

Strategic Plan

2016-2020



The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Draft Strategic Plan 2016–2020

Chairman's Foreword

Almost 70 years ago, ministers debated the intention of what was to become the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. However, there was little debate over whether landscape *required* protection; the question was more about *the way it should be protected*. Likewise, there was no clear appetite for defining 'natural beauty' in case this was too limiting. It was clearly understood then, as it is now, that landscapes are the product of the interaction between nature and people; a central principle that underpins the way that AONBs are managed today. What, I suspect, was less well understood seventy years ago was the importance of landscape to our sense of place, our identity, and our health and wellbeing. The flexibility built into the original and subsequent legislation has been a great benefit. AONBs remain the cherished landscapes they were in the 1940s, but the way they are managed today is far more progressive than I think the legislators envisaged. With collaboration and partnership-working central to them all, AONB staff, their boards, and partnerships are deeply embedded in the 'local', and at the same time, through their membership of the National Association for AONBs, working collectively towards more strategic national aims.

The NAAONB has changed significantly since its formation in 1998. It is now a Charity with its interest focused on AONBs, but flexible enough to extend that interest to active engagement with National Parks and other areas not yet designated. Its clear vision and mission, dedicated staff and trustees, and its active and engaged membership, are a recipe for real delivery. This strategic plan sets out how the Charity will continue to help people collaborate in order to conserve and enhance natural beauty. It is a pleasure to help lead the Charity through this important period of development.

Philip Hygate FRSA
Chairman

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Introduction

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) has achieved a great deal since it was established in 1998. This 2016 – 2020 strategy builds on the success of the last eighteen years and sets out an ambitious direction for the Charity's work over the next four years.

The Charity helps people to collaborate in order to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

Charitable Status

The Association achieved charitable status in October 2015 and is now a Charitable Company limited by guarantee. This gives it a structure that allows it to respond better and more quickly to the needs of the membership. The Charity has three objects:

- a. to promote the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty including the physical, natural, cultural and built environment in and around Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, other Protected Areas, and those areas for which such designation might be pursued,
- b. to advance the education, understanding and appreciation of the public in relation to the conservation and enhancement natural beauty including the physical, natural, cultural and built environment of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), other Protected Areas and those areas for which such designation might be pursued, and
- c. to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of those organisations promoting or representing Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, other Protected Areas and those areas for which such designation might be pursued.

Membership

Charity members are involved in the planning and management of 8,000 square miles of outstanding and cherished landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Membership includes most of the AONB partnerships¹, as well as some of those Local Authorities with statutory responsibility for AONBs, together with a number of voluntary bodies, businesses, and individuals with an interest in the future of these iconic landscapes.

The membership, in particular the dedicated AONB units, have proved to be an effective means of achieving the purpose of the AONB designation and contributing to broader policy priorities. The units, whether hosted by local authority structures or based within Conservation Boards, have given AONB Partnerships long term credibility and local expertise. AONB units are, even in times of financial constraint, renowned for 'punching well above their weight'.

The Charity works on behalf of its membership, fostering collaboration and collective action between the 256 staff of the AONB Family, the 700 elected members that support the AONB partnerships¹ and the many partners with whom we do business at the local and national levels.

Vision

The vision of the Charity, adopted in January 2012 is that ***the natural beauty of AONBs is valued and secure.***

Mission

The Charity's mission, adopted in January 2012 is ***to support and develop a network of ambitious AONB partnerships¹ with a strong collective voice.***

¹ AONB partnership in this instance includes any management Partnership, Conservation Board, Joint Advisory Committee or Joint Committee.

Responding to the External Environment

A major part of the Charity's remit is to interact with the broader external environment of national government and international agencies. The four year period to 2020 will offer continuing challenges and opportunities for the Charity and our members.

{ **Devolution** Enhanced devolution carries with it legislative changes and political complexity. This presents challenges to the Charity in maintaining and/or renegotiating working relationships and funding that recognises and supports the work of the Charity and that of the AONB partnerships¹.

{ **Public Sector reform** On-going public sector reform and a shrinking public purse mean that many AONB units have had to adapt to different ways of working and will continue to do so. Developing and testing new models will require the Charity's co-ordination, focus, and energy.

{ **Withdrawal from the European Union** Following the decision for the UK to withdraw from the EU, governments are working to redefine our relationship with other European countries and the rest of the world. The UK will cease to be subject to the EU treaties at the end of the 2 year period from the day when the UK gives its notice under Article 50(2) of the Treaty on European Union which formally initiates the procedure. The Charity will engage with other NGOs and governments to ensure that the interests of the AONB Family are represented at an appropriate level in negotiations, and position itself to maximise the potential for the delivery of its objects and the purpose(s) of AONB designation.

