

Committee and Date	Item
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	
5 th March 2019	7

JULIAN GLOVER VISIT - UPDATE

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Summary

Julian Glover visited the Shropshire Hills AONB on 17th – 18th January and met a wide variety of people. This paper summarises what happened in the visit and the agenda item provides an opportunity for discussion.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to comment on the issues raised.

Background

The Glover Review published its terms of reference and started work in June 2018, and invited written evidence from October to December 2018. The AONB Partnership's written evidence was submitted and circulated to members on 14th December after a valuable additional Partnership meeting on 4th December to discuss a draft of the evidence (see link below). Around 2,500 written submissions of evidence were made.

Julian Glover visited the Shropshire Hills AONB on 17th – 18th January 2019, accompanied by Louise Leighton-McTague, Head of the Glover Review Secretariat team at Defra. The steer was that Julian wished to meet a range of people involved with the AONB and hear a range of views and perspectives. Partnership members were invited to participate and those who expressed an interest were included. The programme for the visit is at Appendix 1. The Review Panel between them are visiting all AONBs and National Parks.

Expectations of the visit ran high, and throughout the visit Julian was keen to keep discussion moving around different topics. This is in line with the remit of the Review to look at the national system of designated landscapes, informed by local experience in particular areas, but not reviewing or making recommendations on each designated area individually. The first quite large meeting was held partly to discuss the potential for boundary extension of the AONB into Herefordshire and/or Powys, and the potential for National Park status. A discussion of this sort involving representatives of Herefordshire and Powys is not believed to have happened before, and a brief note of the meeting is at Appendix 2 for the record.

The second meeting at the AONB Partnership office later on 17th January was intended to focus particularly on points raised in our evidence about our Conservation Board proposal and the local authority hosting model, but ended up being a more general discussion about activity of the AONB Partnership and team.

The six visits on 18th January went very well despite some snow, with a variety of people involved including farmers, Norbury Primary School, delivery partners and staff from the AONB team.

Around 50 people were involved in the two day visit in total. The final visit at Ironbridge enabled some further new contacts to be made and another useful discussion – about the links between the AONB and Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site and its management structures.

Julian and the Defra team expressed thanks to all those involved in the visit. The Panel is due to report in the autumn of 2019.

The issues of potential boundary extension and National Park status have attracted some press and public attention. The AONB Partnership itself has not initiated discussions on these topics but clearly must be involved and engaged in such discussions if they take place. Contrary to some expectations, the Glover Review is not understood to be likely to make any specific recommendations on these matters regarding particular AONBs. It is however likely that more general recommendations made by the Review, e.g. about the process of making boundary changes or new designations, may have some implications for these issues in relation to the Shropshire Hills.

It is suggested that the positions of the Partnership as recently set out on these two topics remain valid at the current time -

On potential boundary changes (as in the draft Management Plan November 2018):

Policy B1 - The AONB boundary

At the current time, the benefits of formally amending the AONB boundary would not be justified against the considerable costs and resources this would entail. The AONB Partnership and local authorities will work, and encourage partners and others to work, in ways which strengthen the integrity and identity of the Shropshire Hills AONB as an area of exceptional landscape value. The Partnership will focus its work strongly on the designated AONB area, but will work in a flexible and pragmatic way in relation to the boundary to secure the maximum benefit for the Shropshire Hills. If the process for amending boundaries is made easier, this policy will be reviewed.

On potential for National Park status (as in our Glover Review evidence December 2018):

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership retains its ambition to achieve a stronger governance structure, as expressed in our bid for a Conservation Board. We would wish to consider the options for designation and governance in more detail after understanding the recommendations of the Glover review and the government's response.

The written submission of evidence of Natural England is included here as Appendix 3, and that of the National Association for AONBs is available at the link below for members who may be interested to see these. The NAAONB response is understood to have been well received by the Review team as ambitious and informative. Natural England's position that the Conservation Board model should be made available to those AONB Partnerships who wish to use it, is of interest.

