



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  6 <sup>th</sup> March 2018	<u>Item</u>  <b>8</b>
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## **NAAONB PROPOSALS FOR INFLUENCING NEW GOVERNMENT ENVIRONMENTAL LAND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

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### **Summary**

This paper provides an outline of the proposal the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) is developing to make to Defra for the involvement of AONB Partnerships and units in the government's new, post-Brexit environmental land management system. It also highlights the government consultation launched on 27<sup>th</sup> February about new domestic agricultural policy and schemes to replace the CAP post Brexit.

### **Recommendation**

The Partnership is recommended to comment on the outline of the proposal and the issues raised.

### **Background**

The National Association has been in discussion with Defra for some time about the potential role of AONB units in influencing, supporting or even delivering aspects of the new schemes for supporting land managers to provide environmental goods. This is seen as an important opportunity to shape these critical schemes for the best benefit of AONBs. Defra are interested in the ideas and view AONB unit involvement positively. AONB units are among a range of place-focused delivery bodies referenced in Defra's 'Stakeholder Proposals' document accompanying the Command Paper consultation document of 27<sup>th</sup> February.

The following is an extract from the NAAONB paper provided to Defra in the autumn of 2017:

#### ***AONB partnerships supporting delivery***

*The following offer is based on our collective experience of working at the local and national levels. It builds on the AONB partnerships' exceptional power to convene, the trust that they have developed at the local level with farmers and land owners, and the insight they have in relation to issues of local importance. This offer represents a natural evolution of the role of the AONB designation.*

***We propose that:***

***AONB management plans should provide a key framework for the development of a post Brexit agri-environment support scheme.***

- *AONB Management Plans are statutory documents with a democratic basis rooted in evidence based policy*
- *The integrated nature of AONB management plans ensures that agricultural policy is cross referenced to wider environmental, social, and economic outcomes, the outcome of which will result in more productive and prosperous rural areas*
- *Integrated delivery at the local level will improve opportunities for simpler, cheaper, more effective delivery*
- *The AONB management plan is a plan for sustainability.*

*AONB management plans provide a locally led, strategic articulation of the character and qualities of places recognised as national assets. The plans articulate what constitutes valued landscape, endorsed by expert input and public opinion. Where high quality landscape is coincidental with sustainable land management this provides an ideal framework within which to drive agri-environment and rural development funding.*

*Payments would support the nationally valued characteristics and qualities that the plan describes, and the natural resources and processes upon which they depend, where they might not be supported otherwise, for example the retention and management of field patterns, high nature value sites, open views, woodlands, barns, in field trees, sense of tranquility etc. The plan making process would also, importantly, provide the platform for public engagement in, and gaining public support for, directed landscape change where this is necessary.*

*Placing AONB management plans at the heart of a new scheme for agri-environment and rural development would have multiple benefits - there would be greater engagement over, and debate around, the framing of a statutory plan that has a well-established track record of success. It's role in driving investment would attract new partners and generate deeper interest and debate, which in turn would inform how the scheme is delivered locally. Both plan and scheme would be reviewed on a 5-year cycle, supporting an adaptive, evidence based process that aligns public investment with the clear delivery of public goods, in such a way that the duty of regard placed on public bodies is exercised, and the national value of AONBs is increased through improved local engagement and policy development.*

This topic was a focal aspect of the national AONB Lead Officers meeting on 14-15<sup>th</sup> February. The write-up of this meeting has not yet been circulated and there is no single document at present outlining the NAAONB proposal, which is continuing to be refined.

The Transition Board on 6<sup>th</sup> February considered some exploratory NAAONB papers circulated in advance of the Lead Officers meeting. Board members expressed strongly that the AONB Partnership should not administer any new schemes, and did not support leading a pilot within the AONB. The Board were not particularly clear as to what was being proposed, and had concerns that this might go beyond the role of what the Partnership should do.

