

**HOWARDIAN HILLS  
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY  
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
22 NOVEMBER 2018**

**NATIONAL/NAAONB ACTIVITY**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To receive details of current national issues and the work of the National Association for AONBs.

**2.0 AGRICULTURE BILL**

- 2.1 In January 2018 the Government published its 25 Year Environment Plan, followed in late February by the document 'Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit'. Members discussed this latter document at the April JAC meeting and a response was subsequently submitted to Defra.
- 2.2 In September the Government published the Agriculture Bill. Accompanying the Bill was a response to the Health & Harmony consultation, detailing what options the Government had selected and therefore what it was including in the Bill.
- 2.3 The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) scrutinised the wording of the Bill and produced a Briefing Note for AONB Partnerships to use in advocacy activity. The Briefing Note is attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.4 The key response to the Bill was the suggestion of an Amendment to add the words "landscape quality" to one of the clauses. The amendment was tabled by Dame Cheryl Gillan MP, who represents the Chesham & Amersham Constituency that includes the Chilterns AONB. Unfortunately, due to a technicality, it wasn't selected by the Committee Chairmen to proceed. The JAC Chairman is ready to write to our local MP Kevin Hollinrake to encourage him to support this amendment, should it be re-instated.
- 2.5 Work will continue on ensuring that the end-goal is achieved – a new Environmental Land Management Scheme that has the implementation of AONB Management Plans at its heart.

**3.0 THE GLOVER REVIEW OF PROTECTED LANDSCAPES**

- 3.1 The second significant project to emerge from the 25 Year Environment Plan was the Review of Protected Landscape, led by journalist Julian Glover. This was launched in May and will report to Government in September 2019.
- 3.2 Julian Glover has already met with the NAAONB Chairman, Chief Executive and a small group of Lead Officers. He and members of his Panel have also visited a number of AONBs and National Parks, including Cornwall, Dorset, the Yorkshire Dales, Nidderdale and North York Moors. More visits are planned for early in 2019. Full details of the Panel members and the Review's Terms of Reference can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-parks-review-launched>

- 3.3 The Panel has launched a public consultation/Call for Evidence, which is now open for submissions until 18<sup>th</sup> December. The consultation document and questions can be found at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use/landscapes-review-call-for-evidence/>
- 3.4 The NAAONB organised a meeting for AONB Lead Officers in late September, to discuss the issues arising from the Review and to formulate a suggested response to the Review/Call for Evidence. The most consistent points emerging were that:
- AONB protection and enhancement could best be boosted if bodies were made more directly responsible for implementing the AONB Management Plan. At present there is a Statutory Duty to prepare and review an AONB Management Plan, but not a Duty to then implement it. Likewise, the Duty to 'have regard to AONB Purposes' (s.85, Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000) is somewhat dated wording – more recent legislation uses the words 'further the purposes of ...'
  - AONB Teams should have a stronger/more formal role in the land use planning system.
  - Stability of funding settlements for AONB Teams was fundamental to drawing down significant external resources, e.g. from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Prior to the current 4-year protected settlement, grant offers were only made on an annual basis.
  - AONB Teams have a huge potential to deliver more landscape and biodiversity enhancement, but over recent years much of the responsibility for implementation has appeared to fall back onto our shoulders. A change in emphasis, focussing on the 'designated landscape' rather than on the 'managing organisation', could bring about a significant step-change.
- 3.5 Following the meeting, the NAAONB is producing a Prospectus to assist AONB Partnerships in engaging with the Glover Review. This will be emailed separately to Members when it is available, but a draft list of Key Asks that will form the basis of the Prospectus is included as Appendix 2.
- 3.6 It is proposed that the JAC Chairman will submit evidence to the Glover Review, based on the Prospectus and illustrated with local examples. There may also be a request from the Panel/one of its members to visit the Howardian Hills in the spring, which will be accommodated if possible.

#### **4.0 OTHER NATIONAL ACTIVITY**

- 4.1 Work is continuing on developing a new set of Key Performance Indicators that will enable Defra to quantify the work achieved by AONB Partnerships. The Indicators developed to date will be dovetailed with the work being done by Defra on Indicators for the 25 Year Environment Plan.
- 4.2 Defra is proposing a simplified grant claiming mechanism, with 75% of the annual grant being paid up-front in April rather than in arrears in January. It is hoped that a simplified reporting mechanism can be developed at the same time, using our Annual Report and the KPIs mentioned above.
- 4.3 The publication of an Environment Bill is anticipated at some point, at which time a Briefing Note will be produced to assist AONB Partnerships with writing to their local MPs.