List of Background Papers

AONB Partnership written evidence to the Glover review and back ground information available at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/aonb-partnershipglover-review-of-designated-landscapes/>

NAAONB written submission to the Glover Review available at <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NAAONB-Response-to-Glover-Review-of-Designated-Landscapes.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 Julian Glover visit to Shropshire Hills AONB 17-18th January 2019 - programme

Appendix 2 Note of meeting held 17/1/19 discussing potential boundary extension

Appendix 3 Natural England written submission to the Glover Review

Shropshire Hills AONB – Julian Glover visit 17th- 18th January 2019 Itinerary

When	Where	Who	What
Thursday 3.20pm – 4.45pm	Craven Arms Community Centre (room booked)	Philip Dunne MP for Ludlow James Williamson AONB Partnership Chair Cllr Cecilia Motley AONB Partnership Vice Chair & Shropshire Council Hilary Clayton-Smith AONB Partnership Vice Chair Cllr Robert Tindall AONB Partnership (Shropshire Council) Veronica Cossons Shropshire Wildlife Trust and AONB Partnership Colin Preston, Shropshire Wildlife Trust CEO Cllr Andy Boddington, Shropshire Council Steve Brown and Clare Fildes, Shropshire Council Gavin Ashford and Mark Latham, Telford & Wrekin Council Sarah Bury, Shropshire CPRE & AONB Partnership Carol Griffiths, NFU and AONB Partnership Roger Plowden, CLA Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager Joy Howells, AONB Funding & Programmes Officer Cllr Carole Gandy & Juliet Wheatley, Herefordshire Council Adrian Humpage, Powys County Council Lorne Campbell, Forestry Commission	Discussion on potential expansion of the AONB, or potential National Park designation - chaired by Philip Dunne Wildlife Trusts 'Wild Marches' proposal for extended designation. Landscape value of adjacent land in Herefordshire and Wales.
5.00pm – 6.00pm	AONB office at Drovers House, Craven Arms	James Williamson, Cllr Cecilia Motley, Hilary Clayton-Smith, Cllr David Turner (all AONB Partnership). Philip Dunne MP Phil Holden, Joy Howells, Mike Kelly - AONB team Steve Brown and Clare Fildes – Shropshire Council	AONB Partnership group and structure Council hosting, Conservation Board proposal Resourcing and operation. Influence in planning.

FRIDAY			
8.15am – 9.45am	River Clun – Beambridge (arrive at site 8.25 am)	Phil Holden (all day – except NFU and CLA sessions) Mike Kelly AONB Natural Environment Officer Alison Jones AONB Clun Catchment Officer Gill Walters, Environment Agency Emma Johnson, Natural England Joy Greenall, Land Life & Livelihoods group Jim Whitehead, Lawn Farm Mark Chandler, Heath House Farm	River Clun Recovery project. Longstanding habitat management work on river with SAC protected site, partnership working with EA, NE and Woodland Trust. Ecosystem services and integrated catchment management. Working with community and farmers, Community Wildlife Group, Stewardship Facilitation Fund. Agri-environment schemes and transition
9.45am – 10.35am	Cwm Bydd Farm, Clunton	Carol Griffiths (NFU Clun Valley Branch Chairman and AONB Partnership member) and local NFU members	NFU farmers' views on issues facing the area
11.00am - 11.50am	Plowden Hall	Roger Plowden and Andrew Sayer, CLA members. Helen Dale, Regional Adviser CLA James Williamson, AONB Partnership Chair Cllr Cecilia Motley, AONB Partnership Vice Chair	CLA members' views on issues facing the area
12.00pm – 12.45pm	Norbury Village Hall (lunch)	Les Ball Head of Norbury Primary School & Year 6 pupils Cath Landles, AONB Community & Landscape Officer	John Muir Award and educational work The school run 'Brew with a View' café at the village hall on Friday
12.45pm – 1.15pm	Long Mynd (en route – weather dependent)	Andrew Hearle, National Trust Joy Howells, AONB team	Stepping Stones landscape-scale project. Biodiversity, links with NNRs, SSSIs. NELMS Trial proposal. Landscape Partnership Scheme
1.15pm – 2.15pm	Church Stretton Burway Road and walk down into Cardingmill Valley	James Williamson, AONB Partnership Chair Nigel McDonald, AONB Sustainable Tourism Officer Stephanie Hayes, AONB Promotions Officer Anthony Morgan AONB Trust Chairman Alison Caffyn, AONB Partnership member Pete Carty & Andrew Hearle, National Trust Hilary Claytonsmith Church Stretton Town Council & AONB Partnership Vice Chair (unable to attend)	Planning pressures - housing. Sustainable tourism – Shuttles, Destination Partnership, Charter, promotion, recreation pressures, Fix the Fort appeal for Caer Caradoc. Joint working with AONB Trust. Friends scheme. Conservation Fund projects.
2.15pm – 3.00pm	Ape Dale and Wenlock Edge (en route)	Mike Kelly AONB team Alison Caffyn AONB Partnership	Planning pressures – large agricultural & renewable energy developments. AONB boundary issues.
3.00pm-3.30pm	Ironbridge	Cllr Rae Evans, Cllr Nicola Lowery & Mark Latham Telford & Wrekin Council Sir Neil Cossons, Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site	Wrekin area of AONB, links with Telford, Ironbridge. Conservation, sustainable tourism, social inclusion

