

**HOWARDIAN HILLS
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
5 NOVEMBER 2010**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AONBs (NAAONB) ACTIVITY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To receive details of the initiatives currently being carried out by the NAAONB.

2.0 AONB BRANDING

2.1 Members will recall that the issue of branding for the whole family of AONBs was discussed at the JAC meeting in April 2009. At that time it was envisaged that a suggested new branding scheme would be available for JACs to consider in autumn 2009.

2.2 The timescale was put back due to the impending appointment of a new CEO at the NAAONB – it was considered inappropriate to launch a potentially significant new initiative shortly before he started.

2.3 Work re-started on the branding initiative in spring 2010, but was then delayed again by the difficulty in getting revised drafts from the consultant designers.

2.4 A branding scheme was ‘soft-launched’ at the NAAONB Conference in July 2010, but further development work has been hampered by the Natural England interpretation of the Cabinet Office’s clampdown on marketing and advertising activity.

2.5 The NAAONB continues to slowly develop the branding scheme, with the NAAONB staff working in their own time, until the Natural England embargo is relaxed.

2.6 Of what has been seen so far of the suggested branding (see examples attached as Appendix 1), this initiative is something that we could potentially slot into without losing our established identity. Participation will be voluntary, and it will up to each AONB to decide whether or not it joins the scheme. The coherence of the family of AONBs may however be of even more significance in the new era of government funding than it was previously.

3.0 DISCUSSIONS WITH NATURAL ENGLAND AND DEFRA

3.1 From the time of the announcement of the General Election and still on-going, parliamentary liaison activity has taken up a significant amount of the NAAONB staff’s time.

3.2 The situation as regards future funding, and who the sponsoring body for AONBs might be, has been and continues to be a fast-moving game.

3.3 Rather than attempt to explain all the activities in this covering report, Appendices 2 and 3 contain the two briefing notes that the NAAONB has issued this year. The first of these was prior to the General Election, with the second following a meeting with Defra Minister Richard Benyon on 25th October. Any further developments will be reported orally at the JAC meeting.

4.0 NAAONB STAFF STRUCTURE

4.1 Due to the likely decrease in Government funding for the NAAONB, it is likely that it will be reviewing its staff structure over the coming year. In addition to the two current staff, the 'regional co-ordinators' covering the south west and south east groupings of AONBs and National Parks have been putting significant amounts of time into national initiatives.

4.2 Because the situation changes almost from week to week it is difficult to predict how the organisation may evolve. It is however looking increasingly likely that it will look to source all its income from member bodies, rather than relying on Government grants. The issue of the communications embargo mentioned in paragraph 2.4 above brings the issue into stark relief – its member bodies want the NAAONB to be proactive on communication at this time, but its hands are tied because it receives most of its funding from Treasury sources.

4.3 Moving towards funding from its member bodies only would significantly increase the membership fee that would be sought from each AONB. Whether the funding that the NAAONB and regional co-ordinator posts currently receive would be channelled via the individual AONBs in future, to in effect offset the increase, isn't known yet. What is clear however, particularly at this current time, is that we are benefiting significantly from the national lobbying activity of the NAAONB, and that the future would be looking considerably worse if it wasn't there.

5.0 NORTHERN CHAIRMEN'S MEETING

5.1 As has been the practice for the last few years, the NAAONB Chairman and CEO will be attending a series of regional meetings around the country, to discuss the initiatives outlined above and also issues on which the NAAONB is lobbying nationally.

5.2 It is envisaged that the JAC Chairman and AONB Manager will attend the northern meeting in York, which will also have representatives from the other northern AONBs. This meeting is scheduled for 12th January 2011.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- a) the initiatives described above be noted, and
- b) the AONB Manager liaises with the JAC Chairman on the branding initiative described in paragraph 2.6, should decisions be required before the next meeting of the JAC.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
 ROUTE 1: Creating a hybrid structure for the organisation

Retention of the local area's individual logo
 retains their character and "uniqueness"



Selecting a unique colour also communicates independence

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
ROUTE 1: Local area branding applied to stationery

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One of the
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NAAONB Membership Briefing

Briefing 1 – June 2010

General Election 2010

Post Election Briefing to AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards

Introduction

This is the first formal briefing to AONBs following the general election. Briefings will be produced on an 'as needed' basis and reflect the growing need to ensure we work as a cohesive family of AONBs in representing our interests to government. Copies of this and future briefings will be available in the Reference Library of www.aonb.org.uk under Membership Briefings.

