



# National landscapes and community rail:

working with National Parks, AONBs  
and other outdoor spaces



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More than 260 million people<sup>1</sup> visit Britain’s national landscapes each year, to enjoy nature and experience adventure. The national landscapes of Britain are made up of 15 National Parks and 46 designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), spread across the country from the coast of Cornwall to the highlands of Scotland. See [www.nationalparks.uk](http://www.nationalparks.uk) and [landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://landscapesforlife.org.uk) for locations.



This guidance explores how Community Rail Network members can engage with national landscapes, showcasing examples and providing advice on working together to encourage and promote sustainable, car-free journeys.

The advice may be used to develop partnerships with other outdoor organisations and locations, such as country parks, estates, gardens and nature reserves.

For further advice on tourism promotion, download the [identifying your tourism offer](#) and [developing partnerships in the tourism sector](#) guidance from [communityrail.org.uk](http://communityrail.org.uk)

Additional tourism support for members of Community Rail Network is available through tourism officer, Alice Mannion on [alice@communityrail.org.uk](mailto:alice@communityrail.org.uk)

## Benefits of working with national landscapes

Building partnerships with national landscapes can provide an array of benefits to community rail partnerships and groups, such as:

- Tap into an already established visitor audience
- Increase the profile of community rail and raise awareness of your line, station and group’s work to a new audience
- Share tourism knowledge, visitor statistics and research
- Opportunity to work with local attractions within the boundaries of national landscapes
- Potentially open up new funding opportunities and/or pooled resources
- Opportunity to influence visitor behaviour, encouraging sustainable transport use, helping to protect local environments while benefitting the tourist economy



Community rail groups celebrating 70 years of National Parks at Community Rail in the City 2019

National landscape authorities are keen to encourage visits that do not cause pollution, noise, congestion and road danger. See **Challenges facing national landscapes** (page 6). They actively promote sustainable travel options that will help to preserve these peaceful, natural environments. This is where working in partnership, with community rail groups, can provide benefits to national landscape authorities. Some of these benefits may include:

- Improved visitor transport information leading to an enhanced visitor experience
- Helping to achieve their critical aims around reducing car use and safeguarding landscapes
- Increased community engagement including in consultations and reports
- Access to contacts in the rail sector
- Improving access for all
- New opportunities to influence sustainable exploration of national landscapes
- Access to additional marketing opportunities such as [Community Rail in the City](#)



Several community rail partnerships have already been working closely with their national landscapes, promoting rail travel (and public transport as a whole) as a more relaxing, sustainable option of exploring the natural landscape. Some examples of this work can be found later in this guide.





## National Parks

The first National Park was founded in 1951 to protect the Peak District’s impressive moorland, farmland and steep limestone dales. Today, Britain is home to 15 National Parks, with the most recent addition of the South Downs in 2010, boasting a combined total area that is slightly larger than Wales. In 2017 the Lake District National Park became a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site and joined iconic places across the world such as the Taj Mahal, Machu Picchu, Easter Island and the Great Barrier Reef.



Across the country, each National Park aims to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area while promoting opportunities for better understanding and enjoyment of special environmental qualities of the park.

## NATIONAL PARKS Britain’s breathing spaces



### 15 National Parks across England, Wales and Scotland

- Brecon Beacons
- Broads
- Cairngorms
- Dartmoor
- Exmoor
- Lake District
- Loch Lomond & The Trossachs
- New Forest
- Northumberland
- North York Moors
- Peak District
- Pembrokeshire Coast
- Snowdonia
- South Downs
- Yorkshire Dales



## Campaign for National Parks

Founded in 1936, Campaign for National Parks (CNP) is the only independent national charity dedicated to the protection and enhancement of the 13 National Parks in England and Wales. Their vision is that National Parks are beautiful and inspirational places enjoyed and valued by all.