Note of meeting 17th January 2019

The meeting was held at Craven Arms Community Centre as part of Julian Glover's visit to the Shropshire Hills AONB on 17-18th January as part of the national Glover Review of designated landscapes. The meeting was held at the request of Philip Dunne, MP to discuss the Review, as well as the potential for extending the AONB boundary into Herefordshire and/or Powys, and the possibility of National Park status.

Present:

Julian Glover
 Philip Dunne MP for Ludlow
 James Williamson AONB Partnership Chair
 Cllr Cecilia Motley AONB Partnership Vice Chair & Shropshire Council
 Hilary Claytonsmith AONB Partnership Vice Chair
 Cllr Robert Tindall Shropshire Council & AONB Partnership
 Veronica Cossons Shropshire Wildlife Trust and AONB Partnership
 Colin Preston, Shropshire Wildlife Trust CEO
 Cllr Andy Boddington, Shropshire Council
 Steve Brown, Shropshire Council
 Clare Fildes, Shropshire Council
 Gavin Ashford, Telford & Wrekin Council
 Mark Latham, Telford & Wrekin Council
 Sarah Bury, Shropshire CPRE & AONB Partnership
 Carol Griffiths, NFU and AONB Partnership
 Roger Plowden, CLA
 Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager
 Joy Howells, AONB Funding & Programmes Officer
 Cllr Carole Gandy, Herefordshire Council
 Juliet Wheatley, Herefordshire Council
 Adrian Humpage, Powys County Council
 Lorne Campbell, Forestry Commission

Julian invited all present to introduce themselves, and some expressed views on the potential for boundary extension and/or National Park status. Current activity and operation under the existing AONB designation was also discussed.

Philip Dunne said this AONB was not well resourced by its local authorities and felt that more could be done to promote the AONB and nearby areas for tourism.

Cecilia Motley said the structure and relationship with the planning authority was an issue, as comments were not given much weight since the AONB Partnership was not a statutory consultee. She didn't have strong views about the boundary but was not keen on becoming a National Park and referred to fears of people working in the area about restrictions.

Carol Griffiths said farmers were concerned about further restrictions. She said replacement farm buildings were needed and additional powers would be worrying.

Lorne Campbell said the Mortimer Forest crosses the Shropshire/Herefordshire border and the AONB objectives to conserve and enhance the landscape and make the most of recreation opportunities fitted well with Forestry Commission's aims for the forest.

James Williamson said he felt AONB designation was more appropriate to the area than National Park.

Cllr Carole Gandy as the ward member for the Mortimer area of Herefordshire said it seemed the AONB has relatively little influence in planning. She said tourism was important but North Herefordshire is a tranquil area and there was a risk of that becoming different. Designation might drive better quality housing but this would be more expensive. She noted that the Welsh system was significantly devolved now.

Clare Fildes felt there was potential for the AONB to have more impact within the county.

Cllr Robert Tindall felt the area shouldn't be a National Park but the AONB's remit should be strengthened, including being a statutory consultee on planning and revisiting the boundary.

