

**HOWARDIAN HILLS
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
11 November 2021**

Item 6: Proposals for the future AONB Action Programme

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To review the work of the AONB team and for the Manager to make proposals for future work for discussion by the JAC:

- Review of existing strengths.
- An increase in focus on Glover recommendations.
- Branding and website refresh.

2.0 REVIEW OF EXISTING STRENGTHS

The AONB team have a number of strengths, including:

- A small, efficient staff team.
- Two officers with differing, complementary skills and knowledge. Liz B has built a huge knowledge of the area, its habitats and landscape and a network of contacts over many years, as well as delivering projects, managing the volunteer programme and managing allocation of the project fund to landowners and communities. Francesca has significant geomorphology, outdoor education and art sector knowledge, as well as delivering projects, working on the Ryevitalise project, becoming an expert on tree spiral issues and leading on website maintenance.
- An excellent record of delivering on-the-ground landscape and habitat improvements, via allocation of a high proportion of core funding to project delivery.
- A high level of community awareness of the AONB, built on direct staff team contact with the community, e.g. through allocation of funds to community projects, involvement with local schools, events and volunteers, and circulation of the annual newsletter.
- Existing, though slightly dated, walks leaflets encouraging public enjoyment of the area, supported by good walk signage.
- A new opportunity to fund on-the-ground improvements via delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

Using 2020-21 as an example, approx. 40% (£71,000) of the core funding was distributed via project grants focussed on:

- Natural environment (walls, hedges, grassland and grazing, INNS control)
- Historic environment (scrub management, village signs)
- Sustainable development and community (publicity, walk leaflets, signage)

3.0 A FOCUS ON GLOVER RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2019 Glover Review of Protected Landscapes made 27 proposals for the future role of protected landscapes (see the summary of the review in Appendix 1).

The Howardian Hills AONB team is already delivering well on many of the Glover proposals, notably delivering a strong Management Plan, supporting vibrant communities and delivering a range of volunteer activities and good

information and signage.

The new Farming in Protected Landscapes programme is taking a first step towards delivering the Glover objective to place national landscapes at the centre of new Environmental Land Management Schemes. The FiPL funding and resourcing available over the next two financial years (£145k for projects in 2022-23 and £105k in 2023-24, with 1.0FTE advice and guidance and admin support) will support delivery of natural environment and historic environment projects which would usually be delivered by core funding and staff resource.

Thus, there is an opportunity to build on the existing strengths and expertise of the staff team to stretch the on-the-ground delivery into other areas highlighted by Glover, namely:

- More work on health and wellbeing through access to the countryside, with improved and expanded walking and cycling guides.
- More involvement with schools and schoolchildren (and young people), with a new schools programme, building on past successes.
- Increased ethnic (and economic) diversity of visitors, with stronger links to nearby urban areas and their communities.
- A focus on new ways to reach and engage with a more diverse audience, including use of art, delivery of art in the landscape and involvement with the arts sector.
- An increase in provisions for sustainable tourism, with greater connections to local tourism providers and development of a sustainable tourism plan for the area.

It is proposed that these new areas of work are firmly rooted in continued on-the-ground delivery, utilising existing core staff resources and project budget, made available through FiPL.

Glover also notes that delivery of his proposals should be accompanied by a new financial model for AONBs, 'more money, more secure, more enterprising'. Long term growth of these new areas of work will rest on delivery of this last proposal.

Whilst we have some capacity, we do, however, have the opportunity to look at becoming more enterprising by:

- Looking for opportunities to partner other, related organisations in larger funding bids, e.g. NYMNPA, LNP.
- Develop our own smaller external funding application(s), e.g. to National Lottery.

4.0 BRANDING AND WEBSITE REFRESH

Lastly, it is proposed that a small proportion of the core funding freed up by FiPL is used for a minor refresh of:

- The AONB branding and logo.
- The website design.
- The design of external publications, particularly the annual newsletter and the walking guides.