#### **5.0 RECOMMENDATION**

That the work being carried out on national initiatives be noted for information.

## NAAONB briefing on the Agriculture Bill

The [Agriculture Bill](#)<sup>1</sup> receives its Second Reading in the House of Commons on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

The Government has pledged “to leave the environment in a better state than we found it” (*Prime Minister Theresa May – Launch of Defra’s 25 YEP - January 2018*). Leaving the EU and moving away from CAP offers up the opportunity to address how the landowners, land managers, farmers, foresters and all those who are involved in producing food, plants and trees **whilst also protecting the British countryside**, are rewarded for the vital role they play – so-called “Public money for public goods”.

The NAAONB supports the premise of “Public money for public goods” and welcomes the resulting delivery of environmental outcomes such as clean air and water, thriving plants and wildlife, climate change mitigation, enhanced natural beauty, increased biodiversity and engagement with the natural environment. It is keen to build on its current work with Government to help support the objectives of the 25 YEP.

The Government has indicated that it will work with those who wish to improve the environment by entering into environmental land management schemes (ELMs) post Brexit. The AONB Family’s capacity and willingness to be testbeds for new ELMs to assist the 25 YEP objectives is indicated in its offer to Government [Farming for the Nation: AONBs as testbeds for a new Environmental Land Management Scheme](#).

England’s 34 AONBs cover nearly 7,000 square miles of the countryside. From the open moorlands of the North Pennines, Nidderdale, and the Forest of Bowland, through the undulating grasslands of the Chilterns and Cotswolds, to the more intimate wooded landscapes of the High Weald and Kent Downs, each AONB is the product of farming practices, and its value to the whole nation is largely dependent on sympathetic future land management practices. It is a legal requirement that public bodies have regard to the purpose of AONB designation (CRoW Act Section 85) and any future land management scheme must, therefore, do likewise. The AONB Family proposal will help facilitate this.

It is a statutory requirement for each AONB to have a Management Plan. This is the mechanism by which the future of each AONB is discussed, determined, and delivered. It is a locally-designed, nationally-relevant plan that depends on the collaborative activity of multiple stakeholders for delivery. AONB Management Plans are reviewed every five years and the new plans will be in place just as the UK leaves the EU. The Plans will act as a catalyst for new thinking and positive action that will sustain and improve the flow of public goods from the UK’s outstanding national landscapes.

At the same time, Government is [reviewing](#) the AONB designation to explore what works and what might be done differently. This is an excellent opportunity for AONBs to show that they remain fit for purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> [Agricultural Bill Policy Statement](#)

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## **NAAONB Environmental Land Management Scheme Proposal**

The NAAONB ELMs proposal allows a clear way of aligning land management with the need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of our national landscapes. By developing new approaches, the AONB Family aims to deliver across all the goals and policies in the 25 YEP. We want to test new ways of working with land managers that will put the environment first and fully utilise the opportunities afforded by the AONB designation to deliver integrated, place-based solutions. New approaches require new thinking and new partners. AONB partnerships<sup>2</sup> have universal interests in their localities, so are ideally placed to ensure that health and wellbeing interests, the private sector, cultural and heritage organisations and economic partnerships can get the most from an improved environment and can participate fully in both its conservation and enhancement. AONBs are a key national asset that can unlock these opportunities and realise the Government's high ambitions for the future.

## **Comments on the Agricultural Bill's First Reading**

The NAAONB welcomes

- the Government's ambition to leave the natural environment in a better state than they found it
- the Government's pledge to spend public money on public goods and the related delivery of environmental outcomes such as clean air, thriving plants, diversity of wild life, climate change mitigation, connecting people with nature and the resulting health and harmony of society
- the recognition that agricultural land has value that stretches beyond the economic and the environmental – it is vital to the health and wellbeing of our society and culture too
- the opportunities that the Agricultural Bill affords to improve the protection of our natural environment and the iconic national landscapes of the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- the proposed flexibility of the ELMs and the simplicity of the application process
- the proposed roll out of the ELMs including a piloting period
- the opportunities ELMs afford AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards to work more collaboratively with landowners, land managers and farmers

The NAAONB is concerned that

- there is no explicit provision in the Bill to enhance landscape quality. There is therefore inadequate read-across to the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan objective around enhancing beauty and heritage. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty cover nearly 7,000 square miles of the English countryside, the quality of which is dependent upon a future ELM delivering a full suite of environmental public goods. Without this integration AONB partnerships will not be able to optimise their role in delivering on the ambitions set out in the 25 YEP.