Colin Preston mentioned environmental pressures including housing and industrial agricultural developments. He said there was an opportunity to look at the natural capital of farmland, and said that the boundaries of the AONB do not make much sense.

Veronica Cossons said that natural beauty included biodiversity and landscape and heritage, and needed protecting more.

Cllr Andy Boddington said that from leading a discussion on potential for National Park status he could see that while some of the public are in favour, many farmers are very nervous about the idea. He felt the stronger identity and planning powers would be an advantage. The weakness of the current system to deal with planning pressures was a problem. He would like to see a National Park or a strengthened AONB, and suggested inclusion of Ironbridge and Mortimer Forest.

Roger Plowden was concerned about the idea of a National Park and said landowners often have to deal with the consequences of access without help. He felt better infrastructure was needed, in particular we need to look at car parking, litter, dog control and education. Landowners should be supported to do their job of looking after the countryside.

Juliet Wheatley said that landscape and biodiversity don't stop at administrative boundaries. She was aware however that resources for new designations were minimal and resources of the additional local authorities which might be included was also an issue.

Mark Latham said that a small but important part of the AONB was within Telford & Wrekin, and there was a lot of growth and development around it. Social inclusion along with health and wellbeing were therefore a high priority.

Gavin Ashford said that the designated areas were important to Telford.

Adrian Humpage said the Powys Local Development Plan had been adopted and had taken a policy approach to landscape protection rather than area designations. The potential for AONB designation near the English border had never been mentioned through the LDP examination process, though there was interest further west in Powys from campaign groups in relation to the Cambrian Mountains area. The recent Welsh review of designated landscapes had also not brought out any interest regarding the border area. For Natural Resources Wales to take forward a designation proposal and local authority involvement would require resources and political support and would need a strong evidence base and justification. Maintaining the existing designations was already difficult and new ones would spread resources even more thinly.

Philip Dunne mentioned the Agriculture Bill and new funding regimes, in which he expected designated landscape organisations to have a role. The Environment Bill would bring new

powers, but he recognised that capacity was an issue both for planning authorities and the AONB Partnership.

Robert Tindall felt that if the AONB body were a statutory consultee it should be a Conservation Board and better resourced. He was keen to see the AONB enlarged and felt that the Powys landscape was little different. The Midlands area of the UK was under-represented by designated landscapes.

Julian Glover said he was looking for big ambition, above process and detail. He said how money goes into the landscape was changing and the role for designated landscapes was interesting. Money for farming wouldn't be guaranteed and a new effort was needed to make the case to the Treasury. He said there was a need to think about nature differently, not to hector people and to build coalitions. He described joining things up, as in the Lawton report recommendations. His Review would not be looking at boundary changes individually and was also not covering Wales. He felt boundaries were always a bit arbitrary but the process could be simpler. He was also interested in how people outside designated landscapes get benefits from them, keeping in mind the founding vision, that these are areas for everyone. He asked how the Partnership works in practice.

Sarah Bury said it worked well on the ground but had poor resources. She felt AONBs were more creative, and National Parks by comparison rather bureaucratic.

Cecilia Motley said the relationship between Shropshire Council and the AONB had been difficult. The authority had been under pressure and the AONB had suffered. Work on the Conservation Board proposal had been very positive and this would offer more freedom to raise resource and expand areas of activity. It shouldn't however sever all contact with the local authority, who were now more receptive. Though the Conservation Board proposal had been stalled, we were moving forward.

Colin Preston said we were in danger of not delivering the Lawton vision and of designated areas not being fit or adequate for their purpose.

Veronica Cossons said a lot of effort went into preparing the Management Plan but questioned whether it has sufficient teeth.

Clare Fildes mentioned work of health and wellbeing.

Hilary Claytonsmith said the recently proposed housing sites in Church Stretton, the only town in the AONB, were problematic and there was a risk of important areas of the AONB being built over.

There was further discussion about natural beauty and use by people of the area for recreation.

The meeting was not intended to seek any decisions, and no firm conclusions were reached. People expressed however that it had been a valuable discussion which had not happened before with the parties present.

