

# Case Study From The North York Moors National Park, United Kingdom

Andrew Wilson

## Geography and Ecology

The North York Moors is situated on the east coast of England. At its centre is a large upland block with predominantly ericaceous vegetation. The area as a whole is, however, characterised by a great diversity of landscape and habitat: the sea cliffs on the coast, dozens of traditional villages, ancient woodland, intricately farmed dales and rolling pastoral country.

The area is extremely rich in archaeological and historical artefacts and associations. The predominately Jurassic geology was the subject of much study from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Human understanding of the science of geology and the processes of evolution were strongly influenced by the studies carried out on the Jurassic rocks of the park. The archaeological interest runs from Mesolithic times to the present day and is particularly rich in Bronze Age remains and significant examples of early industrial archaeology (alum, ironstone, jet). There is also a rich ecclesiastical heritage. The Synod of Whitby was held 663-664. This united the Celtic and Roman



Figure 1. Westerdale landscape. (Courtesy Ken Paver)

Christian traditions and decided on the process for determining the date of Easter still used by Christians today. Captain Cook, a European explorer, sailed from the area on his way to chart New Zealand and 'claim possession' of Eastern Australia. The religious, mining and seafaring traditions of the area have left big marks on the landscape. Agriculture over the millennia has also done this and the result is a highly complex and intricate palimpsest.

The central moorland area of the park is protected under European designations both for its key bird species (notably Golden Plover, Curlew, and Merlin) and for its habitats. The UK contains 70% of the world resource of heather dominated heathland. The national park has the single largest contiguous block of this type in England. The marine area bordering the park also has special protection, as do several of the woodland and wetland sites.

## Stakeholders

The complexity of the landscape is reflected in the complexity of the stakeholders. The area is very largely privately owned. Large areas of moorland are maintained for grouse shooting. This area is also grazed by sheep and most of the park area is farmed in one way or another. The remaining area is largely woodland: a mixture of recent coniferous plantation and ancient woodland. The first set of stakeholders consists of those who own and manage this land. Many of these are members of the local communities, but some are landlords residing at considerable distance. The park has a resident population of 25,000, forming another obvious and large stakeholder group; most of these have no direct connection with land management. There are approximately eight million visitors per year and thus a large number of visitors also see themselves as having a stake of some kind in the park. A variety of national and regional agencies have a stake in the park via their responsibilities for economic development, environmental protection and social well-being. In addition, there are two tiers of local authorities with their own responsibilities covering areas that include the whole national park.

## Management and Responsibility

In terms of the IUCN classification, the national park fits best into the category “co-managed protected area.” It does not fit easily into any of the three identified sub-types, however, but rather has elements of all of them. It has a pluralist management board and so is under ‘joint management,’ but it is also ‘collaboratively managed’ in that plans for the management of the park are drawn up consensually. The coast, with its borders across the North Sea, brings an element of ‘trans-boundary management’ into play.

