

REVIEW OF DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Purpose

To advise members of progress with the respective Reviews of Designated Landscapes England and Wales.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- The 'Glover' Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England was published a year ago with 27 'Proposals' for Government.
- Proposal 24 states that "AONBs should be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, and renamed as National Landscapes."
- The formal response from Government has yet to be produced but is anticipated over the Winter. Meanwhile Natural England, the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) and National Parks England have published a Joint Statement.
- The NAAONB and AONB lead officers are collaborating with DEFRA on the provision of information, statistics and case studies in support of implementing the Glover Review.
- In September Welsh AONB lead officers met (on-line) with Deputy Welsh Government Minister Hannah Blythyn and officials to discuss the on-going implementation of 'Valued & Resilient: Welsh Government's Priorities for AONBs & National Parks'.
- The Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) capital funding from Welsh Government has been awarded including a decarbonisation scheme for the AONB Office.
- Welsh Government responsibility for AONBs and National Parks has subsequently moved back to the Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.

Reasons

The Glover Review in England was broadly welcomed when published a year ago, in September 2019. The Government has inevitably been distracted with other priorities, but it is believed a formal response may be forthcoming once the Spending Review is concluded. Meanwhile DEFRA officials continue to work with stakeholders, including the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) on progressing preparations for the implementation of the Review.

Welsh Government Minister, Hannah Blythyn and her officials have been working with AONB lead officers, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the NAAONB on addressing the lack of parity and inequality of status, profile and resourcing between National Parks and AONBs. Welsh Government launched the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) scheme to provide additional capital funding within AONBs and National Parks.

Implications

The NAAONB and AONB lead officers have been responding to a range of requests from DEFRA officials in support of implementing the Glover Review and preparations for the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review. This has included the delivery of a Prospectus on AONBs outlining requirements, the provision of case studies on engagement with farmers on the development of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and information and statistics about AONB resourcing and achievements.

Proposals in the Glover Review for a National Landscapes Service and the renaming of AONBs as 'National Landscapes' have been discussed further in various circles. The NAAONB have set up a Task Group on the rebranding. Meanwhile Natural England, the Government's advisor on AONBs & National Parks, The National Association for AONBs, along with National Parks England have published a joint statement to mark the first anniversary of the publication of the Glover Review, demonstrating how AONBs, National Parks and Natural England are working together to deliver for nature and people across the UK. The full statement is available: <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2020/09/23/working-together-for-our-national-parks-and-areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty/>

Natural England's recent response to the Glover Review included a section 'Achieving greater parity between National Parks and AONBs' which stated: "AONBs have equal status to National Parks in terms of their natural beauty. Natural England strongly supports the Review's conclusions that AONBs should have the recreation related purpose of National Parks; a strengthened role in the development planning system; and equity in the application of grant in aid for statutory purposes and delivery of government priorities, if they are to be able to deliver the Reviews aspirations."

It is unlikely the Government will make any formal response to the Glover Review until the Spending Review is concluded.

Welsh AONB lead officers and NAAONB Wales Development Manager recently met (on-line) with Deputy Welsh Government Minister for Housing and Local Government, Hannah Blythyn, together with officials from Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Welsh National Parks to discuss the on-going implementation of 'Valued & Resilient: Welsh Government's Priorities for AONBs & National Parks'. This includes the work on gaining greater parity between National Parks and AONBs in Wales. Welsh Government responsibility for AONBs and National Parks has subsequently moved back to the Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.

Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) is a capital funding scheme from Welsh Government to assist with short term resources for AONBs and National Parks. The focus of the funding programme is contributing to key Welsh Government objectives around decarbonisation, resilient rural economies and sustainable tourism. The main scheme for the Wye Valley AONB this year is improving the energy efficiency and decarbonisation of the AONB Office. This will include replacing the Porta-cabin meeting room with a more efficient building and use of space and the purchase of an electric van to replace the diesel van currently used. Consequently there may be some disruption to operations at the AONB Office over the winter. However, as most AONB staff are working from home on account of the Coronavirus Pandemic, contingencies and logistics may not need to be as complex as originally anticipated.

Background

For more information on the Review of Designated Landscapes in England visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-national-parks-and-aonbs-2018-review>

Welsh Government's statement on Priorities for AONBs & National Parks 'Valued & Resilient' (published in July 2018) is available here: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/areas-outstanding-natural-beauty-national-parks-2018-report%20.pdf>