Some key points from the discussions at the national AONB Lead Officers meeting are as follows:

- Lead Officers were positive about using AONB Management Plans to guide the targeting of new schemes, and the importance of engaging actively with this opportunity.
- Many or most AONB teams felt they had some capacity or experience in providing support to land managers to engage with agri-environment schemes. NAAONB were clear that any proposal to Defra seeking to build on this type of role should not be expected to be met from within existing AONB team resources, and that additional funding would be needed.
- Almost all Lead Officers were very clear that there were roles in the delivery of new schemes including administering payments, compliance monitoring, etc that they felt strongly should not be undertaken by AONB units. These roles were felt to carry unacceptable risks to relationships with land managers, and in any case to be more suited to a centralised, consistent system. The concept of a 'red line' limit to the involvement of AONB units in the schemes was strong, although there were different views about where exactly this might fall. One or two AONBs have more ambitious proposals to run schemes themselves.
- The concept has been developed by both NAAONB and the National Parks Association of a two level scheme, comprising a 'broad and shallow' scheme open to all land managers, and a more demanding scheme, targeted at providing a higher degree of environmental benefits. In the scenario of AONB Management Plans providing targeting, the question arose of what would happen outside designated landscapes. There was felt to be a case that the higher level of scheme should be targeted mainly to the protected landscapes (National Parks and AONBs) though it was acknowledged that there are areas of high environmental importance outside these. It was also agreed that AONB units could and should work flexibly across their boundaries where appropriate, as with many other initiatives.
- The NAAONB intention is to get the proposal together for AONB Partnerships to agree April and submit to Defra late April/ early May. This now fits with the consultation timetable for the government Command Paper of 8<sup>th</sup> May. The submission of the proposal may therefore be linked with NAAONB's response to the government consultation, as many of the questions are relevant (see Appendix 1 for consultation questions).
- A number of AONBs are interested in running pilots for Defra, and are developing these proposals.
- The question was raised about what would happen to cross-compliance standards with the abolition of the Basic payment Scheme. It is not likely that these standards would all transfer into law, and if dependent on conditions within a new scheme and uptake of this, there could be a weakening of standards.
- There was discussion about using the new AONB Management Plans as targeting documents for the new schemes and how this might work in practice. The period of the next Management Plans would more or less equate to the transition period, within which pilot schemes are likely to operate. There was therefore the opportunity to test approaches to targeting within these Plans, and refine them for the next round of Management Plans, which will be closer to when new schemes would actually start. Targeting statements probably need to be a separate document to the Management Plan, but linking with more strategic statements in the Plan itself.

## Next steps for Shropshire Hills AONB

The timing of refining a national proposal for over 30 AONBs and allowing them each to scrutinise and agree this is challenging. The next Transition Board meeting is on 22<sup>nd</sup> May and Partnership meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> June, both after the close of Defra's consultation. A draft response to the consultation will be circulated to members by email for comment. A year on from the useful Shropshire Hills Uplands Forum meeting in February 2017, there would be value in a follow-up to this, using the Defra consultation and the AONB Management Plan review as a focus. A meeting of this sort may perhaps be more beneficial than an additional Partnership meeting.

### **List of Background Papers**

Transition Board papers and minutes from 6 February 2018.

'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment', Defra 11 January 2018  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>.

Health and Harmony: The Future for Food, Farming and the Environment, Defra Command Paper 27 Feb 2018 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-for-food-farming-and-the-environment>.

Reports from Shropshire Hills Uplands Forum 27<sup>th</sup> Feb 2017  
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Shropshire-Hills-Uplands-Forum-27-Feb-17-full-report.pdf>

### **Human Rights Act Appraisal**

The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

### **Environmental Appraisal**

The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.

### **Risk Management Appraisal**

Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.

### **Community / Consultations Appraisal**

The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 Consultation questions from Defra Command Paper on Agriculture, Feb 2018

## **Appendix 1 Health and Harmony: The Future for Food, Farming and the Environment, Defra Command Paper 27 Feb 2018. Consultation questions**

(Numbers relate to sections of the document. The main questions to which the AONB Partnership should respond are highlighted in yellow, though there may also be others).

### **2. Reform within the CAP**

Please rank the following ideas for simplification of the current CAP, indicating the three options which are most appealing to you:

- a) Develop further simplified packages
- b) Simplify the application form
- c) Expand the online offer
- d) Reduce evidence requirements in the rest of the scheme

How can we improve the delivery of the current Countryside Stewardship scheme and increase uptake by farmers and land managers to help achieve valuable environmental outcomes?

### **3. An 'agricultural transition'**

What is the best way of applying reductions to Direct Payments? Please select your preferred option from the following:

- a) Apply progressive reductions, with higher percentage reductions applied to amounts in higher payment bands \*
- b) Apply a cap to the largest payments
- c) Other (please specify)

\* please provide views on the payment bands and percentage reductions we should apply.

