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Congratulations to Gavin Capstick, new CEO of the Lake District National Park

In October Gavin Capstick takes over as the new CEO of the Lake District National Park. We are heartened by his three priorities for the Lake District:

- supporting nature recovery and agricultural transition
- promoting low impact visiting
- helping people access and learn about the National Park and World Heritage Site

Gavin's arrival coincides with the publication of UK National Parks' "[Vision for Regenerative Tourism](#)". We think this is a real opportunity to look afresh both at tourism in general and motorised tourism on green lanes in particular.

The new vision set out by the UK's 15 National Parks is, to some degree, a recognition of a worldwide problem: the negative impact of tourism on special (and therefore popular) places. In the UK National Parks this problem is given a sharper edge by the difficulty of reconciling their two fundamental purposes: *to conserve the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage* and *to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of national parks by the public*. As is generally known, the NPA is required to give greater weight to the first of these in the event of conflict, but this does not entirely resolve the problem when the sheer number of visitors and the impact of their activities begin to damage the special qualities the Park is seeking to encourage people to enjoy.

“*We need to move from minimising the impacts of tourism to ensuring visitors leave our National Parks as better places.*

UK National Parks

The vision is a welcome statement of an intent to move to tourism that is *helping give back more than it takes*. The word *helping* is a little worrying; why not just tourism that is *giving back more than it takes*? But this is the blog/press release. The main document sets out the commitment of NPAs to:

Champion and support tourism development that contributes to the enhancement and regeneration of the places and communities in which it operates.

LAKE DISTRICT GREEN LANES ALLIANCE

Protecting the beauty and tranquillity of our green lanes

and

Support tourism activity that helps reduce carbon emissions and increases nature-recovery, whilst ensuring National Parks are relevant to everyone's needs.

The press release goes on to highlight a series of case studies of tourism good practice in UK National Parks, which are worth a look to get an idea of how others are tackling this dilemma. Sadly, the Lake District, the largest and one of the oldest National Parks in England, is conspicuously absent. Admittedly there are a number of initiatives that are listed as being undertaken by all or most National Parks, but given the critical nature of the problem in Cumbria you might expect the LDNPA to be giving a lead.

However, the incoming CEO, Gavin Capstick, has *low impact tourism* as one of his priorities, so we can now look forward to a positive reset. Among other things, he might want to look at the green lanes issue. *Regenerative Tourism in UK National Parks* says that the future focus of NPAs' support for tourism will include (among other things):-

- Measuring (through gathering data, evidence and intelligence of a variety of types) the impact of tourism *on user-experiences, carbon emissions, nature and residents' quality of life*;
- Supporting and promoting low carbon and carbon-free travel;
- Developing nature-benefitting and low carbon experiences.

For green lane use, most of the data, evidence and intelligence is already in place, and recreational traffic on green lanes can hardly be said to be carbon free or nature-benefitting. Surely now is the time to reconsider the LDNPA's approach to this activity.

Looking beyond the remit of *Regenerative Tourism in UK National Parks*, it may also be time to move away from the common, long-held assumption that tourism is the answer to all the Lake District's economic problems. While it undoubtedly brings benefits, like everything they come at a cost, potentially at the cost of losing the very features for which the area was made a National Park and was awarded World Heritage Status. The assessment of the balance of tourism's benefits and costs tends to be ignored for a perceived lack of alternatives, but there are plenty of small scale industries, both low and high tech, that could fit into the Lake District without any undue impact on the special qualities of the place, and that are relatively sustainable, and able to offer more secure and regular employment, better wages and greater prosperity to the local community.

Given that, in carrying out their two founding purposes, the NPAs are also required to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities, perhaps the LDNPA should actively seek to introduce alternatives to tourism and be more imaginative and wide-ranging in the businesses they support.