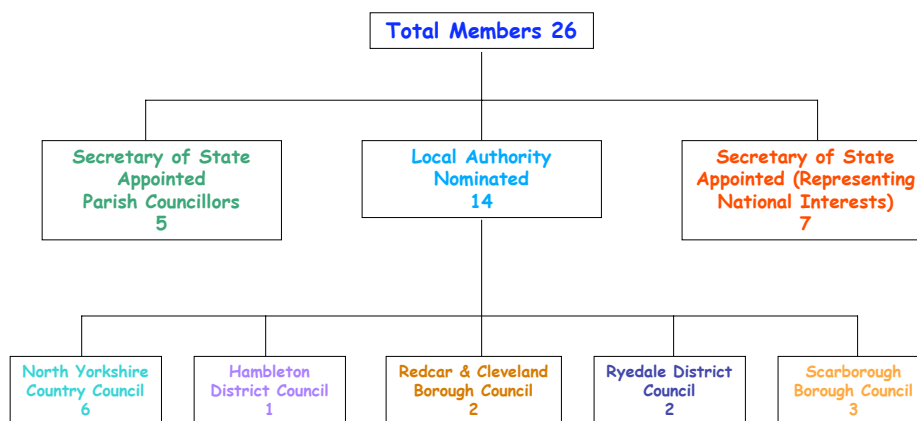
The National Park Authority in one sense has broad powers. It exists to conserve the area and to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the park. Its statutory powers to achieve these measures are, however, relatively limited – although the budgets to enable them to happen have been increasing. The Park Authority is the strategic and local planning authority; this brings with it considerable power, albeit over a relatively limited range of activities. Private owners of the land and associated managers have the biggest influence over what happens on the ground. They are constrained by a variety of national laws and agencies and by the National Park Authority, but the trend has increasingly been to find ways of working with these groups to find common solutions rather than impose penalties. Other national agencies have specific authority to take action, e.g., for the protection of ancient monuments or designated wildlife sites. The local government bodies are responsible for economic development along with the Regional Development Agency. Thus, influencing what happens on the ground in the park is a complex business, and the structures are correspondingly complicated.



**Figure 2. Curlew (*Numenius arquata*).**  
(Courtesy Neville Harwood.)

The structure of the National Park Authority is itself complex. Nearly half of the members are appointed by a national minister via a public recruitment process. But in turn half of these are representatives of the local communities, who indirectly elect them through their Parish Councils (the most local level of democratic representation). The other half of the membership is nominated from the local authorities that cover the area – generally they nominate members who have been elected from constituencies that cover the park. In addition to the authority itself there are a variety of advisory and consultative structures that the park itself has established. These discuss issues such as land management or access by the public and draw in representatives from specialist interest groups and neighbouring urban communities. The Park Authority is represented in a wide variety of external groups that bring an even bigger variety of influences to bear on it.

## North York Moors National Park Authority

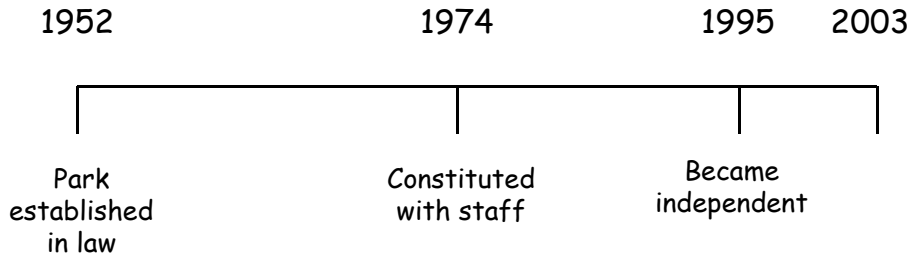


In terms of formal accountability, the National Park Authority is remarkably independent. There is a sponsoring ministry in London with associated civil servants, but the authorities are currently truly independent – hybrids between local authorities and national institutions, accountable informally to a vast majority of stakeholders, subject to a multitude of interests, formally accountable only to Parliament via the Minister.

## History of the National Park

The North York Moors National Park was established in 1952, in the period when the other English and Welsh national parks were first established. The designation at first had little practical meaning, but the status of national parks was increased in 1974 and an independent authority was established in 1995.

## Timeline



It is not possible to define a single point when a conservation regime for the park was established. The park has been both conserved and changed since Mesolithic hunters first arrived here nine and a half thousand years ago. What we have today is a much, much better understanding of what has happened in the past and of how to manage the conflicting pressures on the park. We haven't resolved the dilemmas between economic development and conservation, but at least we understand and can analyse them. In some significant and encouraging instances we have found ways of ensuring long-term market-based jobs and enhanced conservation.

The best example is the Moorland Regeneration Programme. A full report on this five-year project has been published and is available from the National Park Authority: *Moorland Regeneration Programme, Final Report, October 1995 – March 2001, Published by North York Moors National Park Authority, September 2001.* It is significant that, as well as delivering jobs and profits to the private sector, it hugely increased the scale at which core conservation targets were met. From working with local communities on projects such as this it has been possible to build trust, which in turn has led to greater collaboration and understanding.