Natural England's Response to the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes

1. Natural England's Role

1.1 Natural England is a statutory body established under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (the "NERC Act"). We are the statutory adviser to Government on the natural environment. Our purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development. As the national landscape adviser for England, Natural England is the designating authority for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We have specific powers and duties to advise on the management and governance of designated landscapes and to monitor and assess their effectiveness. We are a statutory consultee on planning matters and provide landscape advice to local planning authorities and the Secretary of State. This response draws on our significant experience and expertise from working closely with designated landscape partners in these roles over many years.

2. What this Review can achieve

2.1 We believe that this review offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to place designated landscapes at the heart of Government's wider 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) ambitions. Covering 24% of England, the 10 National Parks and 34 AONBs are our finest landscapes, rich in natural beauty, their distinctive character providing a wide range of benefits to local communities and visitors. As environmentally focused bodies, they already perform valuable functions in conserving natural beauty, the natural environment and natural capital, but they could do much more. This review should retain and build on designated landscapes' existing purposes, founded on conserving and enhancing their natural beauty, but we would like to see them deliver much more towards the Government's goals of environmental improvement and delivering more ambitious benefits for people and the economy.

2.2 Landscapes define the character of our country, creating a sense of place and belonging. Well-managed landscapes support thriving wildlife, nourish our culture and underpin a sustainable economy. As our most cherished landscapes, National Parks and AONBs have the capacity to provide nationally important benefits and enhance our natural capital into the future. Designated landscapes can offer more than their current contribution. They should exemplify integrated, landscape-scale approaches to management that improve their natural capital assets for people in and beyond their boundaries. They should adopt a more coherent national voice as a key part of the Defra family to deliver more with their resources for a healthier natural world. Designated landscapes can play a major role in delivering the 25 YEP by well targeted and informed management and action, for example, as a key part of the Nature Recovery Network, piloting environmental net gain, delivering carbon sequestration, piloting the new Environmental Land Management System (ELM) and forging green connections with urban populations.

2.3 Natural England can play a significant role in helping designated landscapes achieve these ambitious changes, reinforcing our statutory links and supporting and championing the designated landscape family.

3. Summary of Natural England's overarching recommendations

3.1 Our overarching recommendations are set out below. These are supported by further analysis, including how Natural England may support their delivery, which we would be pleased to discuss with the Review team.

- I) **Stronger Together:** Greater collaboration and coordination across designated landscapes, working to a common set of national objectives, standards and performance criteria whilst reflecting local priorities.
- II) **Champions for the environment:** Designated landscapes should be exemplars of the enhancement of natural beauty and natural capital, delivering specific contributions to the 25 Year Environment Plan goals and sustainably providing thriving wildlife, multiple ecosystem services, health and well-being benefits into the future.
- III) **Making the most of the best:** New designations and boundary variations to be undertaken where they add substantial national value to the current series. The current designation process should be simplified.
- IV) **More effective land use planning:** Strengthening the ability of designated landscapes, particularly AONB partnerships, to enhance their character and natural beauty and deliver environmental improvement through the quality and consistency of land use planning and related decisions.
- V) **For people, with people:** Designated landscapes to pioneer new ways to connect more people from all parts of society with the natural environment, to raise awareness of, increase the benefits they receive from and increase positive action for the environment.

4. Our Recommendations

4.1 Recommendation 1: STRONGER TOGETHER

Greater collaboration and coordination across designated landscapes to work to a common set of national objectives, standards and performance criteria while reflecting local priorities.

Our recommendations:

- (a) Working together more closely as a national collective across all protected landscapes will create a clearer national voice, profile and brand for the designated landscape family, and enable consistently higher quality delivery, monitoring and reporting against national objectives such as the 25 YEP. National coordination, intelligence sharing, and collective direction across all designated landscape should be strengthened. This strengthen collective role will enable designated landscapes to deliver more and in new ways. It will require adequate resourcing and capability building, including for the national bodies, the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB) and National Parks England. Natural England is well placed to support

and challenge the designated landscape family to define standards and agree their contribution towards national targets that deliver the 25 YEP. The contribution of designated landscapes should be reflected in the New Nature Strategy, with further refinement and development of the existing monitoring framework for designated landscapes (MEOPL) to ensure their contribution can be readily understood and assessed.