The Campaign for National Parks secured the creation of National Parks in 1949 and since then have acted as a collective national voice for the local charitable bodies that work in each one and for other organisations with an interest in these unique and special places.

Most recently CNP have worked hard to promote and protect the English and Welsh Parks and some noticeable successes have included: preventing further cuts to the budgets of the National Park Authorities; guaranteeing the Westminster Government retained the highest levels of protection for National Parks in the national planning policy framework; working with partners in the Lake District to stop the installation of zip wires in Thirlmere and campaigning to secure extensions to the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales, which resulted in 188 square miles of land being added to the National Parks.

For more information about the work of Campaign for National Parks visit their website: [www.cnp.org.uk](http://www.cnp.org.uk)



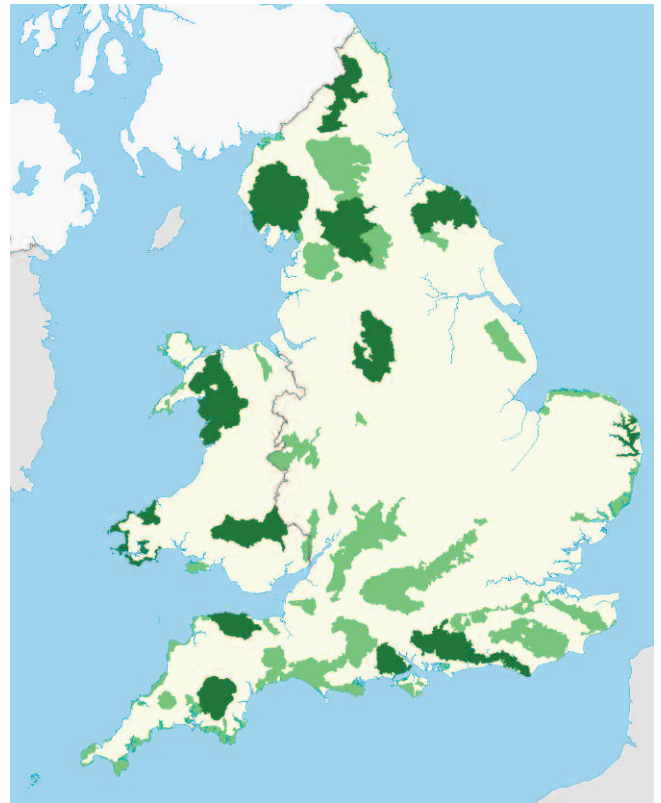


## Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a designated exceptional landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are precious enough to be safeguarded in the national interest. Similar to National Parks, AONBs are protected and enhanced for nature, people, business and culture.

Britain is home to 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, covering 18% of the countryside, over a fifth of the English coast and includes 12,000 miles of footpaths and bridleways.<sup>2</sup>

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty support the UK's 46 AONBs to value and secure the natural beauty of the countryside. Find out more about their work at [landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://landscapesforlife.org.uk)



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Photo credit Tom Rayner



Photo credit Allan Hopkins on Flickr



## Challenges facing national landscapes

The Glover Review, an independent review commissioned by the government, was published in 2019, identifying several challenges for national landscapes.

One of these was to do with unsustainable tourism. Although tourism brings billions into the economy, with visitors spending over £4bn in local shops and businesses in England’s National Parks alone,<sup>3</sup> it also produces pollution, disruption and other detrimental impacts for local people and nature. Much of this is related to car usage, with 93% of visitors travelling to National Parks by car.<sup>4</sup>

The review suggested that the alternatives to car use are not sufficiently well coordinated (including across modes) and promoted. This means the many people who do not own a car are excluded from the benefits national landscapes can have on our physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

The Glover Review recommended action is needed to encourage more sustainable ways of accessing national landscapes in addition to improving access for diverse groups.

This was echoed in a recent article in Rail magazine that highlighted the poor transport information on some National Park websites.



