

We are where we are, but is that where we want to be?

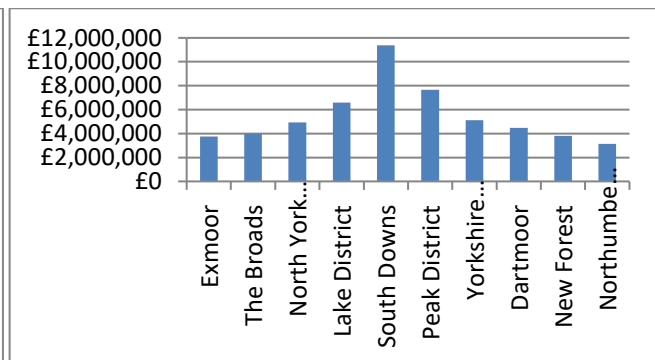
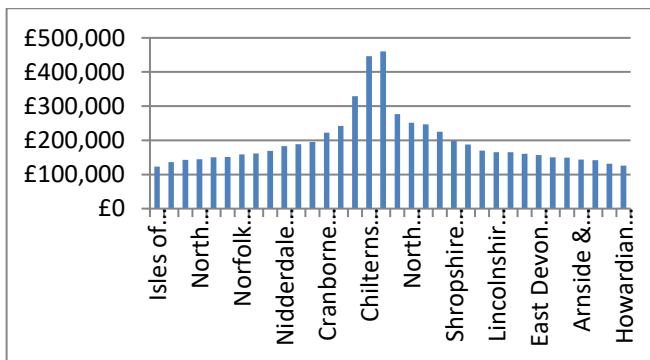
This document forms a commentary on the current funding arrangements for the core funding of Protected Landscapes in England to help inform the “Maximising Revenues for Protected Landscapes” work that is being funded by the Government’s Contestable Policy Fund.

This commentary has been produced in response to representations made to the NAAONB by its members and as a response to discussions in the steering group meetings.

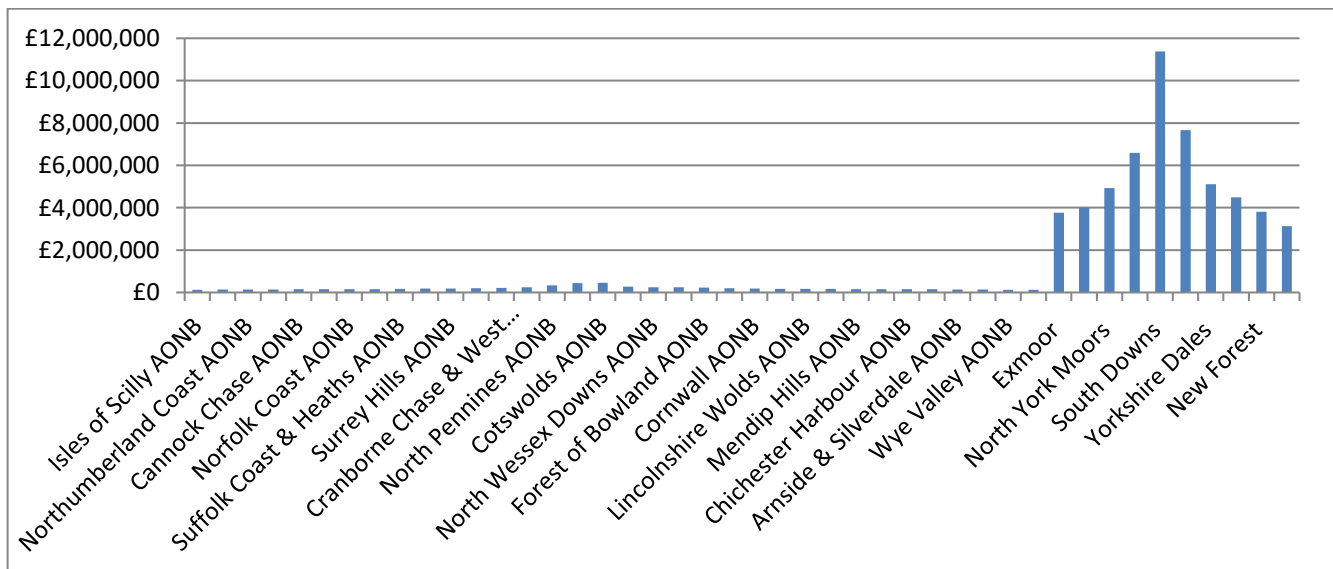
DEFRA Allocations of Core Grant to Protected Landscapes