- (b) The membership of National Park Boards and AONB partnerships should be reviewed to ensure they reflect wider society and have the skills needed to drive their contribution to refocused national objectives, including the 25 YEP. For AONBs, the national interest should be better reflected, for example through independent appointments in line with National Park and Conservation Boards. Natural England already provides some *ad hoc* skills training to the designated landscape family e.g. how to meet Biodiversity 2020 targets and apply an ecosystems approach in AONB management planning. We could offer coordinated training for AONB Board members and local authority members on statutory purposes, and aspects of the 25 YEP which Defra has asked us to lead, for example the Nature Recovery Network, implementing Green Infrastructure standards and connecting people and nature. This provides a model which could be expanded upon across the Defra Group.
- (c) There is significant variation in the resourcing and consequent performance of designated landscapes. Current funding arrangements for AONBs should be improved to enable them to make an enhanced contribution to national priorities. This could include providing 100% of Grant in Aid directly from Defra rather than relying on local authorities to provide 25%. This would standardise funding arrangements, provide greater certainty over AONB allocations and avoid complex, annual negotiations with multiple authorities. Building the resilience of the NAAONB is also important. We recognise all designated landscape bodies have made strides to explore alternative funding options and would encourage more on this, including for example, renewed investigation of hypothecated visitor taxes and charges, and the role of trusts and charities and commercial income.
- (d) The existing statutory purposes of designated landscapes are broadly fit for purpose and should be retained. There are some small amendments to how natural beauty is defined which could be helpfully clarified through the Environment Bill, specifically to include wildlife and cultural heritage as part of natural beauty when considering AONBs, thereby aligning the legislation with how natural beauty is understood for National Parks.

4.2 Recommendation 2: CHAMPIONS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

Designated Landscapes should be exemplars for the enhancement of natural beauty and natural capital, delivering the 25 Year Environment Plan goals and sustainably providing thriving wildlife, multiple ecosystem services, health and well-being benefits into the future.

Our recommendations:

- (a) Every designated landscape should have a clear, shared and integrated vision for their landscape, setting out how they will be beautiful, wildlife-rich places for people to enjoy. To deliver this, designated landscape Management Plans should adopt a natural capital approach, clearly framed around the natural beauty, character and

special qualities of the landscape. Plans should always be developed and delivered in partnership with stakeholders, and hold shared objectives and visions with Local Development Plans. They should clearly identify, through a common set of goals, their contribution to national priorities. These should be underpinned by a shared evidence baseline and clear monitoring requirements to inform regular reporting. Natural England can support and collaborate with designated landscapes to develop shared objectives, provide standards and guidance, and assess performance in delivering 25 Year Environment Plan objectives, for example to help them assess their contribution to species recovery and habitat restoration targets and to explore options for future change with partners and communities.

- (b) In setting out their environmental objectives, designated landscape Management Plans could usefully address how they will seek to have impact beyond their boundaries, to promote partnership working and to extend the benefits of a healthy environment to neighbouring landscapes and communities. National Nature Reserve partnerships provide a useful model for how to bring local people together to deliver a shared vision that impacts beyond their boundaries, engaging with and delivering wider benefits to neighbouring communities.
- (c) Designated landscapes should play a central role in delivering a resilient, wildlife-rich Nature Recovery Network¹ that also provides active travel and recreation routes, linking populations to the benefits and services these areas of great natural beauty can provide. Natural England would be interested in working more closely with designated landscapes to trial new approaches to conservation that focus on creating resilient landscapes² through the restoration of ecosystems and natural capital and help build the Nature Recovery Network.
- (d) As highly valuable natural capital assets, land in designated landscapes should continue to attract agri-environment support. Strengthened land management plans, with clear targets and performance criteria, could potentially provide a local framework to support Environmental Land Management System, informing land managers of locally and nationally coherent priorities for landscape-scale activities.
- (e) Designated landscapes and constituent local authorities should, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework, embed biodiversity net gain in their plans. They should adopt and apply metrics to achieve biodiversity net gain for developments within their boundaries, setting ambitious targets. They should pilot a wider environmental net gain approach to achieve wider 25 YEP targets including climate change, water quality, natural beauty and cultural heritage. Relevant Local Development Plans could support this by including a clear principle to seek net gain.

