

Defra, Natural England and the NAAONB

Issue for Consideration

New roles for Defra and Natural England and key role of the National Association for AONBs (Appendix 'A')

Information

From 1 April 2011, the resources and responsibility for funding and strategic oversight of the AONB Joint Advisory Committees, the two Conservation Boards and the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) transferred from Natural England to Defra, whilst leaving Natural England with resources to continue to provide technical expert support and advice at the local level, and to deliver their statutory role with respect to AONBs.

In a letter written in late November 2010 to the Chief Executive of the NAAONB, Howard Davies, the Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries, Richard Benyon MP, made clear his intention that there should be an effective tripartite relationship between Defra, Natural England and the NAAONB which sees AONBs thrive and prosper, with appropriate support from central government and minimal interference.

This streamlining of arrangements reflects the growing maturity of AONBs as effective and well managed partnerships. It demonstrates "the importance the Government ascribes to AONBs as part of the network of our protected landscapes, and to the successful delivery of AONB management plan objectives." "This local action and accountability alongside the demonstrated results has helped secure the commitment of central government."(Open letter to NAAONB from Andrew Wood, Executive Director Science and Evidence, Natural England).

The support of successive governments has been won by the success of AONBs in delivering environmental and social benefits at the local level largely because this has been most effectively and efficiently communicated to government through the work of the National Association for AONBs, its successive Chief Executives and support staff.

Working closely with Natural England the NAAONB has performed a key role in negotiations with governments both current and previous to seek the best outcome for AONBs nationally and to ensure government ministers are well informed on matters affecting AONBs and can obtain speedy and reliable information when required. The NAAONB receives many consultations on national plans and policy documents every month and is able to respond to these taking on board the information and views of members. This is a remarkable cost saver to individual AONBs and the county, district and unitary councils charged with stewardship of these national landscapes. Since its inception the organisation has been stretched by the demands placed upon it and with government expectations growing there is a need for the organisation to raise sufficient funding from subscriptions to respond to this

growing demand. The subscription rate in 2010 was only only £600.00 whereas the UK Association of National Park Authorities was £7,000.00. All councils with AONBs in their areas are urged to support the National Association for AONBs by becoming full members - email Jill Smith, Communications and Development Officer at jill.smith@naaonb.org.uk to request membership.

Decision required

To note the changes, commend the effectiveness of the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB) in securing government support and urge all councils with AONBs in their area to become full members of the NAAONB to ensure its continuation.

Background Information

AONBs were brought into being by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 strengthened the conservation and management of AONBs in partnership with local authorities.

Natural England and the Countryside Council for Wales are responsible for designating AONBs and advising government on policies for their protection.

The administration of planning and development control in AONBs is the responsibility of those local authorities within whose boundaries they fall. Section 89 of the CRoW Act 2000 required all AONBs to prepare and publish a management plan for their area.

The Act also requires the plan be reviewed every five years, consideration given to whether any changes need to be made and amended if necessary.

There is a general statutory duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purposes of AONBs when making decisions affecting these areas.

A guidance note explaining the duties (PDF 100 KB) is available: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/protected/npaonb-duties-guide.pdf>

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB)

Lancashire County Council and the Forest of Bowland AONB originally initiated and sponsored the founding of the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) in 1998 as an independent organisation to act on behalf of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales.

Its membership is largely composed of representatives from local authorities whose boundaries include AONBs and who are concerned to improve their management and funding arrangements. The NAAONB is administered by an Management Board and holds an Annual Conference, which provides an

opportunity for those working in AONBs to join together and address issues of current concern.

Recently, the NAAONB has been raised to new prominence as central government have established a new tripartite working relationship that recognises the key role of the NAAONB alongside Defra and Natural England in forming strategic policy and overall management of AONB landscapes. The NAAONB has performed a key role in negotiations with governments both current and previous not only to seek the best outcome for AONBs nationally but to ensure all political parties and government ministers are well informed and can obtain speedy and reliable information when required. The NAAONB receives many consultations on national plans and policy documents every month and is able to respond to these taking on board the information and views of members. This is appreciated by government as a valuable mechanism for consultation and is a remarkable cost saver to individual AONBs and the county, district and unitary councils charged with stewardship of these national landscapes.