These communication tools have delivered well for many years, with the branding defined when the designation was confirmed in 1987. However, the styles and fonts are now looking dated. For example:

- The website has a picture taking up the full page view, requiring scrolling to

access the text information, see Image 1. This was a design preference some years ago but now instant access to information is preferred.



Image 1: Website homepage

- The walking guides design is print-focussed and does not work well when downloaded and used on a mobile device. There is also a move to more itinerary-based guides, rather than simple maps of walks.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

That the JAC approve development of these ideas in the 2022-23 and 2023-24 Action Programme and budget, with the Manager to return to the JAC with proposed costs and timings.

Landscapes review: final report - summary of findings

Updated 25 September 2019

The underlying argument of our review, which covers England, is that our system of national landscapes should be a positive force for the nation's wellbeing. Big ambitions are made possible by these 44 areas working together in new ways to become more than the sum of their parts.

We want this to happen not as an end in itself but because more must be done for nature and natural beauty. More must be done for people who live in and visit our landscapes. And a lot more must be done to meet the needs of our many fellow citizens who do not know the countryside, or do not always feel welcome in it, but should be able to enjoy it. Our landscapes are open and free to all, but can seem exclusive.

We think this can only happen if we are honest about what doesn't work at the moment and put in place a system which can do better.

Today, we have a system which is fragmented, sometimes marginalised and often misunderstood. Indeed it is not really a system at all, but 10 National Parks, who do not always work together effectively, and an entirely separate network of 34 less powerful Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). They have different purposes from National Parks, vastly less money, but sometimes greater pressures. Yet they cover areas that are more visited, sometimes more biodiverse and are just as beautiful.

We believe this duplication wastes resources and diminishes ambition.

That is why our central proposal is to bring National Parks and AONBs together as part of one family of national landscapes, served by a shared National Landscapes Service (NLS). This will give them a bigger voice, bigger ambition and a new way of working to meet new challenges.

Within this family, of course not every member will be the same. Local identity matters. National Parks need to keep their titles, at least their current levels of funding, and local autonomy, especially over planning.

The current system of governance for National Parks (and, as we'll explore later, AONBs) should be reformed substantially. Time after time we have heard and seen that National Park boards are too big, do not do a good job in setting a strategic direction and are deeply unrepresentative of England's diverse communities.

Of the almost 1,000 people on National Park and AONB boards today, the great majority are male, many are of retirement age and a tiny fraction are of black, Asian or minority ethnicities. This is wrong for organisations which are funded by the nation to serve everyone.

We also think what are now AONBs should be strengthened, with increased funding, governance reform, new shared purposes with National Parks, and a greater voice on development.

We think the current cumbersome title 'AONB' should be replaced. Our suggestion is that they should be called National Landscapes.

We would also like to see the encouragement of a wider range of non-designated systems of landscape protection, which should be members of the national landscapes family and served by the NLS.

This ought to include new areas of forest, along the lines of the successful National Forest in the East Midlands. We give our strong support for proposals for new urban National Parks, such as the one proposed for the West Midlands and the one already underway in London. We also praise the impressive work being done to bring the South Pennines together as a regional park and to create a marine park in Plymouth.

Our overriding conclusion is that without structural reform and greater shared ambition and status, our national landscapes will always struggle to do more than make an incremental difference.

Summary findings

The review focused on 5 areas:

1. Landscapes alive for nature and beauty
2. Landscapes for everyone
3. Living in landscapes
4. More special places
5. New ways of working

They are not separate but part of one ambition: to strengthen the natural beauty of England's landscapes in order to serve the country better by improving their biodiversity, and the lives of people who work in them, live in them and enjoy them.

For clarity when reading this summary, we refer to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as AONBs, and use 'national landscapes' to refer to the two designations of National Parks and AONBs together.

Summary 1. Landscapes alive for nature and beauty

The [2010 Making Space for Nature review](#) and the most recent [2016 State of Nature report](#) are explicit about the crisis of nature and what needs to be done to bring about a recovery. There is no need, in this review, to restate the excellent and mostly chilling analysis they contain, except to say that we agree and we want to see national landscapes lead the response.

