

Surrey Hills AONB Board response to government consultation on the Landscapes Review response (online questionnaire) submitted 9th April 2022

[Qs 1-5 personal details]

Overview

Implementing some aspects of our response to the review will require changes to legislation, subject to securing parliamentary time. We are seeking public views on support for these proposed legislative changes, and their potential effects on different groups and interests. We are also interested to hear any wider views on other aspects of our response to the review.

A stronger mission for nature recovery

6. Should a strengthened first purpose of protected landscapes follow the proposals set out in Chapter 2?

Yes

Please give reasons for your answer:

The Surrey Hills AONB Board, the Joint Advisory Committee for the AONB, supports the case for strengthening the purpose for nature recovery. As a designated National Landscape, the entire AONB should be regarded as a nature recovery area with biodiversity targets set.

The Surrey Hills AONB Board however is unsure about the inclusion of Natural Capital as statutory purpose as its understanding is currently ambiguous and therefore may lead to distorted outcomes.

7. Which other priorities should be reflected in a strengthened first purpose e.g. climate, cultural heritage? Please give us your views

Climate change is acknowledged as leading to a global climate and biodiversity emergency which will have a profound impact on all aspects of the Surrey Hills landscape, and so we support specific reference to climate change in updated purposes. However the Surrey Hills AONB Board is unsure about having specific Climate Change targets as this may lead to unrealistic expectations and a monitoring and reporting burden on a small team. However, as a National Landscape, climate change targets should be integrated into international, national, regional and local policy, strategy and programmes

The Surrey Hills AONB Board would also support the updated purposes to include having regard to cultural heritage, including historic building, settlements and landscape features. Community Engagement is also essential so that work done is understood by the communities adjacent to any areas where habitat management is required.

Agricultural transition

8. Do you support any of the following options as we develop the role of protected landscapes in the new environmental land management schemes? Tick all that apply.

- ✓ Designing the environmental land management schemes in a way that works for all farmers and land managers, including the specific circumstances for those in

protected landscapes, recognising that farmers in these areas are well-placed to deliver on our environmental priorities.

- ✓ Using Local Nature Recovery Strategies to identify projects or habitats within protected landscapes.
- ✓ Monitoring the effectiveness and uptake of the new environmental land management schemes in protected landscapes. Using this to inform whether further interventions are needed to ensure we are on track for wider nature recovery ambitions.
- ✓ Creating a clear role for protected landscape organisations in the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Our recent LNRS consultation specifically asks for views on the role of different organisations in the preparation of LNRSs, including protected landscapes.
- ✓ Building on FiPL, empowering protected landscapes to support decision-making and delivery against agreed priorities, including through dedicated project coordinators and advisers.

9. Do you have any views or supporting evidence you would like to input as we develop the role of protected landscapes in the new environmental land management schemes?

Please give us your views

The Surrey Hills AONB Board strongly supports the principle that it should have a central role in the delivery of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme in the area. This will be key to delivering on the purposes and Management Plan policies. As the AONB team does not directly own or manage land, this means they have the ability to convene partners and target funding where it will make the biggest impact without having a conflict of interest.

The governance structure integrating with the county, boroughs and districts local authorities means the AONB team can add value to other investment opportunities like biodiversity net gain, conservation covenants, community (green and blue) infrastructure and the emerging local nature recovery strategy. The potential for outdoor education and well-being activities must also be linked to LA responsibilities.

The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme is already demonstrating the ability of National Parks and AONB teams to deliver environmental land management schemes. However, it is important that sufficient resources are provided to facilitate advice and support to land managers to deliver collaboratively across the designated area and making links to the wider landscape.

As part of the design of the Environment Land Management Scheme (ELMS) test and trial, the Surrey Hills AONB Board has published 'Making Space for Nature', a landowner and land manager approach to nature recovery. This identifies 30 key indicator species for the 7 landscape habitat types of the Surrey Hills. This programme requires on-going support and monitoring of progress.

A stronger mission for connecting people and places

10. Should AONBs have a second purpose relating to connecting people and places, equivalent to that of National Parks?

Yes

Please give reasons for your answer:

The Surrey Hills AONB Board supported Glover's call for a stronger mission to connect all people with our national landscapes for health and well-being. However, the Surrey Hills AONB, having over 10 million people within a hour's travel, faces greater visitor pressure than most National Parks. Although this provides an opportunity to connect a wider range of people with nature, including many groups who are traditionally excluded from the countryside, this needs to be balanced in terms of the impact on nature conservation and community interests. More resources are required to promote and provide the infrastructure to support active travel, visitor education and to control and restrict access where appropriate.

11. Should a strengthened second purpose of protected landscapes follow the proposals set out in Chapter 3 to improve connections to all parts of society with our protected landscapes?