¹ One of the flagship initiatives in the 25 YEP is the development of a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) as a key mechanism for recovery and delivering wider benefits including greater public enjoyment, pollination, water quality improvements and flood management. The NRN will link our existing habitat resources, including protected sites and major Nature Recovery Areas which should include Designated Landscapes.

² We define **resilient** landscapes and seas as capable of absorbing, resisting or recovering from disturbances and damage caused by natural perturbations and human activities, while continuing to meet overall objectives of supporting biodiversity, landscape character, geodiversity and benefits for people. This depends on functioning natural processes and society's support for sustainable management of the natural environment and cultural heritage.

The application of net gain funds could include net gain funding levied from outside the designated landscape.

- (f) Resourcing of designated landscapes should be reviewed to reflect the expected additional contribution to delivering national priorities, such as in the 25 YEP. Grant in Aid resourcing models should ensure that all have sufficient long-term capacity to work for, with and through local communities, businesses and other stakeholders to deliver reframed objectives and the 25 YEP. Priority allocation of net gain and ELMs funding should be targeted on delivery of local contributions to national targets such as developing designated landscapes as key elements of a Nature Recovery Network or species recovery.

4.3 Recommendation 3: MAKING THE MOST OF THE BEST.

New designations and boundary variations to be undertaken where they add substantial national value to the current series. The designation process should be simplified.

Our Recommendations:

- (a) We strongly recommend that Government focus is on improving the performance of existing designated landscapes and applying those benefits and their learning beyond their boundaries. New designations and boundary variations should be undertaken where they add substantial national value, for example in delivering targets in the 25YEP. This assessment should be supported by clear criteria.
- (b) Where new designations are required, the designation process should be reformed to:
 - i. Better identify and prioritise the best possible future designation options for the environment and society;
 - ii. Make designations or boundary variations more straightforward, to achieve within a reasonable timescale and within the constraints imposed by current legislation and precedent;
 - iii. Better harness the knowledge and commitment of willing stakeholders to assist in the designation process.

Natural England has developed proposals to reform the designation process in response to a request from Lord Gardiner. These have been shared separately with the Review Team. Options include the introduction of an initial assessment of proposed designations against criteria and a greater role for local stakeholders to provide supporting evidence for designation. Natural England could also explore developing a discretionary chargeable advice service to support applications. We encourage the Review to adopt these recommendations, subject to further consultation and testing with stakeholders. Natural England's resource in this area is currently limited. This will need to be reviewed if Government seeks greater urgency in delivering new and revised designations.

- (c) As an alternative to designating new or varying existing designated landscapes, Government could consider creating new mechanisms to recognise and afford protection to locally valued landscapes identified by communities and local authorities. These could include a new local level non-statutory designation for landscapes of local value, the concept of a suite of "National Park Cities" for England,

establishing a new “Living Coast” designation and a stronger role for green belts as breathing spaces connecting populations with surrounding countryside. These could have suitable status set out within the National Planning Policy Framework, such as that given to the Local Green Space Designation (paras 99-101). Natural England can provide technical advice and support to help develop such innovative approaches.

4.4 Recommendation 4: MORE EFFECTIVE LAND USE PLANNING

Strengthen the ability of designated landscapes, particularly AONB partnerships, to enhance their character and natural beauty and deliver environmental improvement through the quality and consistency of land use planning and related decisions.

