

The state of sustainable communities

Measuring changes in communities

Communities within the National Park, as elsewhere in rural areas, have undergone radical changes in recent years. Many rural settlements now lack basic services such as shops, post offices, schools and health care facilities which were once the accepted norm. A lack of adequate public transport means that some people cannot conveniently reach services in neighbouring towns and villages. Most areas also face a shortfall in affordable housing for local people, especially young adults, to live independently in their local community.

Communities within the Lake District National Park are subject to a variety of pressures. The immigration of people who wish to live in the area, in addition to those who have second and/or holiday homes or who simply wish to retire to the area, distorts the housing market. This situation is exacerbated for local people due to low incomes, reduced job opportunities and the constant threat of employment providers relocating outside the area. Many rural areas have poor access to local services and public transport, and dwindling populations threaten the viability of local schools. Many areas are still to benefit from the introduction of broadband.

Vibrant and balanced communities are key to the long-term sustainability of the Lake District National Park.

To sustain the communities living and working in the National Park new opportunities are needed, including business and affordable housing. In 2004/2005, 1,526 planning applications were submitted in the National Park and 1,231 (81%) were approved. Each approval must balance the need for development with the requirement to conserve and enhance the landscape. To support these decisions, organisations like the Lake District National Park Authority need to identify and understand the needs of the community and react to change as appropriate. We need to monitor the needs of our local communities by measuring the availability of local services, housing for local needs and the diversity of employment opportunities.

There needs to be a better understanding of the functions of communities within the National Park, how residents live, what presents a challenge to their quality of life and what is essential to support vitality and vibrancy. But not all communities are the same. The towns, villages and more remote areas each warrant consideration as places in their own right. An improved awareness of the detailed dynamics of each area will enable specific and local needs to be understood.

The key indicators we will use to measure change in communities are:

SOP20

Changes in employment

1. Employment and annual income rates by sector
2. The variety of job opportunities

SOP21

Changes in housing provision

1. Access to affordable housing (ratio of house prices to income)
2. Number of second homes and type of housing affected

SOP22

Changes in services available and the vibrancy of opportunities.

1. The types of services available in settlements
2. Travel to work patterns
3. School profiles

SOP20
Changes in employment

We will monitor changes in local economic activity by analysing employment and income in different sectors. The environmental (which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting) and tourism sectors will be key areas to observe. However, it is essential that the overall diversity of employment within the area is monitored in order to fully appreciate local circumstances.

As well as shaping the landscape of the National Park, agriculture provides the most obvious employment opportunity for many living in rural areas, and contributes to a range of secondary type of employment. The benefit of its continued role in maintaining the high landscape value is demonstrated by its relationship to tourism. The effect of the foot and mouth epidemic in 2001 highlighted the vulnerability of both farming and tourism.

Tourism provides employment opportunities for many local residents and there is a strong relationship between tourism and the health of the local economy within the National Park.

When information about the economic profile is mapped across the National Park, the western edge sees a reliance on the employment opportunities presented by both Sellafield and Barrow in manufacturing and engineering. Both these employment types are extremely sensitive to political and commercial changes. Mapping of employment in the retail and hospitality (wholesale and repair) sector shows a strong patterning of residents employed in the areas around the tourist core of the Park.

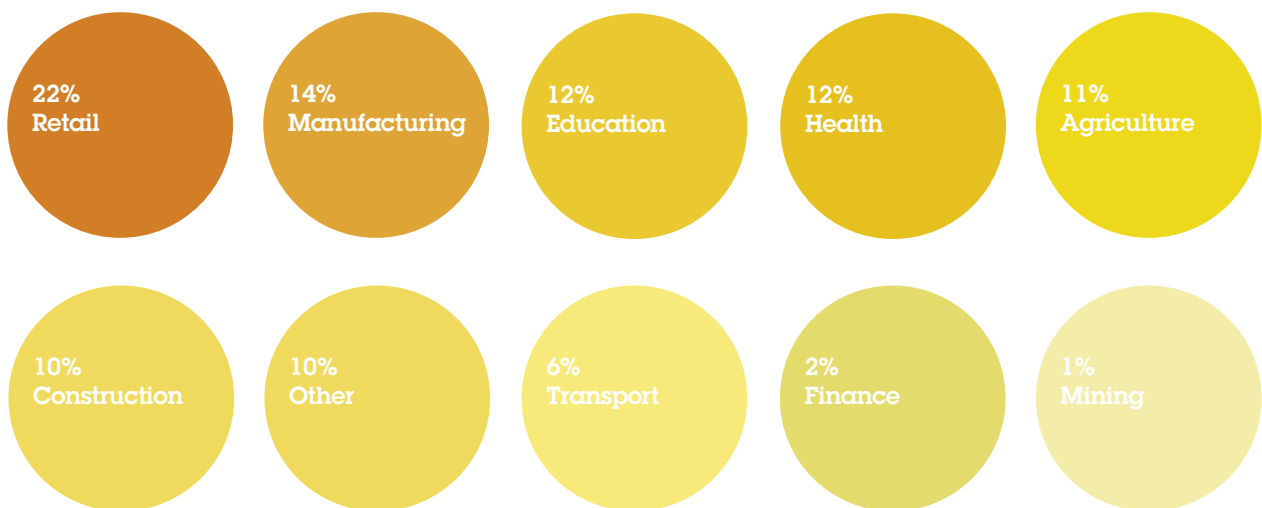
(Source: LUC – a social and economic profile of the Lake District National Park).