### Principles of Good Governance

(The sub-sections relate to the UN's five principles of good governance.)

#### 1. Legitimacy and Voice

It is difficult to analyse the effectiveness of the National Park Authority's governance without understanding the social and ethical framework of the society in which it fits. There is an increasing range of legislation that relates to discrimination and human rights. The authority, of course, strives to comply with all of these. The wide variety of stakeholders and the limited absolute power of the authority mean that the establishment of good dialogue is essential to the effective working of the authority. The best answer as to whether the authority meets its responsibilities in respect to these aspects of governance is from the residents themselves. The results of an anonymous park-wide survey showed that 69% were satisfied with the authority and 10% dissatisfied. This is a slightly higher approval rating than the average for local

authorities in England and implies that, despite its national status, most residents are broadly happy with the authority's activities at a local level. This park-wide result is confirmed by a survey carried out by one of the largest parishes in the park, which asked residents to comment on a variety of local institutions. The Park Authority won the second highest approval rating after the local Parish Council, with all the authorities receiving scores related to their size and their 'distance' from the parish. This confirms that the National Park Authority is perceived to be a local institution accessible to the public despite its national status.

2. Accountability

Because of the complex nature of the structures and the multitude of stakeholders, assuring effective accountability is not easy. Much emphasis needs to be put on communication through as wide a variety of means as possible. One of the most effective means that this authority has found to provide this is via parish forums. These are held every three months within four subdivisions of the national park. The Park Authority finances and services these, but they are chaired and the agenda is set by local people. Members of the public may ask questions at these and it is normal for the Chief Executive and other senior staff plus the Chair or Deputy Chair and other members of the authority to be present. This allows direct access to decision-takers in the authority and the opportunity for public debate, criticism, exchange of views and dialogue at a grass roots level. It is clearly a time-consuming commitment but one that reaps rich rewards. The meetings are informal in one sense, but the actions are formally recorded so the authority can be held to account for delivery. The informality is vital to encourage effective human communication.

3. Performance

The authority is subject to a wide range of performance measures resulting from its national status and because it forms part of the local authority framework. The authority's performance and financial affairs are independently audited and subject to public scrutiny and consultation.

4. Fairness

The authority's actions are subject to the normal legal processes, which are increasingly used by the population. There is an established internal complaints system that is scrutinised by members of the authority and all members of the public also have the right to refer any actions or decisions of the authority to an independent scrutineer (the local government ombudsman). The biggest cause of complaints against this and other similar authorities with regard to equity tends to be over the operation of the land use planning system. By determining whether householders and landowners can build on and develop their land, the planning system can have a huge financial influence. There is a complex and balanced planning system in England, subject to independent appeal, whereby planning decisions must be judged against objective criteria. Nevertheless, the system is inevitably based on judgements of aesthetic merit at times. This makes the land use planning system an area where demonstrating equity can be difficult despite the considerable effort taken to achieve it.

5. Direction

The Performance Management framework under which the National Park Authority operates requires demonstration of strategic vision and effective leadership. It also covers issues of consistency and good conduct.

In addition to being appraised according to the statutory framework, the authority has won an accolade known as “Charter Mark,” which recognizes the achievement of high standards. This authority has been assessed as meeting the required standard for the last five years.

## **Key Governance Strengths and Weaknesses**

The structure of the authorities in English national parks captures the tension that exists on the ground between national and local interests. A variety of national, local and very local authority members have to reach common decisions. This can lead to polarisation and disagreement – but where there is a strong desire to work together to find best solutions the tension can be creative and produce excellent results.