Yes

Please give reasons for your answer:

Diversity and inclusion is a priority for the Surrey Hills AONB Board which considers that everyone should have the opportunity to experience the Surrey Hills in a sustainable way. This is integral to the AONB Management Plan vision statement. There is a significant issue with under-representation among some parts of society who may be considered excluded from enjoying the AONB. Strengthening the second purpose should mean that this is given the appropriate priority but again resources will be required to invest in the outreach and infrastructure required if this is to be delivered sustainably.

12. Are there any other priorities that should be reflected in a strengthened second purpose?

Please give us your views

Health and wellbeing are vital benefits that protected landscapes can provide and should therefore be referenced in the purpose to ensure they are a focus for action. There is a need to promote active travel to these National Landscapes to address the issues related to carbon footprint, air quality and to help protect areas sensitive to visitor pressure.

As National Landscapes, AONBs and National Parks have a critical role in the nation's place making. This is a major economic opportunity to secure investment through international tourism and visitor economy. Outside London, the British countryside is the most important reason why people visit. To realise the potential of this asset, there is an opportunity to collectively own and manage the identity (through trademark registration and licensing) to secure greater investment and return locally, regionally and nationally. This could help secure private finance. The Surrey Hills AONB Board is keen to share our experience.

The Surrey Hills AONB Board also highlights the important role that education and environmental arts should play by engaging and inspiring changes in behaviour. This is the priority for the Surrey Hills Arts partnership which we are always happy to share.

Managing visitor pressures

13. Do you support any of the following options to grant National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority greater enforcement powers to manage visitor pressures? Tick all that apply.

Issue Fixed Penalty Notices for byelaw infringements

Make Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs)

Issue Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) to control the amount and type of traffic on roads

Please give reasons for your answer:

Question applies to National Parks and the Broads only.

14. Should we give National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority and local highway authorities additional powers to restrict recreational motor vehicle use on unsealed routes?

Question applies to National Parks and the Broads only.

15. For which reasons should National Park Authorities, the Broads Authority and local authorities exercise this power? (select all that apply)

Environmental protection

Prevention of damage

Nuisance

Amenity

Other (please state)

Question applies to National Parks and the Broads only.

16. Should we legislate to restrict the use of motor vehicles on unsealed unclassified roads for recreational use, subject to appropriate exemptions?

Yes – everywhere

Yes – in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty only

Yes – in National Parks only

No

Unsure

Please give reasons for your answer:

The countryside outside protected landscapes also has valued environmental and amenity qualities which are important for recreation. Motorised off-road recreation is inherently intrusive in the countryside and often environmentally damaging, and there should be greater controls everywhere on this. However, efforts to better safeguard AONBs and National Parks should not result in increased harm to non-designated areas.

The Surrey Hills AONB Board is aware that environmental damage and disturbance occurs on private land rather than the unsealed unclassified roads themselves. As such, measures should be implemented to safeguard these areas including considering restricting access to the road. Again resources are needed to support private landowners, which may be an opportunity for ELMS.

17. What exemptions do you think would be required to protect the rights and enjoyment of other users e.g., residents, businesses etc?

Please give us your views

There will be the need to make exemptions or provision for residents and businesses to access areas. The Surrey Hills AONB Board in supporting the principles of including all groups would support responsible users to enjoy the area for their wellbeing providing it does not unduly compromise the experience of other users or cause undue damage to the surface or immediate environs. Such measures may include a permit scheme.

The role of AONB teams in planning

18. What roles should AONBs teams play in the plan-making process to achieve better outcomes?

Please give us your views

On behalf of the constituent local authorities and partners, the AONB team should play the lead role in preparing the AONB Management Plan and the Plan's vision and policy framework should provide a material consideration in planning. The Surrey Hills AONB Board would welcome government guidance on how the AONB Management Plans could be given greater weight, including consideration of a spatial planning framework.

The Surrey Hills AONB Board considers it is important that the AONB team is involved at an early stage in advising on policy that would impact on the National Landscape. This should include collaborative work on supporting evidence and helping to prepare additional guidance beyond the Local Plan itself, for example design statements.

It is important that the AONB has the appropriate capacity and competency to effectively undertake this planning function, particularly as local planning authorities often have reduced capacity and expertise on landscape matters. Evidence of the limited local authority resources is that there is a greater demand, particularly from parish councils and community groups, to engage the Surrey Hills AONB Planning Adviser on development proposals to provide pre-application advice.

19. Should AONB teams be made statutory consultees for development management?

Yes

Please give reasons for your answer:

As safeguarding the Surrey Hills against inappropriate development is the highest priority for the Surrey Hills AONB Board, we support the principle of being a statutory consultee on planning. It is not clear however whether the existing structure of a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) can be a statutory consultee as JACs are not a legal entity in themselves as the finances and contractual obligations for the AONB staff are held by the host authority. If the JAC or AONB staff team can legally be a statutory consultee, there would need to be robust procedures including schemes of delegation for the involvement of AONB staff and the role of JAC partners, particularly elected members.

