



## Colton Parish Council

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### **Consultation on the new National Parks Circular and Vision Statement**

Please find attached Colton Parish Council's response to the proposed new circular to replace circular 12/96 on National Parks.

Regarding the consultation process, Colton Parish Council wishes to register its dismay and concern at the lack of consultation of local communities within National Parks on such a significant document guiding policy for the National Park Authorities. This is particularly surprising in the light of the Government's White Paper on "Strong and prosperous communities" (2006) which states that its key aim is to "give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives".

Notice of the consultation came by chance from an unofficial source, which gave only a few days in which to respond. On querying with Defra why local councils were not consulted, the response given was as follows: "it was considered that NALC, as the umbrella organisation for local councils, would cascade this information down to individual councils. It was not possible to send the consultation to every council in the country, especially as what we had wanted was a collective view." For whatever reason, the consultation did not cascade down.

The explanations given above give cause for concern:

- i) "it was not possible to send the consultation to every council in the country". Firstly, local councils are regularly consulted on other government documents so we don't understand where the difficulty lies, and anyway, the issue relates only to those councils and local communities within the National Parks whose lives are directly affected by such policy guidance.
- ii) "a collective view is sought". The list of consultees makes interesting reading. We counted around 50 recreational groups consulted as opposed to only 6 organisations representing local communities. The list of recreational groups ranged from umbrella organisations to the very local. If, for example, Rochdale Ramblers Association can be consulted, why not Colton Parish Council which represents the whole community living within a similar-sized area in the National Park?

We should welcome information on the strategy for selection of consultees and some assurance of better representation for local communities in future.

Yours sincerely,

Mandy Lane  
Clerk, Colton Parish Council, Cumbria

CC: Cumbria Association of Local Councils

## **Consultation on the new National Parks Circular and Vision Statement**

### **Response by Colton Parish Council (Lake District National Park, Cumbria)**

Because of the lack of direct consultation referred to our covering letter, Colton Parish Council has not had the opportunity to consider the document in detail. Its response therefore focuses on two main points under Section 5.3 which are those parts of the document and changes to which we have been alerted. Please note that since the original Circular 12/96 is unavailable on-line, it has not been possible to assess the exact wording changes, and so it has been necessary to rely on other sources for this information.

### **Under Section 5.3 The economic and social well-being of Park communities**

We are concerned at the apparent removal of the following paragraphs:

*"The Government is concerned to ensure that there is no incompatibility between conserving the National Parks and their remaining as living and working communities. The qualities for which the Parks have been designated are as much the products of man's hand as of nature. It is in the interests of the conservation of those qualities that the National Park Authorities have a duty to work with and for their local communities".*

*"However, it is essential that the National Park Authorities take full account of the economic and social needs of local communities in fulfilling the purposes of the Parks and this can only be achieved by working in close co-operation with local authorities, landowners and land managers and those other agencies and persons with interests in the Parks."*

*"Nor must the second National Park purpose be interpreted so as to imply undue interference with the everyday lives of those who live and work in the Parks. It is of particular importance that those experiences which are unique to the National Parks should be protected and fostered."*

being effectively replaced with:

*under 53: "The Government believes there is no incompatibility between conserving the Parks and them remaining as vibrant, healthy and productive living and working communities. In fact it is such local communities who continue to help shape our Parks."*

*under 54: Section 11A(1) of the 1949 Act places on the NPAs a duty 'to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park' when pursuing the two purposes.*

*and under 56: "Authorities should continue to explore new ways of engaging with their communities"*

### **Our key concerns about these changes are as follows:**

1. The apparent dilution of the duty to engage with local communities and foster their social and economic well-being. This seems entirely incompatible with the Government's White Paper "Strong and prosperous communities" (2006) which has the key aim to "give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives".
2. The omission of 'duty to work with and for their local communities' which is particularly worrying; the Circular now simply quotes the 1949 Act words 'seek to foster', thus weakening this duty considerably. We would like to see the original statement re-instated.
3. The changed wording under paragraph 53 and reference to 'no incompatibility' suggests a shift in emphasis, and this concerns us. There is nothing to be gained in ignoring the existence of conflicting pressures of tourism, conservation and the needs of local communities; the

important thing is to emphasise the need to **maintain a balance between these pressures, mitigate their effects, and improve communication and understanding.** The new statements appear to take no account of the government's own expectation that pressures on the National Parks will increase significantly over the next 20 years. There is concern that further increase in visitor numbers may bring into question the sustainability of the Sandford Principle that conservation must have priority.

4. The reference to the Parks '**remaining** as vibrant, healthy and productive living and working communities'. This seems at odds with the serious decline of traditional upland farming which shapes the landscape of the Parks, and the lack of affordable housing and employment opportunities for young people.