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnershipsⁱ 2013/14ⁱⁱ

National Park Authorities 2011/12ⁱⁱⁱ



AONBs and NPs



Key Contexts

- Nearly a quarter of England's land area is of such high landscape quality that it is designated as either AONB or NP. The AONB designation covers 15% and the NP designation covers 8% of the land of England.
- Defra allocates £61.6 million to support the core costs associated with managing these areas but despite the landscapes being of the same landscape quality, attracting the same statutory protection, and delivering the same public service per unit area, only 16% (£6.7 million) of this budget is directed towards the 65% of this land that is designated AONB whereas 84% (£54.9 million) is directed towards the 35% designated National Park. The cumulative impact over the years of this disparity, has been exacerbated by more recent reductions in local authority spending, and is now forcing AONB partnerships to consider their future.
- The core funding to AONB partnerships from Defra makes up 51% of the total income to the AONB partnerships, so in essence the AONBs attract almost 100% additional funding from other sources.
- The core funding to NPAs from Defra makes up 81% of the total income to the NPAs, so in stark contrast to the AONB partnerships, the NPAs attract a mere additional 19% to their core from other sources.
- AONB partnerships have already invested heavily in maximising the opportunities for drawing down additional funding from external sources. This has been necessary in order to survive to this point.
- All NPAs have the ability to charge for aspects of the statutory functions. With exception of the two Conservation Boards, AONB partnerships do not have that ability.
- Many NPAs have assets from which they derive an income. For example the Lake District NPA generates in the order of £ ½ million from its car parking charges alone.

The Current Situation

AONB partnerships in the past have been very successful in securing non-exchequer funding as is clearly drawn out in the "Value of AONB partnerships" Report.^{iv} However, funding for AONB partnerships has now reached a critical point with associated consequences when it comes to attracting additional non-exchequer funding.

- AONB partnerships have to decide whether to invest in preparing bids to HLF, Europeans programmes or other funding sources in the clear knowledge that if the bid fails the viability of the partnership may be threatened.
- Applications to secure funding almost universally requires match funding. For an HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme typically that can be in the order of £200,000 - £300,000 which is often well in excess of the entire funding to an AONB partnership. By contrast it is often less than 10% of the total budget for a NPA
- Given the perceived precarious nature of AONB core funding, potential grant giving bodies are now less confident in funding AONB partnerships. Evidence for this can be seen in the results of the recent round of HLF Landscape Partnership Scheme awards.

This **Maximising Revenues for Protected Landscapes** research is about experimenting with a new paradigm. To do this successfully will require a high degree of maturity, honesty, and trust. It is being part funded by the Contestable Policy Fund as part of the **Civil Service Reform Plan**.

"The Civil Service Reform Plan introduced the Ministerial Contestable Policy Fund to give Ministers direct access to external policy advice through a centrally managed match fund. Projects funded through this Fund seek to commission high quality advice from outside the Civil Service on Ministers' priority policy areas; draw directly on the thinking, evidence and insight of external experts; and achieve a potentially broader and more radical range of options than Ministers would receive internally."^v

The opportunity afforded through this piece of work funded by the Contestable Policy Fund comes up once in a generation.

Concluding comments

This commentary has been titled “We are where we are, but is that where we want to be?” because it is the former phrase that is used by the NPAs whenever a discussion is started to consider the strategic approach to funding England’s Protected Landscapes. It is as if by saying “We are where we are” that there is no scope to think or consider alternative approaches to how Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks are funded. This is something that the NAAONB strongly disputes.

The resourcing disparity between AONB partnerships and National Parks Authorities is the single most important issue underpinning the future success of the protected landscape network.

The work that is being funded by the Contestable Policy Fund gives the perfect opportunity for independent and knowledgeable consultants to ask the question “...but is that where we want to be?”

ⁱ AONB partnerships, with a lower case p, is the generic term used by the NAAONB to refer to AONB Partnerships, Conservation Boards and any other organisation recognised as the lead governance body for an AONB.

ⁱⁱ Defra data supplied to LUC to help in the preparation of the “Value of AONB Partnerships” report July 2013

ⁱⁱⁱ Taken from “Valuing England’s National Parks” May 2013

^{iv} The Value of AONB Partnerships – LUC July 2013.

^v Taken from GOV.UK webpage on Contestable Policy Fund. (<https://www.gov.uk/contestable-policy-fund>)