

## North Yorkshire Local Access Forum

29 January 2025

### Approval by Correspondence of Proposed Response to Consultation on Designation of Yorkshire Wolds as an AONB

Report of Committee Member: Stephen Clark

#### 1.0 Purpose of the Report

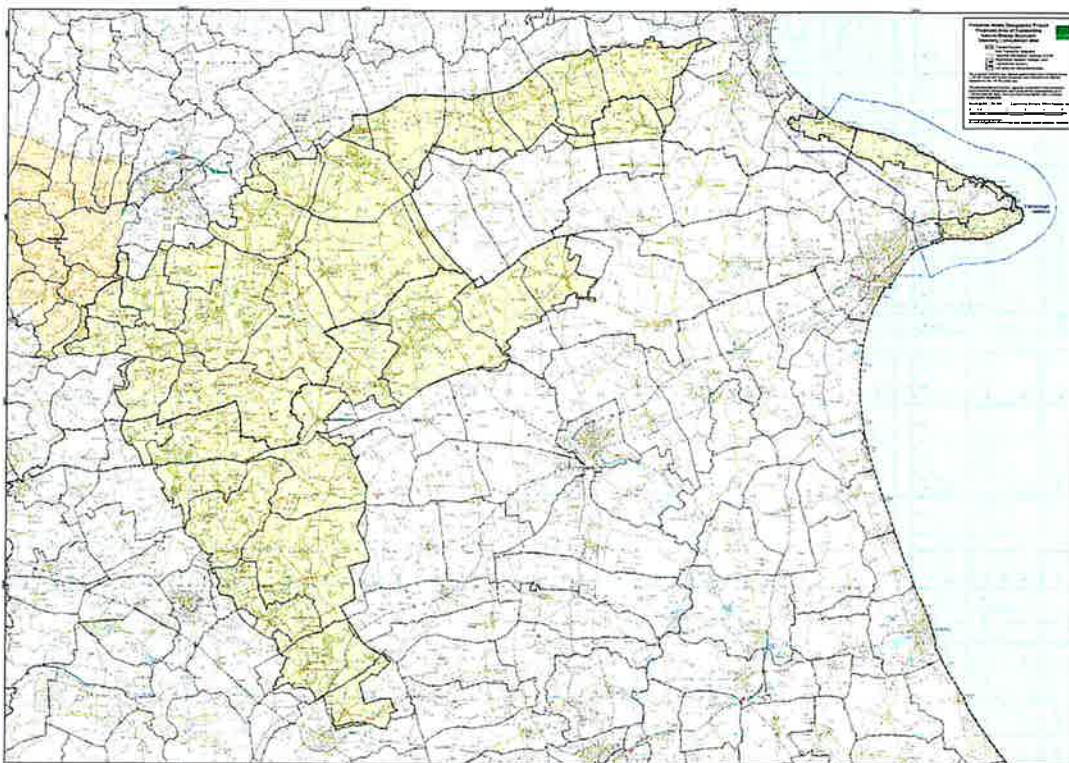
**To note:** This report sets out our agreement by correspondence to a response to Natural England's proposals to designate a new Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (Paras 6.3 to 6.5.). The formal NYLAF response is attached as an Appendix.

**To consider:** Separately it is suggested that a short discussion takes place at the January Forum meeting about addressing any additional pressures within North Yorkshire Council that creation of the Wolds AONB will put on the Countryside Access Service (Para 6.6).

#### 2.0 Background

- 2.1 One of Natural England's responsibilities is to decide whether an area should be given special status and protection by designating it as a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance an area's natural beauty. AONBs are designated via powers in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.
- 2.2 For many years there has been a desire for a new Yorkshire Wolds AONB to include areas covered by local landscape designations and areas of wider countryside.
- 2.3 In June 2021 the then Secretary of State, George Eustace (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)) announced that Natural England "will be taking forward the government's commitment to designate additional landscapes and is currently considering the designation of four new areas". This included the possible designation of a new Yorkshire Wolds AONB. A public consultation on this was launched on 8 October - see [here](#) for the full consultation and supporting documents. The consultation ends on 13 January 2025.
- 2.4 Formal assessments to determine which landscapes meet the legal requirements for inclusion in an AONB have now been completed and proposals have been developed to designate specific areas.

2.5 The purpose of the consultation is to seek views on whether the Yorkshire Wolds have the qualities required for designation as AONB, whether they should be designated, and if so, where the boundary should be. (AONBs were recently rebranded as “National Landscapes”, however when designating Natural England still legally designates an AONB. The proposed AONB consists of two areas covering (i) the Inland Wolds and (ii) a Coastal Area centred on Flamborough Head, as shown on the map below.



Map showing proposed AONB (green). Note the larger area has around its margin, in clockwise direction from the north, the towns of Malton, Scarborough, Driffield, Market Weighton and Pocklington. The coastal area lies between Scarbrough and Bridlington. The brown area is Howardian Hills AONB. Black lines are parish boundaries. A web version of this map is [here](#).

