

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty welcomes this morning's Written Ministerial Statement.

The Statement represents a commitment at the highest possible level, through which we can take forward the ambitious recommendations of the 2019 Landscapes Review.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan set a bold ambition for this generation to be the first in history to leave the environment in a better state than it found it, and the Landscapes Review undertaken in support of the Plan called on England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks to be at the forefront of delivering on these ambitions.

The Minister's commitment to strengthening the status of AONBs, and the funding to support nature's recovery and public access to these precious spaces is both needed and welcome.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in more people than ever seeking solace and recreation in their local countryside, much of which is found within AONBs – some 66% of England's population lives within half an hour's travel time of an AONB. The announcement of increased support for farmers and landowners to improve and maintain public access will help the increased numbers of visitors to enjoy these spaces.

The Minister's commitment to funding the protection of 30% of England's space for nature by 2030 in keeping with the United Nations Leaders' Pledge for Nature is, of course, hugely welcome. Teams from all 34 of England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty work in their landscapes day in and day out and are all too aware of the need to do more for nature, and they have the expertise, the skills and the local knowledge to be able to deliver.

AONB teams have been working at full capacity towards the aims of the Colchester Declaration since July 2019. The Declaration made by all of England's AONBs commits that by 2030: at least 200,000 ha of SSSIs in AONBs will be in favourable condition; 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; 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; and that at least thirty species relevant to AONBs will be taken off the threatened list.

AONB teams are skilled collaborators. Operating in true partnership across the network of protected landscapes and locally with stakeholders, they are committed to bringing this ambition to life. With the right resources and strengthened powers this commitment will become reality.

The twin issues of climate crisis and nature depletion affect every single person, and now government, arm's length bodies, eNGOs, National Parks, AONBs and others must step up to the plate, working together to ensure the ambition and intent behind the Landscapes Review recommendations are given life.

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**The National Association for
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

Belmont House, Shrewsbury Business Park
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6LG
office@landscapesforlife.org.uk
Twitter @NAAONB

A company limited by guarantee no: 4729800
Charity Number: 1158871
Registered office as above