Thus the key strength of the authority is one that is not structural. It is cultural. The structures are complex and could be indecisive, generate endless argument and fail to provide leadership. By concentrating on developing trust amongst and between staff, authority members, local residents, visitors, other agencies, etc., the complex system is made to work well. What could be seen as a weakness – the lack of a single powerful authority able to take swift executive decisions over a wide range of areas and implement them regardless of complaint – is turned to advantage. The authority wants other agencies to succeed with their ambitions, knows that it has much to learn from its local communities and is confident that it can find practical solutions to meet a variety of apparently conflicting needs.

One of the weaknesses of the authority’s governance is in communication. It would benefit from a bigger variety of mechanisms for communication (print, letters, meetings, road-shows, one-to-one, etc.) and from more resources being put into this.

We need to remember to be ready to receive communications as well as to transmit them – i.e., to listen better.

The authority’s governance is also weak in the sense that there is little legislative requirement on other public agencies to follow the agreed National Park Management Plan, though there are moves to strengthen this.

Until recently the authority has been content to accept that many of the tax-payers who fund it know nothing of the services it provides. Certain groups, such as the disabled, have under-used the park and this has been partly due to poor service provision and poor communication by the authority. Addressing the issue of ‘non-users’ is a big issue for the authority at present.

## **Main Lessons Learned So Far**

### **In Relation to Local Rural Communities**

1. Take as a starting point that all protected areas have had people living in them at some point and that all landscapes on earth have been changed by people.
2. Think long term. Remember that in the long run you can't succeed without the support of your local community, whatever 'power' you may have.
3. Trust won't easily develop unless you start from the point that you have much to learn.
4. When working with local communities in rural areas it is important to be willing to work outside the dominant world paradigm, which is currently based on science, procedures and structures. This is where most modern institutions work most comfortably and most intellectuals/practitioners are themselves based.

If good governance is to be achieved, we need to be aware of other, equally valid, worldviews that can be centred on personal relationships, locality and spirituality. These can more commonly occur in rural populations. People who see the world through this perspective can be mystified and even angered by decisions taken on the basis of the 'objective' reasoning of the other paradigm. Modern institutions will tend to react to criticism from local communities by adjusting structures, an area where they work easily – when what they need to do is adjust human relationships. In particular, they need to accept that there is much to be gained from adopting, where practicable, a 'quid pro quo,' 'this for that' approach with local communities – one which justifies decisions on the basis of mutual advantage rather than legalistic reasoning. It may not be possible, desirable or practical to do this in some spheres – such as land use planning in a UK context – but it is important to search for areas where it is possible to 'do a deal' and ensure the Protected Area authority is delivering measures that the local community wants to set against those the community has to accept are in the interest of a wider national or international public.

### **In General**

5. In areas where there has been past conflict, it may be necessary for the protected area institution to begin building trust by a one-sided giving of grants to enable conservation to take place. From this can develop a more collaborative approach in which the park institution works with local communities to jointly develop schemes that will have mutual benefits. This in time may lead to schemes and private enterprises that are led by the community with less institutional involvement. The institution may then need

to be less involved – that’s fine, don’t panic, as there are a hundred and one other issues to tackle.

6. There can never be too much communication, especially with the people whose lives you affect; think imaginatively about what form that communication might take, but bear in mind point 4 above.
7. Expose yourself to criticism rather than run away from it. Admit when you’ve got it wrong.
8. Practical projects that show you can work together help build the basis of trust; be ready to start small.
9. Perfect structures won’t work without good culture and you won’t know what the best structures are unless you have a good culture. There is no substitute for engaging with people. A 20-year plan to gain trust and build understanding is more useful than a perfect structure that has people within it trying to disrupt it.

**Andy Wilson** (a.wilson@northyorkmoors-npa.gov.uk) is the Chief Executive of the North York Moors National Park Authority. Previously he was Assistant National Park Officer at Northumberland National Park. Andy also spent many years in the voluntary sector, including working for the CPRE. He has a passion for protected landscapes and has visited national parks on five continents. Andy and his wife Helen have two daughters, Poppy and Ellie.