### 3.0 What are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

- 3.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are designated for the **purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty**. Designation as AONB means giving an area special legal protection.
- 3.2 The criteria upon which any designation is made includes whether the area has outstanding natural beauty, whether designation is likely to lead to conservation and enhancement of that beauty, and where the boundary should be drawn.
- 3.3 Section 89 (2) of the CRoW Act 2000, places a duty on relevant local authorities to prepare and publish a plan for the management of an

AONB and for the carrying out of functions in relation to it and a further duty to review the plan at “intervals of not more than five years”.

- 3.4 Most AONBs have a management team. The AONB team for the Yorkshire Wolds would comprise East Riding of Yorkshire Council and North Yorkshire Council. Individual posts within the AONB team would include an AONB Manager, and may also typically include project officers offering advice and grants to farmers, landowners and community groups.
- 3.5 Planning and development control in the AONB would remain the responsibility of the two local authorities.

#### **4.0 Practical implications of Designation as an AONB**

- 4.1 Designation as AONB would provide formal statutory recognition of the national importance of the natural beauty of the Yorkshire Wolds, and provide the basis for a more coordinated and integrated approach to management which would give specific focus and priority to the natural beauty of the area.
- 4.2 The benefits can be summarised as follows:
- **Statutory application of an AONB Management Plan** across the proposed area, which sets out the area's special qualities and a focused action plan for the AONB Team and wider partnership, to provide for integrated management in order to achieve the AONB purpose of conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
  - **An AONB Team with specialist skills and expertise.**
  - **Formal inclusion of the East Riding and North Yorkshire Councils** on the AONB Partnership.
  - **A statutory duty on other public bodies** to seek to further the purposes of the AONB.
  - **Additional recognition in planning terms** through the application of NPPF provisions relating to AONBs, inclusion of relevant policies in Local Plans related to the delivery of the AONB purposes, and withdrawal of some Permitted Development Rights.
  - **Long term funding for conservation work from Defra** with contributions from relevant local authorities, and access to additional sources of funding not available to non-designated landscapes.

#### **5.0 Assessment of public access in the proposed Yorkshire Wolds AONB**

- 5.1 Around half of the land area in the Inland part of the proposed AONB is in North Yorkshire. Only about 20% of the Coastal area is in North Yorkshire.

- 5.2 The density of public rights of way in the proposed AONB area is lower than in other areas in North Yorkshire. There are a number of circular walks (e.g. see National Trails website), but in some parts of the Wolds the rights of way make it more difficult to make circular walks without making use of public roads.
- 5.3 The Wolds have relatively small areas of Access Land, however in the North Yorkshire area the Access Land covers many of the picturesque Wolds dales.
- 5.4 The National Trails "Yorkshire Wolds Way" passes through the proposed "Inland" area of designation. The North Yorkshire section of the National Trail runs from near Fridaythorpe along the north edge of the Wolds overlooking the Derwent Valley, towards Filey.

## **6.0 Responding to the Wolds Designation Consultation as NYLAF**

- 6.1 The role of Local Access Forums was defined in section 94 of the Countryside Right of Way Act (2000), and the Local Access Forum Regulations (2007). The primary objective of Forums is to seek improvements to public access for the purposes of (1) open-air recreation and enjoyment, and (2) utility or functional access, for example using rights of way to access public amenities.
- 6.2 A response was formulated by correspondence between forum members in November and December. Our response was agreed by email in December based on the points set out below.
- 6.3 The primary purpose of the creation of a Wolds AONB is to **conserve and enhance the natural beauty** of the area. Furthermore the creation of an AONB will bring a more co-ordinated approach to the management and planning of the area. Our response is therefore based on two themes:
  - 6.3.1 **That the NYLAF broadly welcomes the creation of a Yorkshire Wolds AONB on the grounds that it is likely to lead to improvements in open-air recreation.** It was not proposed that we would comment specifically on the exact boundary of the AONB, as we have not the resources to undertake a review of the proposed boundary, and arguably we are not well placed to judge the application of the formal criteria used in the assessment of the case for the AONB.
  - 6.3.2 **That we argued very strongly for the inclusion of NYLAF in both informal discussion and consultation in the development of the proposed AONB Management Plan, with the aim of promoting and securing improvements to rights of way and public access.** One of the main reasons for

conserving a beautiful area is so that people can enjoy it – and to do that they need to be able to access it easily.

6.3.3 Furthermore we asked that the Management Plan, in due course, should specifically review how access can be improved to the AONB in order that the public can appreciate its beauty and enjoy outdoor recreation. It is important that in reviewing improved access to the Yorkshire Wolds that consideration should be given to:

- New access routes where it may be possible to create these. It is suggested that the Wolds has a relatively low density of public rights of way when compared to neighbouring areas (and very little access land), and that the creation of circular “walks” in particular could be a specific objective;
- An improved quality of access, for example removing conflicts between users of rights of way and public highways;
- Improvements in access that allow people with impaired or restricted mobility to better access the countryside (where realistically achievable).
- Improvements in how people from neighbouring areas can get to the Wolds countryside. This might including development of public transport options, sustainable access into the Wolds, or the development of sites to which people can drive and park in order to “go for a walk”.

