



Annual Report

2018

Exciting new developments at the Kielder Observatory and at The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre on Hadrian's Wall demonstrates an on-going commitment from all partners to the ideals of the International Dark Sky Park and International Dark Sky Association.

Public interest in our dark skies continues to grow at a pace and many new initiatives, both to conserve and celebrate our dark skies are being planned for 2019 and beyond.



*Northumberland's Dark Skies Exhibition at The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre.
© Alasdair Mckenzie*

LIGHTING

New Street Lighting Improvements

Northumberland County Council's £25 million project to modernise all the street lights in the county, including the 107 street lights within Northumberland International Dark Sky Park, with fully-shielded LED lighting is finally due for completion by the end of October 2018, after some delays.

New Military Plan

Officers from Northumberland National Park Authority have been fully engaged with the Ministry of Defence during the review of its joint Integrated Rural Management Plan (IRMP) for the Otterburn Ranges - the UK's second largest military training area in England (23% of the National Park), and at the heart of the International Dark Sky Park.

New objectives and actions have been tabled by the Authority, to commit the MOD to improving the quality of its outside lighting, in a rolling-programme of improvements over the next few years. The final version of the IRMP is to be signed off in 2019.

FUNDING

New Grant for Lighting

This September, the National Park Authority has allocated £5,000 from its Small Grants Fund for businesses within the Northumberland National Park and adjoining parishes, to install dark-sky friendly lighting.

The grant being awarded is up 50% of the capital cost of installation, and is conditional on the applicant allowing their property benefiting from the grant to be used a case study of best practice in other promotional materials by the Authority and its partners.

The applicant would be expected to adhere to the Northumberland International Dark Sky Park Master Plan and ensure that any other future lighting installed on their property is also dark-sky compliant, with the Authority monitoring the applicant for compliancy over the operational lifetime of the business.

Planning officers will also offer advice to the applicant on future plans for lighting installation, which would be given without prejudicing any pre-planning application advice sought or the outcome of any subsequent application for planning permission submitted. We look forward to reporting back on this initiative in 2019.

ARTS, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Successful dark skies Exhibition at the Sill

Between October 2017 and April 2018, more than 10,000 visitors visited the Northumberland Dark Skies Exhibition, which was curated by Northumberland National Park Authority at The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre.



The Exhibition focussed on three themes: Celebrating our Dark Skies, with a gallery of inspirational photography from local photographers; Conserving our Dark Skies, including displays comparing the impact of unshielded and Blue-white LED floodlights with fully-shielded and warm-white outside lighting, and displays on how easy it is to go and enjoy night sky.

We appreciate the support given by the Campaign to Protect Rural England for allowing us to reproduce their excellent and thought-provoking Night Blight Maps.

To coincide with the exhibition, the Sill hosted a number of dark sky events throughout its tenancy, including an opportunity to promote International Dark Sky Week in April 2018, see: <https://www.thesill.org.uk/international-dark-sky-week-at-the-sill/>



This winter, The Sill: National Landscape Discovery Centre will host another “Star Tips for Profit” workshop for tourism businesses interested in becoming dark-sky friendly and a new workshop aimed at the construction industry, to make them aware of the Lighting Master Plan when considering new developments in the Dark Sky Park.

New Kielder Observatory

To mark its 10th anniversary, Kielder Observatory opened its new observatory, the Gillian Dickinson Astro-imaging Academy, on Thursday 26 April.

Sitting alongside the existing Kielder Observatory, the Academy is the new home for the Observatory’s education and outreach work, which aims to give children and young people the chance to experience the wonder of the Universe.



Gary Fildes, founder and CEO of Kielder Observatory, said:

“Our vision for Kielder Observatory when we opened was to let people experience the magic of our Universe. 10 years on we’ve welcomed more than 80,000 people to the Observatory and I’m delighted we’re opening a second facility that will mean more people can enjoy the beauty of the night sky.

The Gillian Dickinson Astro-imaging Academy features fully automated telescopes, a retractable roof and presentation room. As well as hosting educational and community events, its high tech research grade instruments and tracking mounts will allow professional astronomers to spot distant planets around far away stars, conduct supernova searches and plot asteroids.