Our Recommendations:

- (a) AONB partnerships should become statutory consultees on planning proposals affecting them. The governance of the partnerships and management of staff should be sufficiently independent from local authority influence to enable impartial discharge of these enhanced planning powers.
- (b) A strengthened duty should be placed on public bodies, including local planning authorities, ‘to have due regard’ to the statutory purposes of AONBs and National Parks, and consideration given to placing a statutory duty on these bodies ‘to have due regard’ for the aims and objectives of the designation’s management plan. Natural England could provide training to LPAs on this strengthened duty. There is also a stronger role for the designated landscape bodies (NAAONB and ENPA) to facilitate sharing of good practice amongst its members.
- (c) The role of AONB Partnerships should be strengthened. As set out in 4.1b above, the national interest could be better reflected through independent appointments to AONB Partnerships, in line with National Park and Conservation Boards. The Conservation Board model should be reviewed, if necessary amended, and be available to those AONBs Partnerships that want it.
- (d) Local authorities whose land falls within AONB boundaries could collaborate to provide a development plan document that is congruent with the AONB boundary. This would be consistent with the aims of the AONB Management Plan to avoid potential conflict and improve delivery. This approach has recently been applied to Arnside and Silverdale AONB.
- (e) Natural England should fully use its planning advisory and statutory consultee roles (including our duty to co-operate on strategic planning) to ensure that housing, transport and other development issues impacting on designated landscapes are properly discussed at an early stage in plan-making and NPPF policies are adhered to.
- (f) Amendments to planning processes, guidance and monitoring could improve the level of scrutiny applied to decisions and subsequent outcomes. Natural England has identified a number of small changes with potentially significant benefits including further Planning Practice Guidance to support the National Planning Policy Framework on the type, scale and extent of appropriate development within National Parks and AONBs. We would be pleased to share and explore these with the Review

team. We also recommend consideration is given to require local planning authorities to consult the Secretary of State before granting planning permission for major development within National Parks and AONBs (under the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2009).

4.5 Recommendation 5: FOR PEOPLE, WITH PEOPLE.

Designated landscapes to pioneer new ways to connect more people from all parts of society with the natural environment, to raise awareness of, increase the benefits they receive from and increase positive action for the environment.

Our Recommendations:

- (a) Building on pioneering work such as the Mosaic project, all designated landscapes should be charged with and resourced to explore ways of encouraging under-represented groups to experience and benefit from the huge variety of experiences our finest landscapes offer. This could include partnership approaches to make better use of technology, developing clearer and consistent messages on their offer.
- (b) Many designated landscapes are close to people, for example, the NAAONB recognises that over 66% of people in England are within half an hour travel of an AONB, which means 156 million visitors annually. This presents real opportunities to increase direct benefits from visits. However, most of these visits are by car, and many designated landscapes are some distance from urban centres of population. This limits opportunities for many people to directly benefit from them regularly [[MENE Urban Greenspace Visits, 2018](#)]. Designated landscapes could usefully explore how to better connect with urban centres by considering how existing linear access routes, within and adjoining their boundaries, could provide a green infrastructure framework for enhanced biodiversity and recreation opportunities. Natural England is currently exploring a 'Low Speed 2' project with partners to link London and Birmingham via an enhanced landscape corridor along the Grand Union Canal. This would link urban areas and Green Belts with the Chilterns AONB, potentially providing a model for further, similar corridor initiatives.
- (c) There is currently no clear 'pathway' to progress from local health and wellbeing opportunities in towns to larger scale, more challenging, remote opportunities such as the ones that designated landscapes can provide. Natural England is working with Defra, the Department for Education, NHS England and Public Health England to increase the health and wellbeing benefits for people from the natural environment. Designated landscapes could work with these and other partners to offer consistency in scale, scope, quality and long-term sustainability of health and wellbeing benefits across England. Analysis of Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) data could provide a suitable baseline, and future surveys (MENE is currently being reviewed in light of technology changes and the 25 Year Environment Plan) should be able to provide insights about effectiveness and outcomes.
- (d) National Parks and AONBs should be encouraged to sign up to a principle of net gain of access land or Rights of Way. Specifically, National Parks could:

- (i) Consider dedicating any suitable land they own as permanent open access land under s16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Natural England can advise National Parks and AONBs on what is involved in open access dedication and on related issues of access management.
- (ii). Consider reviewing evidence on how a high quality Rights of Way network is best achieved in designated landscapes, including whether delegated management of, or potentially, transferred authority over the Rights of Way network should be extended to all National Park Authorities from Local Highway Authorities.
- (iii) Strategically identify where additional access is needed and how to support land managers to manage access impacts and benefits, particularly in high demand areas.

Natural England
December 2018