

**HOWARDIAN HILLS
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
7 NOVEMBER 2019**

NATIONAL/NAAONB ACTIVITY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

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

2.0 THE COLCHESTER DECLARATION

- 2.1 At the Landscapes for Life Conference in Colchester in July, delegates debated and then universally endorsed The Colchester Declaration. This is attached as Appendix 1 and sets out how the AONB network will contribute to the Government's targets on Nature Recovery, tree planting, climate change mitigation and access to nature.

- 2.2 The Howardian Hills is already well on the way to being able to meet some of these targets. The Landscape Management & Priority Sites section of the Management Plan details actions for the various landscape zones of the AONB, including guidelines on new tree planting, management of existing important habitat sites, restoration/creation of new habitats and the development of a more nature-friendly landscape that delivers enhanced ecosystems services. We already have a Management Plan Objective to produce an 'opportunities map' by 31st March 2020.

- 2.3 One of the most important sentences is the last one – without a new Environmental Land Management Scheme to replace the current Common Agricultural Policy, with payments for public goods replacing flat-rate payments for land area, it will be very difficult to achieve the Declaration's aspirations.

3.0 THE AGRICULTURE BILL

- 3.1 This Bill provided for a range of enabling powers to ensure 'stability' for farmers as the UK exited from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. It also introduced new measures to change the way in which farmers and land managers are supported in the longer term. Payments would only be made on the basis of the provision of public goods which are aimed at protecting and enhancing the environment. It focused on sustainability, with particular emphasis on soil health, biodiversity, flood protection, plant and animal welfare, cultural heritage and public access to the countryside. There was however no explicit provision in the Bill to enhance landscape quality, and therefore inadequate read-across to the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. Neil Parrish MP had submitted an Amendment for rewording in the Bill to remedy this, to read 'managing land or water in a way that maintains, restores or enhances *landscape quality*, cultural heritage or natural heritage'.
- 3.2 Securing the tabling of this Amendment had been a significant goal for the NAAONB, but with the change of Government the Bill has fallen and we will need to see whether the work needs repeating when a new Bill is published.

4.0 THE ENVIRONMENT BILL

- 4.1 After much speculation over the last year as to when the Environment Bill might appear, it was finally published in mid-October following the recent Queen's Speech. It includes many proposals that have been discussed for some while, including the management of waste and water resources, the requirement for biodiversity net gain and the establishment of an Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) to take over environmental regulation after Brexit. It also encapsulates proposals that were first aired in public consultations last year, such as on air quality (in particular wood burning), recycling, and further controls on the felling of trees in both urban areas and the countryside.
- 4.2 It is too early to say whether or how input may be required in shaping this Bill in relation to AONBs, but we will be guided by information provided by the AONB and then choose a course of action as appropriate.

5.0 THE NATIONAL MOMENT/LANDSCAPES FOR LIFE WEEK

- 5.1 The Communications Topic Working Group formed as part of the NAAONB's Future Landscapes project commissioned Simon Armitage, the Poet Laureate, to write a poem to celebrate 70 years since the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act paved the way for the creation of AONBs. He was in the Arnside & Silverdale AONB on 21st September to premiere the poem – 'Fugitives'. He has also undertaken media work as part of his contract with the NAAONB and has been generating good national press interest.
- 5.2 The reading of the poem also coincided with the national 'moment' at 2pm on 21st September. AONBs around the UK collaborated to create heart shapes in the landscape, take a photo and share using the Twitter hashtag #♥L4L. Hearts were drawn in the sand, created out of pebbles, made using human bodies and ploughed into arable fields. In the Howardian Hills we used local children to create a heart shape and then posted our picture.
- 5.3 Landscapes for Life Week 2019 ran from Saturday 21st to Sunday 29th September, with the theme being the 'Natural Health Service'. This tied-in with the celebration of 70 years since the creation of the first AONBs and National Parks (providing the mental and physical wellbeing partner to the NHS after the Second World War). Unfortunately we were unable to coordinate any events to take place this year but are already looking at ideas for next year.

6.0 OTHER NATIONAL NEWS/ACTIVITY

- 6.1 The Glover Review of Protected Landscapes is covered as a separate item on this Agenda.
- 6.2 Theresa Villiers was appointed as the new Secretary of State at Defra in September, replacing Michael Gove. Lord Gardiner has continued in his role, with responsibility for AONBs and National Parks. George Eustice returned to the Government as the Minister with responsibility for farming policy, whilst Zac Goldsmith became the Minister with responsibility for forestry policy.
- 6.3 Work on a new set of Key Performance Indicators was completed in May and AONB Partnerships have submitted their 2018/19 data to the NAAONB for collation. This will be published in the NAAONB's Annual Review which will be presented to Lord Gardiner at the Chairmen's Conference in November.

- 6.4 In advance of the publication of the Colchester Declaration, the AONB Network compiled a list of 70 examples of nature recovery taking place in AONBs, to mark the 70th anniversary of our founding Act of Parliament. Called 70@70 it can be found by following this link:
<https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/about-aonbs/nature-recovery-solutions>
It includes several examples from the Howardian Hills AONB.
- 6.5 Defra has introduced a simplified grant claiming mechanism, with 75% of the annual grant being paid in September rather than in arrears in January. The remainder is claimed in March, with reporting and submission of final accounts (together with any claw-back deemed necessary) being completed in May.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

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

The Colchester Declaration 2019

Set against a backdrop of unprecedented concern for the future of the natural world, and intergovernmental reports that the current global response to the effects of human impact on nature is insufficient – the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty believes that now is the time to significantly increase the scale and pace of nature conservation activity in AONBs. Using our unique network and partnership model, we are making a collective Declaration on Nature in AONBs, setting out our strategy for change.

With many AONB host authorities having taken the step of declaring a Climate Emergency we are demonstrating our readiness to act to redress declines in species and habitats within the context of a wider response to climate change.

We believe

1. Natural Beauty has intrinsic value and means so much to people
2. AONBs should be places of rich, diverse and abundant wildlife
3. Nature recovery is central to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty
4. Climate change is the biggest threat to humanity and one of the greatest threats to biodiversity. Designated landscapes offer some of the most powerful solutions to the challenges of climate change
5. The network of AONBs and National Parks, their teams, partnerships, authorities and stakeholders offer a unique solution to tackling environmental challenges

We pledge

By July 2020

1. To enable an approach that creates opportunities within AONBs for people to make an emotional connection with nature.
2. To prepare a Nature Recovery Plan for each AONB

By 2024

1. To embed an ecosystems services approach into all AONB Management Plans
2. To ensure all AONB management plans include meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation, including clear, measurable targets to support Net Zero

By 2030

1. That at least 200,000 ha of SSSIs in AONBs will be in favourable condition
2. That at least 100,000 ha of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites will have been created/ restored in AONBs to further support the natural movement of plants and animals
3. That at least 36,000 ha of new woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate in AONBs following the principle of the right tree in the right place
4. That, by each AONB immediately adopting a species on the threatened list and by preparing and delivering a Species Action Plan, at least thirty species relevant to AONBs will be taken off the list by 2030

We call on Westminster and Welsh Governments to provide the power and resources to make these targets achievable