

FOREST OF BOWLAND AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

National Association for AONBs update

Issue for consideration

This report provides an update on key areas of policy work being progressed by the National Association for AONBs to strengthen and raise the profile of AONB Partnerships at a national level particularly within Government.

'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Environment Plan for the Future'

The NAAONB Chair, Philip Hygate welcomed the UK Government's long-awaited 25-year Environment Plan, launched in January 2018. The Plan sets out the Government's goals for improving the environment, within a generation, and leaving it in a better state than we found it. The Plan forms the culmination of over two years of work and consultation with environmental bodies, including close work with the NAAONB.

Chapter 2 of the Plan 'Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes' states:

"...the creation of designated landscapes – which also include Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty AONBs) – has been among the outstanding environmental achievements of the past 100 years. They provide a patchwork of stunning, and protected, landscapes. In England, a quarter of our landscape is designated in this way, around 10% as National Parks and 15% as AONBs. We will make sure they continue to be conserved and enhanced, while recognising that they are living landscapes that support rural communities."

Under Section 2 'Conserving and enhancing natural beauty' the Plan goes on to say:

"Over the next 25 years we want to make sure they [National Parks & AONBs] are not only conserved but enhanced. Many of the policies set out in the rest of the Plan will contribute to making all areas more beautiful..."

Reviewing National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty:

The UK's first National Parks were created by an Act of Parliament in 1949 following the government's 1947 Hobhouse Report, which remains the basis for most protected landscape designation in England today. Now, 70 years on, the Government will commission a review for the 21st Century. This will consider coverage of designations, how designated areas deliver their responsibilities, how designated areas are financed, and whether there is scope for expansion. It will also consider opportunities to enhance the environment in existing designations, and expand on the existing eight-point plan for National Parks to connect more people with the natural environment.

Actions we will take include:

- *Commissioning a 21st Century 'Hobhouse' Review of National Parks and AONBs.*
- *Working with National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards to deliver environmental enhancement, including through demonstrator projects, and engaging with communities through their statutory management plans.*

The NAAONB are now in early discussions with the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs and Natural England about the proposed Review and will be feedback to AONB Partnerships and Conservation Board as it progresses.

'Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming, and the environment in a Green Brexit'

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is also currently inviting views on the Government's proposals for future agricultural policy. They are looking for views on the policy ideas set out in the consultation paper on a new, post-Common Agricultural Policy domestic settlement for agriculture. This consultation is the first step towards a new agricultural policy outside of the EU with the intention of securing a *"bright future for farming and the environment."*

The Government is aiming for *"a more dynamic, more self-reliant agriculture industry"* and also *"a reformed agricultural and land management policy to deliver a better and richer environment in England."* They believe this can be achieved by incentivising methods of farming that create new habitats for wildlife, increase biodiversity, reduce flood risk, better mitigate climate change, and improve air quality by reducing agricultural emissions.

The Government is expecting to achieve this by ensuring that public money (particularly to support agriculture) is spent on public goods, such as biodiversity conservation of biodiversity (such as peatland restoration) and measures which sequester carbon from the atmosphere; protecting iconic aspects of the rural heritage; and reducing disease by better monitoring animal health and welfare.

The NAAONB has again been working closely with Defra in the development of these early proposals and in particular the nature of- and delivery mechanisms for future Environmental Land Management Schemes outside of the EU. The NAAONB has presented an offer to Defra focused on using our statutory Management Plans as the framework for identifying priorities upon which any future schemes should focus within our individual AONBs.

Environmental Land Management Schemes

The main proposal of 'Health and Harmony' is a new agricultural policy that will be underpinned by payment of public money for the provision of public goods to include environmental enhancement and protection, better animal and plant health, animal welfare, improved public access, rural resilience, and productivity.

The Government believes this new environmental land management system will help it deliver its manifesto commitment to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than it inherited it and that farming is crucial to achieving the goals set out in the recently published 25 Year Environment Plan. The new environmental land management system will pay farmers and land managers for environmentally beneficial outcomes and ensure an effective application of the 'polluter pays' principle. It will be underpinned by natural capital principles (i.e. the benefits the natural environment provides for people and wildlife are properly valued) and these will be used to inform decisions on future land management.

The Government is proposing is consulting with others, including the NAAONB on the design of new and ambitious schemes and how to pilot them in preparation for the introduction of the system. The NAAONB is working closely with AONB Partnerships particularly interested in developing and delivering pilot new Environmental Land Management Schemes.

Decision to be taken

The committee is asked to:

- i. note the NAAONB update report and offer comments
- ii. approve the AONB Principal Officer to continue liaising with- and assisting the NAAONB on this key policy work, in particular bidding for delivery pilots for the new Environmental Land Management schemes within AONBs