These challenges provide an opportunity for community rail groups, across the country, to provide support to national landscapes in developing joint initiatives to promote car-free, sustainable journeys and enable more inclusive access to these important natural assets.

Read the full Glover Review here:  
<https://bit.ly/GovGloverReview>

“ The websites of the national parks are probably the most important means to encourage people to use green transport[...] On too many websites, public transport information is buried away, requiring numerous clicks to find it; there should be just one click to Getting Here, with public transport as first choice. ” Anthony Lambert, RAIL April 2020



## Working together

When considering what national landscape authority to engage with, keep in mind that your station(s) may not need to be within the boundaries of a national landscape to create an effective partnership. It is also worth considering partnering with other outdoor organisations and locations in the area such as country parks, historic estates, gardens and nature reserves.

You may find it useful to carry out a tourism audit to help you identify and prioritise the development of potential partners. For advice on conducting a tourism audit and for a template, download [identifying your tourism offer](#) guidance from [communityrail.org.uk](http://communityrail.org.uk).

Partnership development begins with a conversation. You may want to familiarise yourself with the aims and objectives of the national landscape authorities you are approaching. Including ways in which your community rail group can help deliver some of those aims in your initial conversations may help the organisation to see the benefit of working together. For more advice on approaching new partners, download our [developing tourism partnerships](#) guidance from [communityrail.org.uk](http://communityrail.org.uk).

Once initial conversations have started, or if you already have a relationship with a national landscape authority, you may want to suggest ways to develop the partnership through joint projects and initiatives. There are many ways to engage with your nearest national landscape, from large-scale projects, such as developing a tourism hub at a station, to smaller, but equally important, projects like developing online transport information. On the following pages you will find ideas and case studies showcasing what other community rail groups have achieved.



Photo credit John Miller

### TIP:

Looking to get in touch with a national park authority? Partnership development is usually included in the role of the press/marketing team. Contact details can be found on individual national park websites.



## Suggestions of working together with national landscapes

- Deliver a joint promotional campaign featuring things to do and see in national landscapes by rail. This could be a digital project using social media channels. For advice on getting started with social media, download our [social media guidance](#) from [communityrail.org.uk](http://communityrail.org.uk)
- Invite a representative to be a member of your steering group. This will help to continue the partnership and may enable the group to be involved in future projects
- Joint working with schools and disadvantaged groups to improve awareness about national landscapes and how to access them sustainably
- Work together to develop transport information shown on national landscapes' websites and promotional materials, and those of their partners' and sites within them, giving priority to sustainable travel via public transport, walking and cycling
- Feed into local transport operators with problems around bus and train connections
- Refresh your line page on [Scenic Rail Britain](#) to include details about national landscapes local to you
- Work to improve transport information with local attractions within the boundaries of national landscapes
- Improve poor walking and cycling routes for safer access from railway stations to countryside public footpaths and local attractions
- Improve way finding and pedestrian and cyclist facilities at stations
- Jointly write a blog about the ease of rail travel around your local national landscape. You could approach partners such as train operating companies and tourism destination organisations to publish the blog and it could also be a feature on [Scenic Rail Britain](#)



## Great for station adopters

- [Community Rail in the City](#), coordinated by Community Rail Network (usually mid-May), is an opportunity for members to showcase their tourism offer to a wider city centre audience. Invite your national landscape partners to have a joint display to create a greater impact
- Create an area at your station(s) to feature as a tourism information hub. This could be as simple as providing a display to promote nearby national landscapes and how visitors can access them
- Use your partnership to develop signage at your station(s), to help visitors easily complete the 'final mile', such as using poster cases to include maps and onward travel information



## East Hampshire Community Rail Partnership - South Downs National Park

East Hampshire Community Rail Partnership (CRP) was set up by the South Downs National Park as part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund in 2013. Building on the successes of the nearby Three Rivers CRP, the aim was to make each station from Liphook to Rowlands Castle a gateway to the national park, encouraging car-free exploration. Although the CRP no longer receives funding from the South Downs National Park, the partnership continues through involvement in the CRP’s steering group. This has resulted in tourism remaining a key part of the CRP and work has continued to strengthen rail and bus links to local attractions.