What conditions should be attached to Direct Payments during the 'agricultural transition'? Please select your preferred options from the following:

- a) Retain and simplify the current requirements by removing all of the greening rules
- b) Retain and simplify cross compliance rules and their enforcement
- c) Make payments to current recipients, who are allowed to leave the land, using the payment to help them do so
- d) Other (please specify)

What are the factors that should drive the profile for reducing Direct Payments during the 'agricultural transition'?

How long should the 'agricultural transition' period be?

### **4. A successful future for farming**

#### **4.1 Farming excellence and profitability**

How can we improve the take-up of knowledge and advice by farmers and land managers?

Please rank your top three options by order of preference:

- a) Encouraging benchmarking and farmer-to-farmer learning
- b) Working with industry to improve standards and coordination
- c) Better access to skills providers and resources

- d) Developing formal incentives to encourage training and career development
- e) Making Continuing Professional Development (CPD) a condition of any future grants or loans
- f) Other (please specify)

What are the main barriers to new capital investment that can boost profitability and improve animal and plant health on-farm? Please rank your top three options by order of the biggest issues:

- a) Insufficient access to support and advice
- b) Uncertainty about the future and where to target new investment
- c) Difficulties with securing finance from private lenders
- d) Investments in buildings, innovation or new equipment are prohibitively expensive
- e) Underlying profitability of the business
- f) 'Social' issues (such as lack of succession or security of tenure)
- g) Other (please specify)

What are the most effective ways to support new entrants and encourage more young people into a career in farming and land management?

Does existing tenancy law present barriers to new entrants, productivity and investment?

#### **4.2 Agricultural technology and research**

What are the priority research topics that industry and government should focus on to drive improvements in productivity and resource efficiency? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) Plant and animal breeding and genetics
- b) Crop and livestock health and animal welfare
- c) Data driven smart and precision agriculture
- d) Managing resources sustainably, including agro-chemicals
- e) Improving environmental performance, including soil health
- f) Safety and trust in the supply chain
- g) Other (please specify)

How can industry and government put farmers in the driving seat to ensure that agricultural R&D delivers what they need? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) Encouraging a stronger focus on near-market applied agricultural R&D
- b) Bringing groups of farms together in research syndicates to deliver practical solutions
- c) Accelerating the 'proof of concept' testing of novel approaches to agricultural constraints
- d) Giving the farming industry a greater say in setting the strategic direction for research funding
- e) Other (please specify)

What are the main barriers to adopting new technology and ideas on-farm, and how can we overcome them?

#### **4.3 Labour: a skilled workforce**

What are the priority skills gaps across UK agriculture? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) Business / financial

- b) Risk management
- c) Leadership
- d) Engineering
- e) Manufacturing
- f) Research
- g) Other (please specify)

What can industry do to help make agriculture and land management a great career choice?

How can government support industry to build the resilience of the agricultural sector to meet labour demand?

## 5. Public money for public goods

Which of the environmental outcomes listed below do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) Improved soil health
- b) Improved water quality
- c) Better air quality
- d) Increased biodiversity
- e) Climate change mitigation
- f) Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

Of the other options listed below, which do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) World-class animal welfare
- b) High animal health standards
- c) Protection of crops, tree, plant and bee health
- d) Improved productivity and competitiveness
- e) Preserving rural resilience and traditional farming and landscapes in the uplands
- f) Public access to the countryside

Are there any other public goods which you think the government should support?

## 6. Enhancing our environment

From the list below, please select which outcomes would be best achieved by incentivising action across a number of farms or other land parcels in a future environmental land management system:

- a) Recreation
- b) Water quality
- c) Flood mitigation
- d) Habitat restoration
- e) Species recovery
- f) Soil quality
- g) Cultural heritage
- h) Carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas reduction
- i) Air quality
- j) Woodlands and forestry

k) Other (please specify)

What role should outcome based payments have in a new environmental land management system?

How can an approach to a new environmental land management system be developed that balances national and local priorities for environmental outcomes?

How can farmers and land managers work together or with third parties to deliver environmental outcomes?

## 7. Fulfilling our responsibility to animals

Do you think there is a strong case for government funding pilots and other schemes which incentivise and deliver improved welfare?

Should government set further standards to ensure greater consistency and understanding of welfare information at the point of purchase? Please indicate a single preference of the below options:

- a) Yes
- b) Yes, as long as it does not present an unreasonable burden to farmers
- c) Perhaps in some areas
- d) No, it should be up to retailers and consumers
- e) Other (please specify)

\*if you answered 'perhaps in some areas', please elaborate.