Any additional responsibility needs to be resourced with additional core funding to ensure that there is the appropriate capacity and competency to fulfil the role effectively.

20. If yes, what type of planning applications should AONB teams be consulted on?

- ✓ AONB teams should formally agree with local planning authorities which planning applications should be consulted on.
- AONB teams should be consulted on all planning applications that require an Environmental Impact Assessment and are categorised as 'major development' as well as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.
- Other (please state)

Local governance

21. Which of the following measures would you support to improve local governance? Tick all that apply.

- Improved training and materials
- Streamlined process for removing underperforming members
- Greater use of advisory panels
- Greater flexibility over the proportion of national, parish and local appointments
- Merit-based criteria for local authority appointments
- Reduced board size
- Secretary of State appointed chair
- Other (please state) Please give reasons for your answer:

The Surrey Hills AONB Board supports all the above measures but considers the most important to be improved training and materials, and providing greater flexibility over the proportion of national, parish and local appointments. We also strongly support the Glover recommendation for an independent Chair with the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to lead the AONB as a National Landscape.

Although the process of appointing an independent Chair can be undertaken by the JAC itself, in principle we would welcome the opportunity for Natural England and the Secretary of State to support the appointment process. This could be enhanced by improved training and support for National Landscape Chairs to share their knowledge and experience, including the ability to act collaboratively in influencing regional and national policy and programmes.

Although there is support in principle for a smaller AONB Board, this would need to be balanced by having a governance structure that could include a wider range of partner organisations. The representation of different user groups and the need to diversify the Board to better represent wider society should be a priority.

As the principle sponsor of AONBs, it is proposed that Defra or Natural England could instruct the host authority to establish a fit for purpose 'Conservation Board' type governance structure as part of the grant making process process. This could provide the benefit of more independence without having to externalise all the core services that the host authority provides, for example finance, IT, payroll and insurance

A clearer role for public bodies

22. Should statutory duties be strengthened so that they are given greater weight when exercising public functions?

Yes

Please give reasons for your answer:

The Section 85 duty has proved to be weak. Changes to the wording may help to strengthen this but greater AONB resources are required to help advise, monitor and report on how public bodies exercise their duty of regard locally and nationally.

23. Should statutory duties be made clearer with regards to the role of public bodies in preparing and implementing management plans?

Yes

Please give reasons for your answer:

The Surrey Hills AONB Board considers that a major weakness of the AONB Management Plan is that there is a statutory duty to prepare and review it, but there is no requirement to implement.

General power of competence

Before answering, please see the section titled 'General power of competence' (page 24)

24. Should National Parks Authorities and the Broads Authority have a general power of competence?

Yes No Unsure

Please give reasons for your answer:

Question applies to National Parks and the Broads only.

Overall

25. If you have any further comments on any of the proposals in this document, please include them here.

Overall the Surrey Hills AONB Board welcomes the government's response to the Landscapes Review and its commitment to take forward many of the Review's recommendations. The Surrey Hills AONB Board's workshop however raised concern that many of the priorities identified in the Landscapes Review have not been identified in this Defra consultation. In particular, there is no substantive commitment to address the visitor pressure on the landscapes and the need for investment to ensure that the needs of wildlife and the local community are adequately protected.

The Surrey Hills AONB Board also considers that supporting the rural economy needs to be given a greater priority as rural businesses are an important part of the community. Such businesses need be encouraged to commit to local buying, environmental performance and staff well-being activities in the outdoor arena. A viable and profitable land based sector is essential to helping to maintain and enhance the special qualities of the landscape, and the goods and services provided by business can deliver the experiences that make National Landscapes special places to love and visit.

The Surrey Hills AONB Board considers that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund should be used as an opportunity to secure much needed new investment in AONBs, particularly linked to the

people and place agenda. To help enable this we would strongly urge the Government, in its guidance to local authorities, to support and promote the delivery of AONB Management Plans as part of their Local Investment Plan. The AONB Management Plan belongs to the relevant local authorities, it is their statutory plan for carrying out their functions and therefore should represent a sound strategic framework to drive UK SPF investment within National Landscapes.

The key message is that greater resources need to be made available to AONBs in order to match the ambition. The Surrey Hills AONB supports the National Association for AONBs call for a doubling of core funding over this parliament, leading to a dynamic and progressive funding formula for protected landscapes which reflects ambition and future needs. The Landscapes Review and the adoption of the National Landscapes brand has already raised expectations on what AONB teams should deliver for the nation, but this will leave AONB team even more stretched and thinly spread unless there is a substantive increase in core resources.