Whilst we recognise that the devolved administrations focus on their own elected bodies, there is a need to ensure that they also engage with their MPs elected to the UK parliament. The NAAONB will continue to work with the AONBs in the devolved administrations, identifying and delivering a bespoke programme of advocacy building work.

These briefings will

1. provide a concise summary of the current situation, including the wider context,
2. update members on commitments made by parliamentarians and
3. suggest some clear approaches to ensuring greater commitment at the local and national level.

Briefing One contains reference to

- **The Coalition Agenda**
- **The DEFRA Ministerial breakfast**
- **Hansard**
- **The PM's speech on the economy**
- **Key opportunities**
- **Key messages**
- **The role of the NAAONB**
- **The role of the AONB Partnership/Conservation Board**

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1. The context

The coalition agenda is set clearly within the wider context of deficit reduction and an agreement that economic recovery is the most urgent issue facing Britain.

There has been a distinction drawn between the cyclical deficit and structural deficit. There has also been an assertion that structural change is required, rather than placing a sole reliance on efficiency savings.

At the **DEFRA Ministerial breakfast meeting** to brief partners on responsibilities and priorities, attended by the NAAONB on Wednesday 2nd June, the Minister outlined some key points that create some 'mood music' to current decision making, namely

- there is a need to protect and enhance the natural environment
- that the UK would be at the centre of CAP reform and that Pillar 1 was unlikely to increase, but 2 could develop further.
- that Defra will lead on driving forward adaptation to Climate Change
- that a white paper on 'biodiversity' will be the only White Paper coming forward from Defra.
- that people should be able to have access to "green space"
- that the Marine Act is to be delivered (additionally recognising that fisheries are an important area of work)
- that future consultation would be real and meaningful and a move away from consultation that could be perceived as tokenism.
- there is a need to re-vitalise the food industry from field to fork.
- that decisions would be made after careful consideration of the science
- that the linkage between local and national is important and government was determined to push power down to the local level.
- that the regional strategies are to be scrapped, local plans re-instated.
- that they would be reviewing all "arms length" bodies and would expect them to do their bit in making savings; not necessarily reorganising them, as reorganisations cost money. Defra will stay as Defra.

And in response to the **NAAONB comment**: "In welcoming a White Paper on biodiversity, it is important to bear in mind biodiversity cannot be delivered without considering economies and communities. AONBs and NPAs provide good opportunities to bring those elements together; we hope this will be reflected in the White Paper."

- that they consider **the AONB Partnerships/Conservation Boards** and NPAs to be very important; and wish to work with organisations like the NAAONB to do this.

Additionally, recorded in **Hansard**, on the 27th May 2010 Hilary Benn states

"On the natural environment, we were very proud to put the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 on the statute book, and to have established two new national parks in the past five years, in the

New Forest and on the South Downs - the latter during the year in which we marked the 60th anniversary of Attlee's National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. I look forward to the creation of new places for wildlife, green corridors, bringing together the work of wildlife trusts, **areas of outstanding natural beauty**, the national parks, sites of special scientific interest and the marine conservation zones that the Marine and Coastal Access Act will create. The Lawton commission, which I established last year, will make its recommendations this summer, and we all look forward to them”.

And later on the same day, **Caroline Spelman** stated

“There is no "either/or" when it comes to climate change and biodiversity; they are interdependent and interlinked. We must act together at those conferences, because to do otherwise would be to rob future generations not only of the infinite variety of landscapes and species that we have been lucky enough to enjoy, but of the natural resources on which we depend for the quality of our lives and, indeed, our very livelihoods. We will act as a Government, with the publication of a White Paper on the natural environment to promote just that”.