East Hampshire CRP launched the South Downs Rambler in summer 2018 providing visitors with a sustainable (and scenic) alternative to exploring the South Downs Way, making easy connections at Winchester and Petersfield Railway Stations. This

summer-only bus route, operated by regional bus company Bluestar, was funded by Three Rivers CRP, East Hampshire CRP and CrossCountry trains and has welcomed around 700 passengers in its first two years. The bus drivers working the route act as local ambassadors providing local area knowledge to passengers.

East Hampshire CRP plans to continue the South Downs Rambler, if funding remains available, building on its success. Petersfield Station has a dedicated travel and tourism hub that opens for four hours a day Wednesday to Sunday. This has been running for four years and provides information on the area’s tourism offer, including cycle routes from local railway stations, and onward travel advice.

Download the 2019 timetable here: [South Downs Rambler 2019](#)



## Haslemere Community Station - South Downs National Park & Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Haslemere Community Station, part of the Surrey Hills to South Downs Community Rail Partnership, is home to the Information Hub, a volunteer-run information centre on the station forecourt. The Hub was developed by the long-established Haslemere station adopters in response to a growing need for tourism information in the area, and received 1,550 visitors in 2019. The Hub is open a few hours every day, including weekends from May to October.

Read about the Information Hub here: [haslemereinfohub.co.uk](http://haslemereinfohub.co.uk)

Visitors can get a sense of where they are in relation to the National Park thanks to a tourist information totem pole. This was produced in partnership with the South Downs National Park and provides clear maps of walking and cycling routes, bridleways, and railway lines across Haslemere, the South Downs National Park and the wider region.

Outside of Haslemere Railway Station, the life-size Surrey Cow is on display. This colourful cow was commissioned,



as part of a wider campaign, by the Surrey Hills AONB and highlights the Surrey Cycleway at the Devils Punchbowl, Hindhead.

Haslemere Community Station is now a member of the South Downs to Surrey Hills Community Rail Partnership, launched in June 2019. Representatives from the South Downs National Park and Surrey Hills AONB are members of both the Haslemere Community Station and South Downs to Surrey Hills Community Rail Partnership steering groups and play an active role in promotion of the railway. This includes a Rail to Ramble project, developed with the support of the National Park and AONB. It features a series of self-guided walks starting and ending at railway stations, taking in picturesque countryside in between.

Photo credit John Miller





## Esk Valley Community Rail Partnership - North York Moors National Park

Esk Valley Community Rail Partnership (CRP) became involved with the Land of Iron project from when it began in 2016 and are now regular members of the project steering group.

This Landscape Partnership scheme was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, North York Moors National Park Authority, David Ross Foundation and other partners.

One of the aims is to tell stories of what life was like for communities living and working inside the national park during the ironstone industry of the 19th and early 20th century, when the landscape looked very different.



Involvement in this project has led to access to new funding for the CRP. This enabled the production of Land of Iron information boards that are to be installed at 18 stations along the Esk Valley Line, providing information on the project alongside an improved visitor experience at the stations.

The project has detailed several walking routes throughout the area on their [website](#). Many encourage the use of train travel and link to the [Esk Valley CRP website](#). This increases the profile of the CRP in addition to promoting greener travel to the national park.



### TIP:

Arrange to meet with your national landscapes on a regular basis. Use this as an opportunity to discuss how public transport access can be encouraged among wider audiences and how you can work together to remove barriers.



## Highland Main Line - Cairngorms National Park

Cairngorms National Park is the largest of the national parks and home to four out of the five highest mountains in Britain.

