

FOREST OF BOWLAND JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE THURSDAY 19 OCTOBER 2023

BRIEFING ON WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT FROM DEFRA SECRETARY OF STATE

Background

On Wednesday 13th September 2023, the Defra Secretary of State tabled a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) setting out a package of measures to support nature recovery in Protected Landscapes. The plans were also announced in the Lords by Lord Benyon and are outlined in a Defra [press release](#).

The package included a commitment to new legislation through an amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill at Third Reading which would enhance National Park and AONB Management Plans by placing a stronger requirement on partners to contribute to their delivery.

The government will also shortly publish its response to the Landscapes Review consultation. The Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership responded to this consultation in April 2022.

The statement also announces funding for the new Protected Landscapes Partnership involving the National Association for AONBs, National Parks England, National Trails UK and Natural England, which will deliver projects and programmes on nature recovery and widening access to nature.

The announcement also confirms an extension to the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL), with funding for a fourth year to March 2025, and refers to the positive impact of Defra's Access for All programme, which has already enabled the Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership to improve access to the countryside for people from all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

The Statement also confirmed the imminent publication of Defra's new Outcomes Framework, which will define the contribution that Protected Landscapes should make to national targets in the 25 Year Environment Plan. These are intended to guide local decision-making and prioritisation and represent a step forward in achieving the government's global goal to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030.

Roundtable

The Secretary of State convened a roundtable with AONB and National Park Chairs on Thursday 14th September 2023. Councillor Shaun Turner, Chair of the Joint Advisory Committee attended the online meeting. The key points from this meeting are outlined below and are drawn from notes taken by AONB Partnership Chairs, which have shared with AONB Lead Officers and the NAAONB:

- The Government has agreed to fine-tune Sir John Randall's amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which would give improved powers to Protected Landscapes.
- AONBs have equal status to National Parks and are central to enabling access to nature and delivering environmental targets.
- The Secretary of State is supportive of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL) but says the spending review (from April '25 onwards) prevents her from a further

extension at this stage. She also wants to explore how lessons from FiPL can be embedded into ELMS including FiPL's local decision-making model.

- Several AONBs urged that AONBs be given statutory consultee status. The Secretary of State supports this but says Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has pushed back, so this won't happen anytime soon, because "with the exception of the two Conservation Boards" the AONBs operate via local authorities, so the legal status is not available for it to work.
- Defra is finalising arrangements for a new 'Protected Landscapes Partnership'.
- Several AONBs stressed the need for a more equitable, evidence-based funding model for Protected Landscapes. The Secretary of State said she is aware of the concerns and Defra officials are looking at options for new funding models, including bringing in private sector finance 'so that we don't have to use taxpayers' money for everything'.
- Defra is soon to publish the Outcomes and Targets Framework for AONBs and National Parks.
- The Secretary of State made the point (strongly) that she wanted Local Nature Recovery Strategies to 'fully take account of all Protected Landscapes' input.
- Secretary of State asked to flesh out what is meant by 'enhanced' Management Plans, with a 'stronger requirement' to comply. She didn't respond to this in her round-up at the end, but we do expect further detail on this point in the coming weeks.
- The announcement was roundly welcomed by all, and the whole tone was very positive.
- By way of follow up, the Chair of the NAAONB will be writing to the Secretary of State to welcome the commitment on the powers and repeat some of our outstanding requests, including increased resources.

Third Reading of Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

At the Third Reading in the House of Lords on 21st September 2023, the government's amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill - to enhance AONB and National Park Management Plans - was passed.

In his speech, Lord Howe set out how the amendment will enhance the Management Plans of Protected Landscapes - National Parks and AONBs - by bolstering the contribution of partners to help deliver them, ensuring better outcomes for people and nature. He stated that, "as home to some of our most beautiful and iconic places, Protected Landscapes are crucial delivery partners who are at heart of work to unleash rural prosperity and create a network of beautiful, nature rich spaces that can be enjoyed by all parts of society."

Lord Howe also explained that the government has amended individual acts to strengthen the duty on relevant authorities to contribute to delivery of the purposes of Protected Landscapes and creating a power to make regulations. He further explained that the Secretary of State now has the power to bring forward these regulations and said the government is committed to doing so in a timely manner.

Recommendation

The Committee is requested to:

- Note the briefing and offer comments, particularly considering the potential implications for partner local authorities represented on the Joint Advisory Committee.