6.4 Our final response based on the principles above (para 6.3) is set out in the Appendix. (I agreed with the team leading the consultation that a cover letter will be considered as a part of our formal response. I also added comments based on the cover letter to an online consultation portal.)

6.5 In discussion on the drafting of our response Forum members pointed out that the creation of new duties for NYC to support the new AONB might lead to resources being diverted from existing activities. One specific concern would be around additional pressures on the Countryside Access Service (CAS). This point is made in our response, and asks that Defra and Natural England consider their funding of any new pressures.

6.6 Furthermore it is also suggested that the resourcing within NYC of the AONB is discussed at the NY Local Access Forum meeting in January. One possible outcome from that discussion might be a formal letter to NYC asking that consideration is given of the resourcing of these new pressures on the Countryside Access Service as part of the Council’s budgeting process for 2026/7 next autumn. If we were to agree to this it is suggested that the benefits associated with any new resources would support the tourism, economic and well-being agendas of NYC.

**APPENDIX: Response to consultation on Proposal to designate a new  
Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

**Yorks Wolds Consultation**  
Natural England  
PO Box 295  
Holmfirth, HD9 9FS

Email to: [YorksWoldsDesignationProject@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:YorksWoldsDesignationProject@naturalengland.org.uk)

**North Yorkshire Local Access Forum**

c/o Dawn Drury  
Democratic Services  
North Yorkshire Council  
County Hall,  
Northallerton, DL7 8AD

**30 December 2024**

**Response to consultation on Proposal to designate a new Yorkshire Wolds  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

**From: North Yorkshire Local Access Forum**

The role of Local Access Forums was defined in section 94 of the Countryside Rights of Way Act (2000), and the Local Access Forum Regulations (2007). The North Yorkshire Local Access Forum covers the area of North Yorkshire Council, with the exception of the areas within the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks.

The primary objective of Local Access Forums in England is to seek improvements to public access for the purposes of (1) open-air recreation and enjoyment, and (2) utility or functional access, for example using rights of way to access public amenities.

This letter forms the main part of our response to the consultation on the Yorkshire Wolds AONB designation. I have also populated the on-line response form using my own name (below) and postcode given above.

The primary purpose of the creation of a Yorkshire Wolds AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. The NY Local Access Forum expects that the creation of an AONB will bring a more co-ordinated approach to the management and planning of the area. Our response to the consultation has two thrusts.

### Creation of Yorkshire Wolds AONB

**NYLAF broadly welcomes the creation of a Yorkshire Wolds AONB on the grounds that it is likely to lead to improvements in open-air recreation.** We neither have the resources or remit to comment specifically on the exact boundary of the AONB, nor are we able to comment on the application of the formal criteria used in the assessment of the case for the AONB.

### Operation of Yorkshire Wolds AONB

One of the main reasons for conserving beautiful areas is so that people can enjoy them. **It is vital that therefore that NYLAF is included from the outset in the development of the proposed AONB Management Plan, particularly at the informal stages.** Our aims in this will be to promote and secure improvements to rights of way and public access, where these can be achieved in balance with other relevant local objectives.

The Management Plan, in due course, should specifically review how access can be improved to, and within, the AONB in order that the public can appreciate its beauty and enjoy outdoor recreation. It is important that in reviewing improved access to the Wolds that consideration should be given to:

- New access routes where it may be possible to create these. It is suggested that some parts of the Wolds have a relatively low density of public rights of way when compared to neighbouring areas (and very little “access land”), and that the creation of circular “walks” in particular could be a specific objective of the AONB and Management Plan.
- An improved quality of access, for example removing conflicts between users of rights of way and public highways. Currently many public rights of way in the Wolds end abruptly on public highways.
- Improvements in access that allow people with impaired or restricted mobility to better access the countryside (where realistically achievable).
- Improvements in how people from neighbouring areas, towns and cities, can get to the Wolds countryside. This might including development of public transport options, sustainable access into the Wolds, or the development of sites to which people can drive and park in order to “go for a walk”. Again we would expect that a Management Plan for the AONB will consider these issues, in order that the beauty of the area can be appreciated by a wide range of the public.
- We recognise that achieving improvements such as those listed above, will in many cases, require the co-operation of local landowners and others.

### Resourcing a Yorkshire Wolds AONB

The Local Access Forum would be concerned if the creation of new duties for NYC to support the new AONB might lead to resources being diverted from existing

activities. We ask the Natural England and Defra give consideration to their funding of any new pressures on the Local Authorities. One specific concern would be around additional pressures on the North Yorkshire Council Countryside Access Service (CAS).

We hope you will be able to take these matters into consideration, and in due course we would like to understand how we might be involved in the development of the plans for the AONB.

Regards

Stephen Clark (Forum Member)  
On behalf of the North Yorkshire Local Access Forum