2001 census data shows that nearly 30% of the National Park population are over 60 years of age which will have particular implications for employment and services in the National Park. During 2004/05 there has been an increase in demand for professional and financial services within the area, and it will be worth monitoring this in the future to assess any further trends and implications

(Source: CEIP 2004 Household and Employer Surveys).

It is essential that we monitor economic activity within the Lake District National Park. The information collected informs forward planning and by monitoring trends we can identify development pressures. Decisions about where development can take place will be better informed as they will be based on evidence of need.

Source: Land Use Consultants, 2004 - a social and economic profile of the Lake District National Park



SOP21
Changes in housing provision

A key indicator for measuring how accessible housing is for local people is the ratio of house prices to household income. We will complement this information with the detailed information that emerges from housing needs surveys across the National Park.

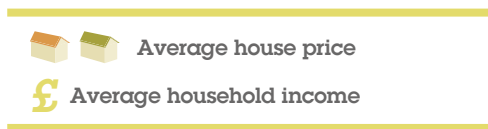
When the ratio of average house price to income is mapped across the National Park, it shows that the problem of housing affordability is generic and exists throughout the Lake District National Park.



In pockets of the south east and east of the National Park, affordable housing for local people is particularly scarce and this is reflected across the whole of the east of the county. In the west of the National Park, the situation is eased a little due to the influence and employment provided by Sellafield.

We will also monitor the number of second homes within the National Park. This is a broad indicator that can indicate the availability of houses to local people who wish to live and work in the Lake District National Park. Over time, the number of second homes in villages will provide some indication of the ratio of temporary to permanent residents – an indicator of the vibrancy of a community.

Over 20% of all houses in the National Park are second or holiday homes. Many Parish Plans in the National Park have highlighted this as an issue for concern. In some settlements, the figure is even higher. 40% of homes in Coniston are second or holiday homes – a figure that has doubled in the last 20 years. It is generally accepted that to maintain the health and vitality of a rural community, this figure should be no more than 25%.

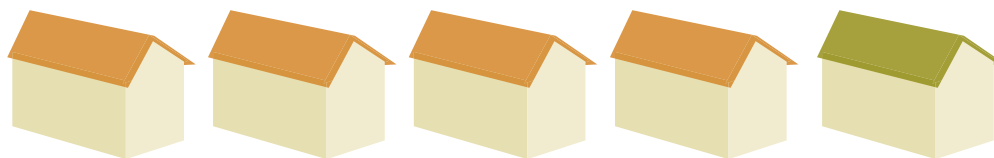


Source: Cumbria County Council/Land Registry, 2004

Source: Cumbria Rural Housing Trust: Part 1
 Effects of affordable housing

Over 20% of all houses in the National Park are second or holiday homes

Source: Land Use Consultants, 2004 - a social and economic profile of the Lake District National Park



SOP22

Changes in services available and the vibrancy of communities

We need to know what services are available in settlements within the National Park. To do this we will monitor service provision within our settlements, focussing on a full range of services, including key facilities like the general store, post office, village hall, village pub and children's play area. Only 32% of the population living outside the main towns in the National Park live within two miles of a post office compared to 41% of the population living in the rest of Cumbria.

We will also monitor the number of vacant shops, availability of financial services and other key features which will show any change in the health and vibrancy of towns within the National Park. A full survey of our settlements started in 2005 and will be programmed to complement the Cumbria County Council Town Centre Health Checks. This will help future development planning, which may help secure a long-term future for communities. We will also monitor schools in the National Park in more detail, providing a clear profile of school numbers and details of catchment areas.

Travel to work patterns will provide information which is useful in analysis of all the indicators for the health of communities in the National Park. People are prepared to travel greater distances to work if they can live in the National Park. The increased availability of broadband may influence these patterns, encouraging homeworking opportunities and affecting the diversity of employment within the National Park.

Overall, homeworking and walking to work account for over 40% of employees in the National Park but only for 25% in the rest of rural Cumbria.

Only 32% of the population living outside the main towns in the National Park live within two miles of a post office

Source: RSS 2004

