

## CHANGES TO AONBS

### ***Purpose***

To advise members of forthcoming changes occurring to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, particularly relating to the duties of relevant authorities and the re-branding of AONBs to National Landscapes.

### ***Recommendation***

That the JAC acknowledges the forthcoming changes to AONBs relating to legislation in England on the duties of relevant authorities and the national re-branding of AONBs to National Landscapes.

### ***Key Issues***

- Government amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB), announced in September, strengthen the duty on relevant authorities towards conserving and enhancing natural beauty and enhances AONB Management Plans by enabling a stronger link to national targets and a requirement on partners to contribute to their delivery. The amendments are appended.
- The LURB amendments require relevant authorities in England to 'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the AONB. Meanwhile, relevant authorities in Wales retain the 'duty of regard' to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty.
- LURB amendments also allow the Secretary of State to make provision to require relevant authorities in England "to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review" of an AONB Management Plan and for the Plan to contribute to meeting targets set under the Environment Act 2021.
- DEFRA resourcing for AONBs, particularly through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme and Access for All funding has increased over the last 2 years and been consolidated until March 2025. Meanwhile DEFRA are working on a review of the funding formula for National Parks & AONBs.
- On 22<sup>nd</sup> November the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) will host an event at the Royal Society, London, to launch when all the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty across England and Wales become National Landscapes. The following day is the NAAONB AGM and Chairs' Conference on Ambition and Leadership. The AONB Manager is intending to represent the AONB at these events.

- The Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change is supportive of Welsh AONBs adopting the National Landscape rebrand and intends to sponsor an event in the Senedd to raise the profile of AONBs.
- Together the LURB amendments, consolidated funding and National Landscape rebrand significantly progress the Glover Landscapes Review Proposal 24 that “AONBs should be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, and renamed as National Landscapes.”
- The Government’s formal response to the Glover Landscapes Review is expected to be published shortly.
- The NAAONB, DEFRA and Welsh Government will be producing respective guidance on the LURB amendments and the National Landscape rebrand later in the year.

### ***Reasons***

The ‘Glover’ Landscapes Review of National Parks and AONBs in England, published in September 2019, contained 27 Proposals for Government. Proposal 24 stated that “AONBs should be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, and renamed as National Landscapes.” The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) has been working closely with DEFRA, Welsh Government and colleagues in Northern Ireland to foster collaboration and collective action and create a national landscape designation fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

It is understood that the Government originally intended to introduce new legislation for National Parks & AONBs in 2020. But due to the Covid Pandemic and changes in Government, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) became the legislative opportunity to improve the duties and powers relating to Designated Landscapes. A series of amendments were submitted in the House of Lords by Lord Randall, Baroness Jones and Baroness Willis focusing on enhancing the ‘duty of regard’ and increasing the responsibilities around National Park and AONB Management Plans. The Government announced they were adopting these amendments on 13th September at the Third Reading in the Lords, requiring relevant authorities in England to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and enabling the Secretary of State to make provision to require relevant authorities in England to contribute to furthering Management Plan targets and actions. The definition of who or what a relevant authority is in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 (see appended amendments).

The LURB amendments are designed not to affect devolved responsibility for National Parks & AONBs in Wales.

### ***Implications***

The Government amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) as they relate to AONBs are appended. The main changes for AONBs relate to the powers and responsibilities of any “relevant authority”, as defined in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. This includes all level of government from Town & Parish Councils up

through District & County Councils to Government Agencies and Ministers, and anyone in 'public office'. The amendments only affect England. The changes are as follows:

#### New duty 'to further the purpose' of AONBs

Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, Section 85 - General duty of public bodies:

- Any relevant authority exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

The "must seek to further" duty is a significant augmentation of the original "have regard" CRoW Act Section 85 duty, which remains in Wales. The existing 'duty of regard' can allow a public body to acknowledge that the AONB (or National Park) will be affected but without an explanation of how they have factored this into their decision, especially what weight was given to the designation in reaching their decision. This is sufficient to comply with the duty. Consequently 'having regard' may be a cursory or general consideration, based on assumptions rather than an analysis of the evidence about the impact of the action or proposal.

The addition of "must seek to further" will ensure that more rigorous attention is paid to the statutory purposes of the designation which is greater than simply giving or having consideration when taking decisions or undertaking actions which may affect the designation. The proposed change would provide for a more structured and proactive process, one which is undertaken with greater transparency of the best endeavour. This would help public bodies, like local authorities or Natural England, to fully understand why, for example, if a scheme or proposal does not further AONB purposes what other actions, adaptations or mitigations are implemented instead. It should also help Planning Inspectors in their role. This simple legislative change can therefore help the planning system and associated appeals procedures to operate more efficiently by providing a more substantive test against which decisions can be measured.

#### Enhanced Management Plans

CRoW Act 2000, Section 90 - Supplementary provisions relating to Management Plans:

Note: The amendments make use of secondary legislation to make provision for regulation through statutory instruments.

