Tir Eryri is a programme developed and funded by Snowdonia National Park Authority and the Countryside Council for Wales and is worth £4.35 million over 4 years.

The programme offers assistance to land managers within the park boundary for improvements to the area's landscape, biodiversity, access and heritage. The types of projects supported through the schemes include those that deal with habitat and species management, maintenance of traditional buildings and boundaries, linear access and management of commonage.

Source: Annett *et al.* (2006) Sect. 3.70, Pg. 56

Widespread concerns during the consultation on the Mourne National Park have been the issues of increasing access – whereby visitors assumed they would have greater access rights than was actually the case – and the potential difficulties young people from the farming community had in securing local employment and affordable housing.

The possibility of utilising the National Park brand for increasing the value of agricultural produce through attracting a premium is another potential positive impact of designation for the agricultural and associated (e.g. food processing) sectors.

If effective schemes are put in place to link the National Park brand with quality control processes and promotion, there is widespread evidence of the commercial gains which can be made through branding (see Case Study 7 below).

Case Study 7: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs – Promoting Local Produce

In the National Park a Leader+ funded project investigated the viability of setting up and outlet to offer residents and visitors year round access to local produce. The study found that:

- The total product range is limited and most food and drink producers already have markets
- There is a gulf between producers and retail outlets/attractions
- There is support for moves to better promote local produce
- Existing outlets such as hotels, restaurants and B&Bs are seeking to source more niche and local produce
- Craft producers were receptive to ideas involving joint working

Source: Annett *et al.* (2006) Sect. 3.24, Pg. 38

Appendix: Summary of potential positive and negative impacts associated with the designation of a national park in the Mourne.

Potential impact area	Positive impacts	Both positive and negative impacts	Negative impacts
Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased visitors Tourism-related employment Tourist investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replacement of traditional jobs by tourism-related jobs (possibly seasonal) Tourism jobs often low paid and seasonal Possible attraction of tourists from non-National Park areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic congestion Development pressures associated with tourist infrastructure Increasing number of second homes
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for new agri-environment schemes or special scheme with Nat Park Management of visitor access issues Use of Nat Park 'brand' for marketing purposes Opportunities in agri-tourism Employment in countryside management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible incentives for access and recreation provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased pressure for access and recreation
Natural Heritage and Built Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landscape conservation Maintenance of biodiversity Conservation of built heritage Potential for increased resourcing for preservation of vernacular buildings (for tourism purposes) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential effects of tourism on biodiversity e.g. via soil erosion or disturbance Possible impacts of visitor pressure on buildings/visited sites
Access and recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentives to increase access incl. funding for access and recreational projects Increase in recreational visitors 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pressure on access sites Potential conflicts with landowners Inability to manage unofficial sites which may develop
Socio-Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased income with the Nat Park area Increased number of jobs Use of Nat Park 'brand' Support for local services Preservation of aspects of natural and cultural heritage 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of economically-mixed communities and potential loss of diversity in range of employment sectors Economic effects of designation on the NI budget
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased levels of protection for the natural and built landscape Higher design and siting standards Higher house and land values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separation of development planning and development control – Nat Park Authority only statutory consultees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher house and land process Loss of mixed communities