What type of action do you feel is most likely to have the biggest impact on improving animal health on farms? Please rank your top three choices from the below list, in order of importance:

- a) Use of regulation to ensure action is taken
- b) Use of financial incentives to support action
- c) Supporting vets to provide targeted animal health advice on farm
- d) Making it easier for retailers and other parts of the supply chain to recognise and reward higher standards of animal health
- e) An industry body with responsibility for promoting animal health
- f) Research and knowledge exchange
- g) Transparent and easily accessible data
- h) An understanding of animal health standards on comparable farms
- i) Other (please specify)
- j) N/A – Cannot rank as they are all equally important.

How can the government best support industry to develop an ambitious plan to tackle endemic diseases and drive up animal health standards?

## 8. Supporting rural communities and remote farming

How should farming, land management and rural communities continue to be supported to deliver environmental, social and cultural benefits in the uplands?

There are a number of challenges facing rural communities and businesses. Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) Broadband coverage
- b) Mobile phone coverage



- c) Access to finance
- d) Affordable housing
- e) Availability of suitable business accommodation
- f) Access to skilled labour
- g) Transport connectivity
- h) Other, please specify

With reference to the way you have ranked your answer to the previous question, what should government do to address the challenges faced by rural communities and businesses post-EU Exit?

## 9. Changing regulatory culture

How can we improve inspections for environmental, animal health and welfare standards? Please indicate any of your preferred options below.

- a) Greater use of risk-based targeting
- b) Greater use of earned recognition, for instance for membership of assurance schemes
- c) Increased remote sensing
- d) Increased options for self-reporting
- e) Better data sharing amongst government agencies
- f) Other (please specify)

Which parts of the regulatory baseline could be improved, and how?

How can we deliver a more targeted and proportionate enforcement system?

## 10. Risk Management and resilience

What factors most affect farm businesses' decisions on whether to buy agricultural insurance? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) Desire to protect themselves from general risks (e.g. – revenue protection)
- b) Desire to protect themselves from specific risks (e.g. – flooding, pests or disease)
- c) Provision of government compensation for some risks
- d) Cost of insurance
- e) Complexity and administrative burden of insurance
- f) Availability of relevant insurance products
- g) Other (please specify)

What additional skills, data and tools would help better manage volatility in agricultural production and revenues for (a) farm businesses and (b) insurance providers?

How can current arrangements for managing market crises and providing crisis support be improved?

## 11. Protecting crop, tree, plant and bee health

Where there are insufficient commercial drivers, how far do you agree or disagree that government should play a role in supporting:

- a) Industry, woodland owners and others to respond collaboratively and swiftly to outbreaks of priority pests and diseases in trees?
- b) Landscape recovery following pest and disease outbreaks, and the development of more resilient trees?

c) The development of a bio-secure supply chain across the forestry, horticulture and beekeeping sectors?

Where there are insufficient commercial drivers, what role should government play in:

a) Supporting industry, woodland owners and others to respond collaboratively and swiftly to outbreaks of priority pests and diseases in trees?

b) Promoting landscape recovery following pest and disease outbreaks, and the development of more resilient trees?

What support, if any, can the government offer to promote the development of a bio-secure supply chain across the forestry, horticulture and beekeeping sectors?

## **12. Ensuring fairness in the supply chain**

How can we improve transparency and relationships across the food supply chain? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

a) Promoting Producer Organisations and other formal structures?

b) Introducing statutory codes of conduct?

c) Improving the provision of data on volumes, stocks and prices etc.?

d) Other (please specify)?

What are the biggest barriers to collaboration amongst farmers?

What are the most important benefits that collaboration between farmers and other parts of the supply chain can bring? How could government help to enable this?

## **13. Devolution: maintaining cohesion and flexibility**

With reference to the principles set out by JMC(EN) above, what are the agriculture and land management policy areas where a common approach across the UK is necessary?

What are the likely impacts on cross-border farms if each administration can tailor its own agriculture and land management policy?

## **14. International Trade**

How far do you agree or disagree with the broad priorities set out in the trade chapter?

How can government and industry work together to open up new markets?

How can we best protect and promote our brand, remaining global leaders in environmental protection, food safety, and in standards of production and animal welfare?

## **15. Legislation: The Agriculture Bill**

How far do you agree with the proposed powers of the Agriculture Bill?

What other measures might we need in the Agriculture Bill to achieve our objectives?