The Prime Minister's [speech](#) on the economy – Monday 7th June 2010

Whilst the focus of the speech was on reducing the burden of increasing interest payments associated with the national debt, direct reference was made to the public sector and public sector workers.

2. What are the key opportunities for AONBs following this election?

a) We should build on the commitment to protect the environment.

The Government has committed to protecting the environment for future generations. This commitment is set within the context of making our economy more environmentally sustainable, and improving our quality of life and well-being. The Government also believe that much more needs to be done to support the farming industry, protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable food production.

There is cross party support for an improved approach to biodiversity conservation and moving forward with the Marine Act.

b) We should champion our Partnerships/Conservation Boards within the context of decentralisation and democracy.

The Government believes that it is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people. They have committed to promoting decentralisation and democratic engagement, and intend to give new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals.

They have also committed to promoting the devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups. This will include a review of local government finance.

Both commitments are highly significant for AONB Partnerships/Conservation Boards.

c) We should raise awareness of AONBs amongst new Members of Parliament.

160 new MPs have been returned to Parliament. Whilst many will inevitably be finding their feet in Government for the first few months it is essential that we engage with them. Many will have no understanding of AONBs and what we are about.

d) We should champion our AONBs as economic assets.

1:8 of MPs are from the private sector (compared to 1:25 in 1997). This fact is significant. It is essential that we engage with politicians using the right language. For some, this will be the language of the private sector, not local or central government.

It is essential that AONB Partnerships/Conservation Boards clearly articulate the major role they have in demonstrating how economic and social prosperity can be achieved through sustainable and creative resource management. High quality environment is the motive force of rural economy in AONBs. This high quality environment underpins a wide range of ecosystem services supported to great effect by AONB Partnerships/Conservation Boards.

In addition, it is important that we demonstrate not just the value of AONBs to the local economy but the cost effectiveness of our Partnerships/Conservation Boards and AONB Units.

e) We should turn stated commitment to AONBs into action.

The NAAONB has secured some commitment to AONBs nationally, voiced in the letters from the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrat Party leaders, and printed in the summer edition of Outstanding, the magazine for AONBs. In addition, the Hansard transcript cited earlier, gives a clear commitment from the Labour Party to the role of AONBs in helping conserve biodiversity.

3. What is the NAAONB doing to help AONBs?

a) Developing key messages

In the run-up to the general election the NAAONB developed three key messages which it fed out to the three main political parties in Westminster.

Key messages

- AONBs are strategic national assets
- AONBs are about managing positive landscape change
- AONBs are locally managed, nationally important areas, dealing with global issues.

These messages are framed within a few context setting statements:

- Our family of AONBs cover 8000 square miles and are governed by 700 locally elected members
- Our Partnerships are democratically accountable, have always provided value for money, and provide technical information (particularly relating to Town and Country Planning, archaeology, geodiversity and ecology) that supports our purpose.
- AONBs have a major role to play in the management of our national water resource, in managing carbon, in protecting our wildlife at a scale that is relevant in a changing climate, and in helping to keep the nation healthy and happy.
- AONBs exemplify collaborative working across the public, private and voluntary sectors, spanning multi-sectoral interests. Local farmers and landowners acknowledge the valuable advice and work of AONB Partnerships.

- AONB funding partnerships provide excellent value for money for funding partners. Gearing of local authority contributions is often well over 10:1, so for modest funds, local authority partners get a high profile and an authoritative stake in AONBs. AONB Partnerships have an excellent track record for attracting external project funding and are well placed for future bids.
- AONBs are not just about landscape and wildlife, they are inextricably linked to people and thriving local economies. Physical and spiritual well-being is overwhelmingly demonstrated to be positively affected by high quality natural greenspace [*Professor Jules Pretty, New Scientist Dec 2007*].

b) Challenging politicians

We publically challenged the three main parties to show a commitment to AONBs.

c) Engaging with Westminster

The NAAONB continues to engage with Westminster politicians and senior civil servants on all matters relevant to AONBs.

4. What next?

Moving on from the letters

The direct responses from the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrats are summarised below highlighting not only the support for AONBs but the challenges set out to us.