The Highland Main Line Community Rail Partnership (CRP) work closely with the Cairngorms National Park with the community support officer attending CRP meetings on a regular basis. In 2018, the National Park supported the development of a Heritage Map, created by the CRP. The guide highlights places to visit along the line. Over 50,000 were printed and distributed across all stations, local visitor centres and tourist attractions in the area. The map is featured on the CRP website [highlandmainlinecrp.co.uk/cairngorm-national-park/](http://highlandmainlinecrp.co.uk/cairngorm-national-park/) alongside a dedicated page encouraging visits to the Cairngorms.



Photo credit Russell Cheyne





## Leeds to Morecambe Community Rail Partnership (Bentham Line) - Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies across the Yorkshire-Lancashire border, immediately to the south of the Bentham Line. Four stations, Giggleswick, Clapham, Bentham and Wennington, lie close to the northern boundary of the AONB. The whole area is great walking and cycling country with major national routes passing through the area, including the Coast to Coast and Land's End to John O'Groats.

The Forest of Bowland AONB has supported Bentham Station and its Town Council with tourism literature and getting involved in joint projects for many years. In 2015, the Friends of Bentham Station invited the AONB to participate in and sponsor their 'Day in the Life of Bentham' community photograph competition. This proved a great success. In 2016,

the competition received the Community Rail Award for Best Community Engagement. The newly formed Leeds to Morecambe Community Rail Partnership and Forest of Bowland began to build a close working relationship which continues today.

The following project, supported by Northern, was to develop key stations along the Bentham Line as 'gateway stations' to the AONB, aiming to bring more visitors by rail, aid the development of local tourism and encourage healthy activity. The Forest of Bowland designed large colourful information panels for each station, featuring aspects of Bowland life, attractions and walking and cycling routes. The community rail partnership developed posters and leaflets, based on the panels, and provided leaflet racks at each station. Visitors could easily identify the stations as gateways thanks to Northern's installation of 'alight here for the Forest of Bowland AONB' signage.





Since then the AONB and Leeds to Morecambe CRP have worked together on projects including:

- Development of ‘Rail to Trail - Bowland’, a collection of walking and cycling routes starting from railway stations and accessing parts of the AONB. Download the Rail to Trail walks here: [http://thebenthamline.co.uk/rail\\_to\\_trail/](http://thebenthamline.co.uk/rail_to_trail/)
- Improved visitor access during summer with the Bowland Explorer, a Sunday mini-bus service, linking visitors with the AONB and the Bentham and Clitheroe railway lines. Read more about the project here: <https://communityrail.org.uk/bowland-explorers-given-a-sunday-option/>
- Supported the ground-breaking ‘Dementia and Community Rail’ initiative, working with the CRP to develop an easy walking route and an expert forest guide for each group, that provides dementia groups the opportunity to explore the Forest of Bowland safely.

Read about the Dementia Friendly Keighley day out in the Forest of Bowland here: <https://communityrail.org.uk/bentham-dementia-oct18/> Read the Dementia and Community Rail case study here: <https://communityrail.org.uk/resources-ideas/case-studies/dementia-friendly/>



The Forest of Bowland AONB are a regular member of the Bentham Line management group and are an enthusiastic contributor, in a position to offer valued advice and support on green, heritage and tourism aspects, while participating in joint projects.

The AONB also feature a dedicated page on their website to promotion of the Bentham Line and the walking and cycling opportunities from the four gateway railway stations.

[www.forestofbowland.com/bentham-line](http://www.forestofbowland.com/bentham-line)



## Sussex Community Rail Partnership - South Downs National Park

Sussex Community Rail Partnership (CRP) works closely with the South Downs National Park to deliver educational projects including, developing itineraries that fit into the national curriculum and organising Try the Train events. These projects provide an opportunity for schoolchildren, who often have experience of neither, to experience both train travel and natural environments and have received positive feedback from teachers.

Download an example education itinerary:  
<http://www.sussexcrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/EVP-Southeast.pdf>

More recently, in partnership with the South Downs, the CRP have delivered the Active Access for Growth project, accompanying schoolchildren on the train to Southease, a village located in the National Park, to take part in arts workshops.