- The Secretary of State may make provision requiring an AONB Management Plan in England to contribute to meeting any target set under Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021;
  - These are long-term Environmental targets, which relates to—
    1. (a) the natural environment, or  
(b) people's enjoyment of the natural environment.  
With priority areas of (a) air quality; (b) water; (c) biodiversity;  
(d) resource efficiency and waste reduction.
    2. Particulate matter
    3. Species abundance

Making AONB Management Plans contribute to these national targets will significantly strengthen the status of AONBs and their Plans.

- The Secretary of State may make provision requiring a relevant authority in England to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of AONB Management Plans.

Currently, under the CRoW Act Section 89, local authorities have to produce an AONB Management Plan and review it every 5 years. But there is no requirement to implement the Plan. This provision amends that oversight.

It is worth noting that the Secretary of State will also be covered by the new duty 'to further the purpose' of AONBs, which would be progressed by making these new provisions.

#### Wye Valley clauses

Due to the Welsh Government's devolved responsibility for AONBs and National Parks, the LURB amendments only cover the English part of the Wye Valley AONB. This is explained in the somewhat cumbersome differentiation in the LURB amendments between England and devolved Welsh authority. However, as and when the LURB is enacted and the provisions start to be implemented, the differences may start to become more significant for the Wye Valley AONB. This will mean that the local (& relevant) authorities in England will have different powers and purposes to those in Wales. Likewise the requirements of the AONB Management Plan may differ. Natural England and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are both currently working respectively on new Management Plan Guidance. However, under the CRoW Act, the constituent local authorities are still required to 'act jointly'. It remains to be seen how significant these differences will become for the management, and governance, of the Wye Valley AONB.

The Government's formal response on the implementation of the Glover Landscapes Review is expected to be published shortly and a new Outcomes Framework. It is anticipated that this will be followed by more detailed guidance on the LURB amendments. These measures will set out a plan of action for Protected Landscapes and define the contribution that they should make to national environmental targets. This will help the global goal to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030. DEFRA officials are also working on a review of the funding formula for National Parks & AONBs. Resourcing for AONBs has increased significantly over the last 3 years, particularly through the introduction of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme and Access for All funding. It is hoped that the new funding formula may be introduced in advance of the next funding allocation cycle from April 2025.

Similarly Welsh Government are also considering how best to further the interest of the 8 Designated Landscapes in Wales. This also includes a proposed review of funding in advance of April 2025, and opportunities to refresh legislation. These two aspects are currently incorporated within the remit of the Biodiversity Deep Dive Designated Landscapes Working Group, which the AONB Manager sits on.

#### National Landscapes

The NAAONB will be launching the rebrand of AONBs to National Landscapes on 22<sup>nd</sup> November. DEFRA have been fully supporting the rebrand. The Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change, Julie James, has expressed her support for the collective decision to

rebrand. Meanwhile, in the absence of an elected assembly in Northern Ireland, civil servants have been engaging on behalf of the 8 AONBs there.

The rebrand to National Landscapes has been mooted and discussed for a number of years. Some AONBs are already being referred to locally as National Landscapes, where teams and partnerships had already recognised the power of this change to enhance the status of the designation in their area. The strength of AONBs is that it is a national designation which is managed locally. The rebrand is the opportunity to assert a collective national identity as part of a family of locally managed and celebrated landscapes.

The NAAONB, working with a design agency and supported by DEFRA, have created the new brand guidelines to help shape each National Landscape's branded communications and create consistency across all applications and media. This covers the different elements that make up the new National Landscapes identity, including the logo, colour, typography, graphic language, iconography, illustration and photography styles.

The new logo for the Wye Valley is below. It is an evolution of the AONB's existing branding, featuring an abstracted version of the distinctive shape of the Wye Valley.



**Dyffryn Gwy**  
Tirwedd  
Cenedlaethol

**Wye Valley**  
National  
Landscape



**Dyffryn Gwy**  
Tirwedd Cenedlaethol

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**Wye Valley**  
National Landscape

The tagline can be used as necessary:

Ardal o harddwich naturiol eithriadol  
Area of outstanding natural beauty

eg: Wye Valley National Landscape  
Area of outstanding natural beauty

Below is a selection of the new logos. The brand styling is consistent across all National Landscapes which is intended to give a more unified identity across the AONB family, to better show the collective size, ambition and the potential impact of the AONB/National Landscapes network. However, the full suite of new National Landscape logos is embargoed until the launch.

The use of the National Landscape branding negates the need for the supplementary 'Landscapes for Life {AONB family}' logo and branding, which was developed over 10 years ago to give some consistent national identity for AONBs.