The Conservative Party Supporting statements

- AONBs are vitally important
- [AONBs are] beautiful environmental assets
- AONBs help 'unlock' value in our landscapes
- AONBs should be trusted to have a greater say in the development of local priorities
- One of an AONB most valuable assets is its partnership approach that works from the bottom up

Challenges

- [AONBs must] protect and enhance our habitats and safeguard wildlife
- [AONBs are] uniquely placed to provide effective management of important habitat, proper delivery of initiatives and targeted local funding
- [AONBs must] be cost effective
- [AONBs must] use our ability to co-ordinate activity locally to deal with the challenges facing our natural environment – in particular climate change, biodiversity loss

The Liberal Democrats Supporting statements

- Britain is blessed with many areas of outstanding natural beauty
- These areas should remain protected and enhanced
- AONBs promote biodiversity and a more sustainable Britain
- Green spaces = better health and well-being

Challenges

- [AONBs must help tackle] litter and pollution
- [AONBs must help develop] 'landscape scale' policies, agreed between local authorities – supporting environmental service provision including biodiversity conservation
- Planning systems must take account of environmental capacity

The NAAONB will continue to develop our three key messages, tailoring them to the political context.

Individual AONBs should

- Identify their local MP(s) – the NAAONB holds a full list of MPs associated with AONBs,
- Engage with them using the family of AONBs' key messages and contextual statements,
- Remind them of their Party's commitment made in the magazine, Outstanding – a copy from the NAAONB was timed to be delivered to their desk on arrival at Westminster,
- Clearly articulate the potential impact of reduced funding, either as direct grant in aid or as a result of Country Agency budget cuts, and relate this to the commitments set out in the letters and Hansard (as appropriate),
- Send them each a copy each of either the letters from the David Cameron and Nick Clegg (attached to this briefing), or the role for AONBs outlined in the speech made by Hilary Benn (as is politically appropriate),
- Invite him/her/them to your AONB to discuss how they can help deliver on their party's commitments

5. In conclusion

We have a number of significant opportunities ahead of us. If we approach these opportunities as a **cohesive family** with clearly articulated messages, we can potentially have a great impact.

There are distinct roles to be delivered locally and nationally and we will realise the potential of these roles by approaching them in a co-ordinated way.

The NAAONB recognises that this approach may not be appropriate for some of the AONBs with devolved administrations. The particular needs of these AONBs will be addressed separately.



NAAONB Membership Briefing

Briefing 2 – October 2010

Comprehensive Spending Review 2010 Discussions with DEFRA Minister, Civil Servants and Natural England.

Introduction

This briefing is to ensure that the AONB Partnerships, teams and supporters are fully aware of the developments in the funding and sponsorship of AONBs in the light of the CSR announcements, discussions with DEFRA and Natural England officials, and most recently a meeting between the NAAONB and Richard Benyon, Minister for the Environment.

The background

The coalition agenda is set clearly within the wider context of deficit reduction and an agreement that economic recovery is the most urgent issue facing Britain.

At a briefing for NGOs, Caroline Spelman, the Environment Secretary, reiterated the now familiar reasons that cuts are being made. She set out the criteria the Government had used in making the cuts: i.e. the protection of front line services through savings in back office efficiencies. However, she also confirmed that DEFRA is inevitably seeing reductions in capital (34%) and programme expenditure (29%).

For Defra, the priority was to protect capital expenditure on flood defence as a strategic need for the country. This has been achieved through a proportionally greater cut to DEFRA's programme budget.

DEFRA's priorities are

- British farming and food produced sustainably
- enhancing the environment and biodiversity
- supporting a green economy resilient to climate change

The Minister, Richard Benyon, specifically mentioned the importance of the Natural Environment White Paper in taking forward any biodiversity commitments from Nagoya and improving landscape scale conservation. He reiterated the important role AONBs and National Parks must play in this area of delivery.