The CRP are also working towards improving signage at each station, making it easier for visitors to understand how they can access the National Park. Fingerpost signs are being installed to help with signage, alongside poster spaces containing South Downs National Park map and information to encourage visitors to explore the area by foot, bicycle and rail.

The South Downs National Parks continues to play an active role in the CRP, by attending steering group meetings and the CRP’s strategic advisory board.







Photo credit Larry Davies

## Conwy Valley Railway Partnership - Snowdonia National Park

Snowdonia National Park works closely with Conwy Valley Railway Partnership (CVRP), regularly attending CVRP meetings and supporting projects.

The National Park supported CVRP with the development of the Scenic Walks website <http://walks.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk/>.

This website details a range of walking routes, suitable for all ages and abilities, and includes an interactive map highlighting nearby points of interest. Each walk starts or ends at railway stations

along the Conwy Valley Line and showcases how easy it is to access Snowdonia National Park by rail. The website was funded in partnership with Snowdonia National Park, Conwy County Borough Council, Welsh Government and Natural Resource Wales through a Snowdonia Partnership Fund.

The National Park also promotes the use of public transport on their website, giving priority to accessing the park by train. It provides a link back to the CVRP website while also linking to nearby heritage railways.

<https://www.visitsnowdonia.info/getting-here-and-travelling-around>



**TIP:**

Discover more examples of community rail working in partnership with national landscapes on the Community Rail Network website [communityrail.org.uk](http://communityrail.org.uk).

## Measuring success

Developing effective working partnerships takes time. Once you have relationships in place you then need to spend time nurturing them to ensure these partnerships remain valuable.

It's therefore helpful to monitor what outcomes (changes) your partnership is achieving. When thinking about these outcomes, you need to think about how to know and demonstrate a change is happening as a result of the work being carried out. The Community Rail Network can advise members further on this, and offers a free impact reporting tool to help members track and evidence their Impact. See <https://communityrail.org.uk/impact-activity-tracking-tool/> for more details or contact [impact@communityrail.org.uk](mailto:impact@communityrail.org.uk).



## Summary of recommendations

- Spend time researching the national landscape organisation(s) you want to partner with, be aware of their aims and objectives and consider how your community rail group can link in with these. You can also use the advice in this guide to consider working with other outdoor organisations and locations, such as country parks, historic estates, gardens and nature reserves
- Explore ideas of how you can work together to make rail access easier and more attractive and promote it to wider audiences, including groups who may currently be excluded
- Invite a national landscapes representative to join your steering group or regular community rail group meeting
- Consider how national landscapes could improve their transport information in promotions to visitors whether this is online or in printed literature
- Want to hear more from members about their successful projects with national landscapes? Contact us and we can put you in touch [alice@communityrail.org.uk](mailto:alice@communityrail.org.uk)
- Keep the flame alive! Don't let your hard work go to waste by letting the partnership fizzle out. Make regular contact, try arranging twice-yearly meetings and use this time to update partners on what you have been doing. It is a great way to offer future support and make sure you and your community rail group are not forgotten about
- Shout about your success and enter the annual Community Rail Awards <https://communityrail.org.uk/events-training/community-rail-awards/>
- Tell us about what you've been working on. We'd love to share through Community Rail News. Just get in touch [news@communityrail.org.uk](mailto:news@communityrail.org.uk)
- Looking for more advice on how you can work with national landscapes or tourism partners in your area? Get in touch with our tourism and heritage officer, Alice Mannion on [alice@communityrail.org.uk](mailto:alice@communityrail.org.uk)



## End notes

1. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/designated-landscapes-review>
2. <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/>
3. <https://www.nationalparksengland.org.uk/home/about-national-parks-england/policy/our-work-pages2/sustainable-tourism-and-recreation>
4. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf)



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