

ALL-ENGLAND ASSESSMENT FOR NEW LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Purpose

To advise members of Natural England's All-England Assessment and intended mapping of potential new Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other landscape designations, and note local requests for AONB designation.

Recommendations

That the JAC:

- A. Welcomes the initiation of Natural England's new landscape designation programme.
- B. Note the three existing local requests for AONB designation &/or extension.

Key Issues

- In July 2021 the JAC was advised of Natural England's announcement on proposals for two new AONBs and extension of two existing AONBs along with a programme to examine how more areas could be assessed for designation of their landscape.
- Natural England's 'All-England Assessment' of potential designated landscapes has now commenced, led by Land Use Consultants (LUC).
- This visionary mapping project aims to reflect the spirit of the Hobhouse Map that led to the establishment of the first National Parks & AONBs over 70 years ago.
- The Hobhouse map identified an area encompassing most of the current Wye Valley AONB and areas to the east across the Forest of Dean and south Herefordshire from Lydney and May Hill to Much Marcle and Tarrington (see attached map).
- The known requests made by various interested parties relevant to the Wye Valley AONB designation are for
 - The Wye Valley AONB to be extended up to the Marcle Ridge
 - The Forest of Dean to be designated and AONB
 - The whole 'Forest of Dean and Wye Valley' area of the Hobhouse map to be designated an AONB.

Reasons

The 25 Year Environment Plan included the actions of:

- Commissioning a 21st Century 'Hobhouse' Review of National Parks and AONBs;

- Identifying opportunities for environmental enhancement in all of England's 159 National Character Areas.

Natural England has the responsibility, under the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, Section 82(1), to make orders to designate AONBs or vary the boundaries of existing ones. Natural England's new Landscape Programme, announced in June 2021, highlights the ambition to create a strategic visionary map for England's landscapes in the 21st Century. It also includes consideration for the creation of two new AONBs in the Yorkshire Wolds and Cheshire Sandstone Ridge, and extensions to the Surrey Hills and Chilterns AONBs.

The Government's recent response (January 2022) to the Glover Landscapes Review reiterated the importance of this area of work stating that Natural England's Landscape Programme "... includes undertaking an All-England Assessment [whilst also] exploring new approaches to improve landscapes for people and nature ...".

Natural England has commenced the new All-England Assessment programme to explore new approaches to improve landscapes for people and nature, particularly in and around towns and cities and enable a more collaborative process to designate new National Parks and AONBs.

Implications

Natural England (NE) have commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to develop the All-England Strategic Landscape Mapping Assessment. Working in close collaboration with key stakeholders, the overall purpose of the strategic landscape mapping project is to help identify:

- Potential areas of new designated landscape;
- Potential areas where alternative landscape approaches may be appropriate.

As part of the programme, NE intend to assess the whole country to identify areas which may have potential for future landscape designation.

NE & LUC plan to work with stakeholders and communities to identify nature recovery and enhancement needs across England, including any remaining places suitable for future National Park or AONB designation. The assessment project will reconsider all existing proposals that have been submitted for National Park and AONB designation and variation. The Assessment will also seek to identify places where alternative forms of action may be more appropriate and where that are wanted by local communities. NE will work closely with Government to explore and develop the options and proposals. Consequently the Assessment will be strategic, not local; landscape focused, on where there is greatest natural beauty. It will not re-write the Natural Beauty criteria. But it will identify potential areas of opportunity and where there is greatest need both socially and environmentally.

In relation to the Wye Valley AONB there are three requests for designation or extension that are known to the JAC. These are:

- i. The Wye Valley AONB be extended up to the Marcle Ridge. This was proposed in the 1980s and 1990s to the Countryside Commission, a predecessor to Natural England.
- ii. The Forest of Dean be designated and AONB. This is another long standing request, endorsed by the Forest of Dean District Council, and listed in the Glover Review Annex 4.

- iii. The whole 'Forest of Dean and Wye Valley' area of the Hobhouse map to be designated an AONB. This proposal was presented at the previous JAC meeting by PRUB – Preservation of Rural Beauty, a private residents' group that straddles the south east Herefordshire/Gloucestershire border.

The Glover Review Annex 4 also lists two other proposals in region, but not contiguous with the Wye Valley: a new Herefordshire Marches AONB and Malvern Hills AONB/ Abberley Hills Variation.

Background

Sir Arthur Hobhouse chaired the 1947 National Parks Committee that published its report and accompanying map to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. The Hobhouse Report progressed the proposals in the 1946 Dower Report which outlined places and purposes suitable for National Park designation and "Other Amenity Areas". The latter were referred to as "Conservation Areas" in the Hobhouse Report, where it stated "special measures should be taken to preserve their natural beauty and interest" [p.51, para 227].

The Hobhouse Report is available here:

https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/application/files/6215/8928/8648/Report_of_the_National_Parks_Committee_1947.pdf

The full map accompanying the Hobhouse Report can be viewed here:

https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/application/files/6015/8935/4242/1947_Hobhouse_clean_map.pdf

In the 1949 National Parks and Access to Countryside Act, renamed Hobhouse's 'Conservation Areas' as 'areas of outstanding natural beauty'.

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