The new observatory was funded by the Gillian Dickinson Trust, Heritage Lottery Fund, LEADER funding, Northumbrian Water and Northumberland County Council.



Northumberland's largest manufacturing employer EGGER (UK) Limited also supported the new observatory – donating wood-based structural materials for the building, along with decorative laminate flooring and decorative melamine-faced chipboard.

Kielder Observatory's expanding education and outreach work in schools across the North East is improving young people's knowledge of astronomy and cosmology, and its inflatable mobile planetarium is visiting schools all over the region to support science teaching and excite and enthuse students about astronomy in 2018.

Physics in the Forest

Kielder Observatory's new series of events 'Physics in the Forest' are proving to be very popular and attracting great feedback from visitors.

Designed for the guest who wants to learn that little bit more they are led by academic astronomers and include a combination of observing, talks and tours of the high tech instruments within the new Gillian Dickinson Astro-imaging Academy.

Astro-tourism has rocketed!

During the winter of 2017/18, Northumberland Tourism Ltd, the destination management organisation for the County and an active member of the Northumberland International Dark Sky Park Steering Group, led a national marketing campaign titled: *"Northumberland – the land that's just as good with the lights off"*, the many attractions and stargazing events programmes in the DSP.

Campaign research & ROI has some surprising findings including:

- 74% said seeing the campaign influenced them to visit more places
- 20.4% said seeing the campaign influenced to stay longer or come back for another visit
- 19% of visitors stayed within the Dark Sky Park
- 84% of visitors were from outside the North East region of England
- 65% are now planning to visit Northumberland.

To date, the value of visitor spend generated is more than £700,000, and projected figures indicate a projected value of around £3.5 million into the local visitor economy, demonstrating very clearly the public's passion our dark skies.

Dark Skies Marathon

The Dark Sky Park designation has led to a wide range of new events celebrating our Dark Sky Park status, including the Kielder Dark Skies Run, which continues to grow in popularity.

It took place this year on 24/25th March and consisted of a marathon and half marathon, attracting a total of 1,200 runners over the weekend, generating a significant number of bed nights in the area and additional income outside of the main tourist season.



COMMUNITY & MEDIA RELATIONS

The Big Dipper Campaign

To highlight the increasing threat from poorly installed and overly bright outside lighting, Northumberland National Park Authority is launching a public awareness campaign on the 1 October 2018 called 'The Big Dipper', to show how, by taking a simple action, property owners can make a big difference to conserving our dark skies.

The campaign aims to encourage all owners of property with outside lighting to go out and assess how much lighting they have, and how much they need, and to ensure wherever possible that as many of their existing outside lights are dipped downwards.

The move is backed by Sir Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal, who said:

"It's important that efforts are sustained to cut light pollution further so we can all marvel at the night sky wherever we may live. This campaign deserves wide support."

Other National Park Authorities across the UK including communities who are keen to conserve their night time environments have indicated that they will amplify this message in their own respective dark sky areas.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Cranbourne Chase AONB

In April 2018, Duncan Wise from NNPA was invited by Cranbourne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership to give a presentation at its AGM, with other speakers, including Bob Mizon from the British Astronomical Association, highlighting the need to conserve our dark skies and the benefits from achieving International Dark Sky Park designation.

BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

Our Friends in the South

The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is designated a UNESCO Global Geopark and located just to the south of Northumberland International Dark Sky Park (NIDSP). It is the darkest mainland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the UK.



*North Pennines stargazing event at Killhope.
© Gary Lintern*

The AONB Partnership has supported a number of dark developments of its own, including the opening of the North Pennines Observatory last year. Last October, it hosted the first North Pennines Stargazing Festival, attracting more than 850 attendees to 13 events. A second festival running over two weeks and including 30 events will be taking place in October/November 2018.

Visit County Durham has also set up a self-accreditation scheme – 'Dark Sky Friendly Durham' – for tourism businesses wanting to promote themselves as astro-tourism venues. Membership of the North Pennines Astronomy Society continues to grow

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Hashtags for the NIDSP:
#NlandDarkSkyPark #Nlandstars
#npenndarkskies