Recent activity

Since June and the last briefing, the NAAONB has sought to engage with Government in many ways to present facts and figures concerning AONBs. The NAAONB has provided information to help Government make an informed decision about the future funding and sponsorship of AONBs. In detail the following has taken place:

- The NAAONB Annual Conference received a video presentation from the DEFRA Minister Richard Benyon.
- Questions in response to the Minister's video were collated and sent on to him.
- The Minister provided a written response to those questions.
- The Minister has visited the High Weald AONB.
- The Minister has made a presentation to the North Wessex Downs Annual Forum.

- The NAAONB CEO has made a presentation to the North Wessex Downs Annual Forum, for which the Minister remained.
- The NAAONB Chairman, Vice Chairman and CEO have held a meeting with the Chairman and Senior Officers from Natural England.
- The NAAONB CEO attended a DEFRA briefing immediately after the CSR announcements.
- The NAAONB officers and Chairman have met formally with the Minister.

The current context

- The Minister and DEFRA civil servants are now clearly aware of the role and current activity that AONB Partnerships play in delivering the government agenda, in particular The Big Society. In addition the Minister is very supportive of the role that AONB Management Plans play in articulating local priorities and setting out policies at the local level.
- The Minister has welcomed the way in which AONB Partnerships have responded as a collective to the issues in hand, particularly over the question of direct funding from DEFRA. He has listened closely to the arguments presented.
- The Minister has now made a decision over the role of DEFRA with regards future resourcing of AONBs.

Feedback on the meeting held with the Minister on the 25th October 2010

- The meeting was relaxed and positive
- The Minister strongly reiterated the important role of AONBs in delivering at the landscape scale
- The meeting covered the ground agreed in advance, namely
 1. DEFRA direct sponsorship
 2. The importance of a multi-year settlement
 3. The future relationship with Natural England
 4. Strengthening the role of the Management Plan, particularly Section 85 CRoW 2000
 5. Communications throughout the AONB family
- On the issue of direct funding a decision had been made in advance of the meeting. **Communication of this decision by the NAAONB however has been embargoed until DEFRA inform us otherwise.**
- DEFRA initially indicated that we should receive formal confirmation of their decision by Christmas. We pressed the need to instil confidence in Local Authorities before they set their budgets in November. This was noted and has since been reiterated by the CEO in discussions with DEFRA civil servants. We understand and accept that final settlements will not be known until December but have suggested decoupling a message of principle from that of detail. This suggestion was noted.
- We discussed strengthening the framework surrounding Section 85. We highlighted the work we are carrying out nationally on this, led by the High Weald AONB. This was noted with interest and will be followed up by DEFRA.
- We highlighted the difficulty presented by the current restriction on communications faced by the AONBs and the NAAONB. This prompted an interesting debate and will be followed up by DEFRA.

What next?

The NAAONB will

- Reiterate the need for DEFRA to issue a statement that will instil confidence in the Local Authorities supporting AONBs as a matter of urgency.
- Reiterate the importance of a multi-year settlement for AONB Partnerships.
- Maintain the close and positive working relationship with the Minister, DEFRA civil servants and Natural England Board and staff.

Individual AONBs should

- Welcome the positive way in which the discussions surrounding direct funding by DEFRA have progressed and communicate this to their partnerships.
- Reiterate to their local authorities the value DEFRA places in AONBs, and the important role that the Minister sees AONBs performing in delivery.
- Highlight the current embargo on communicating the Minister's decision.

In conclusion

We have a number of significant opportunities ahead of us. If we approach these opportunities as a **cohesive family** with clearly articulated messages, we can potentially have a great impact.

There are distinct roles to be delivered locally and nationally and we will realise the potential of these roles by approaching them in a co-ordinated way.

We have made the case for direct funding from DEFRA on behalf of the AONB Partnerships in England. Our arguments have been listened to and have informed decision making. The NAAONB is urging DEFRA to communicate the Minister's decision as a matter of urgency.

There has been much progress made in the last six months in raising the profile of AONB Partnerships as delivery mechanisms. The National Association for AONBs therefore expects to focus, over the coming year, on highlighting best practice for delivery.

Local Authority support remains vital to ensuring AONBs deliver as the Minister intends.

The NAAONB recognises that this briefing is focussed on AONB Partnerships in England. The particular needs of the AONBs in Wales and Northern Ireland will be addressed separately.