## **Our requested amendment**

In 1 (1)(c) add 'landscape quality' after 'enhances' and before 'cultural heritage' so it reads 'managing land or water in a way that maintains, restores or enhances landscape quality, cultural heritage or natural heritage'.

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<sup>2</sup> The NAAONB uses the generic AONB partnerships to describe the organisations that guide the work of the AONB Teams. This includes AONB Partnerships, Conservation Boards, Joint Advisory Committees and Joint Committees.

## **Glover Review**

### **National headline messages**

#### **Purposes**

The purposes of England's Designated Landscapes (AONBs and National Parks) must be future proofed with focus on enhancement and alignment with the principles of the 25 YEP

- The purposes of England's Designated Landscapes should be aligned. In bringing about an alignment, the following should be considered:
- The importance of a 'first purpose' that applies equally to AONBs and National Parks: 'to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage'. Note that the term 'wildlife and cultural heritage' does not currently apply to the AONB purpose.
- A second aligned purpose would specifically relate to recreation, formalising the current supplementary purpose, by the addition of a statutory purpose that focused on the promoting of opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of areas of outstanding natural beauty by the public. This is in recognition that all AONB partnerships already play a major role in delivering opportunities for outdoor understanding, enjoyment and recreation in England and indeed operate as if this was a formal purpose of designation. In our view this purpose should be expressed in way common to both Designated Landscape classifications.

As with the current National Park purposes, any second purpose that applies to AONBs should be supported by the principle that the delivery of that second purpose must be set within limits implied by the delivery of the first, and where conflict exists; the first purpose will outweigh the second.

#### **Governance**

- The mechanism by which the designation's purposes are delivered will vary according to local requirements; AONB governance models should therefore continue to reflect local requirements.
- In order to better utilise limited resources, we suggest extending the requirement to review the AONB Management Plan to a period of 10 years with a shorter term within which to review local Action Plans.
- We recognise that there is a need to strengthen national governance and improve the accessibility of national support for individual AONB partnerships and teams.
- Likewise, we would like to see a strengthening of local governance through improved accountability. Within the parameters of a local authority employer/employee relationship AONB staff should also be clearly accountable to AONB partnerships.
- Local governance models need to ensure national status is recognised, possibly through improved terms of reference for members and/or the use of national appointees.

## Land Management

- It is important that the Designated Landscape Management Organisations and their Management Plans have a central role in the restoration of nature and ecosystem services. This should be ensured through development and support for the role AONB teams will play in delivering on Outcome 1c of Biodiversity 2020, Net Gain, and their crucial role in supporting a Nature Recovery Network.
- Designated Landscape Management Plans should play a strong role in setting the framework for the delivery of a new Environmental Land Management Scheme.
- AONB partnership staff teams should be given the capacity to play a leading role in the local delivery of agri-environment schemes.
- It is essential that government helps optimise the ability of Designated Landscapes to deliver for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

## Planning

- Utilising the opportunities afforded by an Environment Act, strengthen the Duty of Regard through its replacement with a Duty of Due Regard
- Natural England to significantly raise the profile of the Duty of Due Regard.
- Consider legislation that places a duty on relevant authorities to support the *delivery* of the AONB management plan.
- Using the provision set out in Article 18, Schedule 4 of the Development Management Procedure Order (DMPO) 2015, give AONB partnerships statutory consultee status for Town and Country planning matters.
- Encourage the production of dedicated Development Plan documents for AONBs where appropriate.
- Government to support a consistent cross-departmental policy approach to sustainable development in Designated Landscapes.
- Government monitoring of Planning Authorities' performance in Designated Landscapes and associated accountability with incentives for Planning Authorities' performance.
- Ability of Designated Landscape Management Organisations to 'call in' specific cases for scrutiny.
- Consider extending Designated Landscapes offshore into the marine environment and giving their Management organisations a role in achieving the co-ordinated management of the coast and marine.

## Resourcing

- It is essential that core resourcing is aligned with the effective delivery of statutory purposes.
- Address the issue of vulnerability that can be caused by the relationship with the host Local Authority.
- Five-year funding packages agreed with government in line with the mid-term review of 10-year Management Plans, based on clear and agreed outcomes and return on investment.

- Adequate funding of Town and Country planning activity so that designated planning officers can effectively manage major planning applications and properly manage a new statutory consultee responsibility.
- There is a clear need for a national statutory advocate for landscape, championing the role of AONBs across government.
- The provision of a dedicated Sustainable Development Fund for both AONBs and National Parks to enable AONB teams to better support community and business activity allied to the purpose of designation.

## **Status and profile**

- Retain the statutory designation of Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty but support the rebranding of AONBs as 'National Landscapes'.