Stage 1 of the rebranding programme completes with the national launch. Following the launch, Stage 2 commences with a national campaign raising awareness of the new branding. The implementation of the new branding will be accompanied by a comprehensive set of assets including:

- a. A Brand identity for each National Landscape
- b. Branding guidelines that will support each AONB to implement the brand, including guidance on how to use the brand, fonts to use and a range of templates for design platforms
- c. A licence to use the design font Effra that will be available for all AONBs to download
- d. A presentation that articulates why we are making the change and what it is – it will be designed for all National Landscape teams to use to communicate to their partners. This will include guidance on the use of the new brand and when the legal designation should be referred to.
- e. The National Association will trademark each of the brand identities ensuring that each marque is protected and giving each National Landscape free use of the brand.

Funding is available for each National Landscape to begin the process of changing brand identity. This will balance the need for creating local recognition and awareness with value-for-money and pragmatism in delivering the local rebrand appropriately.

Legally, the designation will remain an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Joint Advisory Committee will remain, technically, the “Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee” as established under agreement by the 4 constituent authorities. There will be an indefinite transition period until legislation and policy catches up with the rebranding, during which time we all will need to assist our stakeholders with any confusion that may arise. In the meantime the new logo will start to be adopted and used in key situations and the Wye Valley AONB Unit will rebrand as the Wye Valley National Landscape team and the Wye Valley AONB Partnership will be referred to as the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership. The ‘Area of outstanding natural beauty’ tagline will continued to be used where appropriate.

The following is a summary of officers’ views of the positives and negatives of either a) resisting the current rebranding exercise, or b) aligning with the national initiative:

(a) If we don’t rebrand

Pros

- People continue to recognise our individual local brand (assuming they currently do)

Cons

- Risk of damage to relationships and collaborative approach with other AONBs/National Landscapes and the National Association
- Any subsequent rebrand would be out of step with other AONBs/National Landscapes which could weaken our impact
- We would lose the funding that DEFRA is making available for the implementation of the rebrand.
- Future DEFRA, and possibly Welsh Government, funding agreements may be contingent of implementing the rebrand.

(b) If we do rebrand

Pros

- Gives us time to rebrand and use the national campaign as part of engaging with partners and stakeholders
- We will receive DEFRA funding to support implementation of the rebranding, plus brand guidelines, materials and Trademarking
- Results in us working collaboratively with the National Association and other AONBs/National Landscapes (and being seen to do so)
- Allows the rebrand to settle in before the next Management Plan Review in 2026.
- Aligns with Proposal 24 of the Glover Landscapes Review and provides greater parity with National Parks

Cons

- Need to be clear on financial implications and that DEFRA and Welsh Government support contributes to costs, including staff time
- Rebranding needs to be integral to the other aspects of the Glover Landscapes Review Proposal 24 – i.e. a new funding formula, plus improved purposes, along with consolidated powers and resources.

At the previous meeting the JAC resolved to overturn the recommendation to endorse the National Landscapes rebranding. The reservations were fed back to the NAAONB. However the rebranding is progressing with the support of DEFRA and endorsement from Welsh Government. Therefore changes to AONBs nationally will occur and the benefits of collective rebranding outweigh the advantages of excluding the Wye Valley AONB from the ambition, collaboration, commitment and readiness to redefine the designation for the 21st century. Therefore it is recommended that the JAC acknowledge the rebranding and allow the AONB team to make the necessary arrangements to implement it in a proportionate way.

The AONB Manager is signed up to attend the launch event in London on behalf the AONB Partnership, on the evening of 22nd November at the Royal Society, London. The next day is also the NAAONB AGM and Chairs' Conference in London which the AONB Manager will also attend to represent the Wye Valley AONB. The conference theme is Ambition and Leadership, addressing the opportunities and leadership challenge in realising the potential of National Landscapes. This is in acknowledgement that the need for ambition and leadership in delivering for nature, climate, people and places has never been greater. As leaders of National Landscapes the time is ripe for a step change in mobilising people and partners to deliver for nature and communities. The Conference will focus on what that ambition has to be, and the strong leadership needed to drive forward significant change.

### **Background**

The DEFRA Secretary of State tabled a Written Ministerial Statement on 13<sup>th</sup> September setting out a package of measures to support Protected Landscapes in England, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nature-recovery-to-be-accelerated-in-englands-protected-landscapes>. This package included a commitment to new legislation through an amendment to the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill at Third Reading delivered by Lord Benyon. The full statement is available here <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-09-13/hcws1021>. Lord Benyon's announcement is available to view here <https://parliamentlive.tv/event/index/b2efa2b3-ac1a-4615-850d-ba38955fb29e?in=11:54:59>. This forms part of the government's commitments following the Landscapes Review.

The NAAONB is a charity that provides a strong collective voice for the UK's AONBs. It works on behalf of its membership, fostering collaboration and collective action between the 300 staff of the AONB Family, the 700 elected members that support the AONB partnerships and the many partners with whom the NAAONB does business at the local and national levels. For more information see: [www.landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk)

The rebranding to National Landscapes will be implementing many of the recommendations made in the Glover Landscapes Review (2019) in England, building on the work of the Marsden Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales (2015). Both Reviews recognised that a simpler name for the AONBs, which promoted the national status and gave greater parity to the National Park designation, should be introduced.



