

Think big: ecological recovery in protected landscapes

A joint ambition from key stakeholders in England's National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)



Ambition

England's National Parks and AONBs (the protected landscapes) are valued for their spectacular landscapes and the wildlife and cultural heritage that they contain. Our ambition is to establish National Parks and AONBs as core components of coherent and resilient ecological networks across England. These networks will increase the chances for wildlife to successfully adapt to climate change. At the same time, they will continue to provide people with vital 'ecosystem services' like clean water, climate regulation and beautiful places for recreation. This ambition expands the scale and scope of the many exciting partnership projects which are already achieving wins for wildlife in our most spectacular landscapes.

Potential

With concerted action we can realise the huge potential that our National Parks and AONBs have to form the core of ecological networks, where wildlife sites are Better, Bigger, More and Joined-up¹!

¹ i.e. the key recommendations from the "Making Space for Nature" report (2010) – a review for Government by a panel of experts, of wildlife sites and ecological networks. See full report at

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>

The majority of the land involved in this transformation will currently be under some form of agricultural, forestry or game management –it is therefore critical that habitat improvement and creation becomes part of sustainable land management systems and businesses, and provides adequate reward for land managers.

i) **Better** (Improve quality of current wildlife sites)

It can be done! The condition of designated wildlife sites (SSSIs) in protected landscapes has improved dramatically over the last decade. Other key wildlife sites have the potential to improve to a similar level given the right support.

ii) **Bigger** (Increase size of current wildlife sites)

Our protected landscapes hold the largest remaining tracts of semi-natural habitat in England. Examples of large-scale habitat and landscape management are already taking place and we are determined to build on successes achieved so far.

iii) **More** (Create new sites)

Protected landscapes have huge opportunity for habitat creation – particularly native woodland in river catchments, wetlands like peat habitats and grazing marsh, and upland and lowland grazed heath.

iv) **Joined-Up** (Enhance connections)

It is important that we start to link wildlife sites within protected landscapes, and reach out to wildlife sites beyond their boundaries, using wildlife rich “corridors” and ecological “stepping stones”. This will help species to expand their ranges and move in response to a changing climate.

Immediate actions to drive forward ecological networks in protected landscapes

Fresh thinking and action is needed to achieve this ambitious vision, which builds on much existing good practice and projects found in protected landscapes. Initial actions we will work together on include:

1. Creatively engaging with farmers, land managers and local communities in discussions about how to best achieve ecological restoration. We want to explore how this ambition could benefit local people and their businesses;
2. Developing proposals for improved ecological networks – including creating local opportunity maps, and exploring the potential for ‘Nature Improvement Areas’. The management planning process and associated partnerships in protected landscape can act as a catalyst for this;
3. Identifying key gaps and synergies between existing landscape-scale initiatives and other projects, and build on these by strengthening existing partnerships and forging new ones;
4. Developing ideas for how the Common Agriculture Policy (post 2014) and the emerging National Planning Policy Framework could help implement ecological networks;
5. Making greater use of economic valuation information to develop markets for the goods and services provided by ecological networks. E.g. water company payments for habitat restoration in catchments, and capturing payments for land management from tourism spend.