Proposals

Proposal 1: National landscapes should have a renewed mission to recover and enhance nature, and be supported and held to account for delivery by a new National Landscapes Service

Proposal 2: The state of nature and natural capital in our national landscapes should be regularly and robustly assessed, informing the priorities for action

Proposal 3: Strengthened Management Plans should set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery including, but not limited to, wilder areas and the response to climate change (notably tree planting and peatland restoration). Their implementation must be backed up by stronger status in law

Proposal 4: National landscapes should form the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks – joining things up within and beyond their boundaries

Proposal 5: A central place for national landscapes in new Environmental Land Management Schemes

Proposal 6: A strengthened place for national landscapes in the planning system with AONBs given statutory consultee status, encouragement to develop local plans and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework

Summary 2. Landscapes for everyone

National Parks were created in part to provide a healing space, both mentally and physically, for the many who had given so much to protect our country during the Second World War. They were meant for everybody. Much has changed in the 70 years since. Modern Britain is a very different place socially and demographically. Today we recognise diversity as the mark of a healthy and resilient society. However, many landscape bodies have not moved smartly enough to reflect this changing society, and in some cases show little desire to do so.

We want our nation's most cherished landscapes to fulfill their original mission for people, providing unrivalled opportunities for enjoyment, spiritual refreshment and in turn supporting the nation's health and wellbeing.

Proposals

Proposal 7: A stronger mission to connect all people with our national landscapes, supported and held to account by the new National Landscapes Service

Proposal 8: A night under the stars in a national landscape for every child

Proposal 9: New long term programmes to increase the ethnic diversity of visitors

Proposal 10: Landscapes that cater for and improve the nation's health and wellbeing

Proposal 11: Expanding volunteering in our national landscapes

Proposal 12: Better information and signs to guide visitors

Proposal 13: A ranger service in all our national landscapes, part of a national family

Proposal 14: National landscapes supported to become leaders in sustainable tourism

Proposal 15: Joining up with others to make the most of what we have, and bringing National Trails into the national landscapes family

Proposal 16: Consider expanding open access rights in national landscapes

Summary 3. Living in landscapes

Our system of national landscapes works best when it works with people on its side. We can all agree that a village that is lived in, with an active school, people who work, and who are part of a living tradition, is better than a sterile place that is full of shuttered homes, empty pubs and derelict shops.

If we are serious about demonstrating the value of 'lived in' landscapes to the global family of national landscapes, then we need to be serious about the people who live in them, and show how it's possible to offer meaningful social and economic support for them.

Proposals

Proposal 17: National landscapes working for vibrant communities

Proposal 18: A new National Landscapes Housing Association to build affordable homes

Proposal 19: A new approach to coordinating public transport piloted in the Lake District, and new, more sustainable ways of accessing national landscapes

Summary 4. More special places

Almost a quarter – 24.5% – of England is already covered by national landscapes.

We think there is a case for several larger AONBs to take on National Park candidate status, as well as for a new AONB (or National Landscape as we propose they are called in future).

The success of the National Forest is also a model which should be replicated.

We also think that a changing nation needs new ways to come together to support natural beauty and access.

Proposals

Proposal 20: New designated landscapes and a new National Forest

Proposal 21: Welcoming new landscape approaches in cities and the coast, and a city park competition

Proposal 22: A better designations process

Summary 5. New ways of working

We want our landscapes to focus on enhancing natural beauty, supporting communities and visitors. But to do it better, we think they need to change and work together more.

Proposals

Proposal 23: Stronger purposes in law for our national landscapes

Proposal 24: AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes

Proposal 25: A new National Landscapes Service bringing our 44 national landscapes together to achieve more than the sum of their parts

Proposal 26: Reformed governance to inspire and secure ambition in our national landscapes and better reflect society

Proposal 27: A new financial model – more money, more secure, more enterprising