{ **External pressures** Continuing pressure for economic growth and increasing demand for new housing, the impact of climate change and further decline in biodiversity, together with other issues make decisions on the conservation and enhancement of our most cherished landscapes complex. The Charity has a crucial role in arriving at the optimum benefits for people and the environment.

{ **Maximising potential** The NAAONB will work to unlock the significant further potential for AONB partnerships¹ to take a leading role in tackling many of the environmental challenges of the next decade.

The NAAONB Strategic Objectives

In working towards the Charity's Vision and Mission, it will continue to implement the Strategic Objective already articulated in its Business Plan 2015 - 2018:

- support policies for conserving and enhancing natural beauty,
- develop an understanding of AONBs and the issues they face,
- improve the way in which AONB Partnerships, Conservation Boards, and the NAAONB work together,
- secure and manage resources.

The changes stemming from withdrawal from the European Union over the next few years will lead undoubtedly to their modification. But forecasting what changes might be desirable or necessary with any accuracy is impossible, and likely to be counter-productive in placing unnecessary constraints on future developments.

Implementing the Strategy

Key actions

{ Driving better delivery through collaboration The Charity will further develop its programme of collaboration, improving opportunities and skills that capture the collective knowledge, energy, and skillset of the AONB Family. It will continue to take a collaborative and partnership based approach to working with other organisations at national level to achieve shared goals. It will continue to build collective action and co-operation within our membership and work to ensure that innovative solutions are shared for maximum positive effect.

This means that by 2020 the Charity will have created a network of people, working together to provide solutions to challenges faced in AONBs. It will have a solid, functional IT platform from which the AONB Family can collaborate effectively, share good practice, and communicate success. It will have developed good learning culture based on sound evaluation of prior experience. It will have supported the AONB Family in developing a greater level of cultural maturity.

{ Demonstrating value and relevance The Charity will use case studies and examples to demonstrate the 'AONB offer' and pitch this to sectors of governments and society. Keeping the AONB designation relevant by demonstrating its value to the right

audiences, at the right time, in the right way is essential. Diversifying income streams and thinking more creatively about the collective resourcing of services and projects is more important than ever.

This means that by 2020 the value of the AONB designation will be better understood in the environmental, economic and health sectors. The Charity will have a good evidence base from which we can demonstrate value and showcase case studies.

{ Raising Profile The Charity will further develop its brand and use consistent messages through its Communications Strategy to connect with our audiences and generate strong support for the work of AONB partnerships and Conservation Boards. We will give space to devolution and maintain a clear oversight of national and international perspectives and good practice.

This means that the Charity will have a strong Landscape for Life brand relevant in a devolved context, a clear brand strategy and the Charity and AONB Family will be using consistent messages to communicate the value of the designation at the local and national levels.

{ Raising resources The Charity will diversify its income streams and those of the AONB Family by engaging strategically with funding bodies and charitable trusts, encouraging collaboration around resource planning. To do this it will work with the AONB Family, identify skillsets, and apply them to best effect to share resources and expertise, and bring income into the AONBs. It will demonstrate incremental gains in non-exchequer income to the Charity and the AONB Family.

This means that the Charity will have a rolling programme of bids to trusts and grant aiding bodies, drawing in resources on a themed basis for AONB partnerships¹. The skillset of the AONB Family will be recognised and valued at the local level and the Charity will work with its membership to better monetise the benefits that AONBs bring to society through support for the development of natural and social capital accounting, Payment for Ecosystem Services including projects that deliver carbon sequestration and storage. The Charity will also invest in the skillset and resources of trustees and partners to develop a pipeline of funding support to deliver on our objects.

{ Managing organisational change. The Charity will work to manage positive organisational change within the Charity and across the AONB Family. We will adopt a progressive approach to the delivery of our objects.

This means that the Charity will provide consistent leadership to the AONB Family around organisational change based on our brand values and an overview of evidence gathered at the UK level. We will work with our membership and partners to support transformation recognising that the pace of change will vary across the AONB Family.

Core Messages

- **People are passionate about Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and care deeply about their future.**
- **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are some of the most outstanding, beautiful and cherished landscapes in Britain. They need to be cared for, now and in the future.**
- **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are dynamic, living landscapes that underpin the economy and the health and wellbeing of society.**
- **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are vibrant landscapes, which offer a wealth of opportunities for everyone to enjoy them and help look after them.**
- **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are designated² as special landscapes which provide a range of benefits for people and wildlife.**

In Conclusion

The potential for partnership working between non-governmental organisations, business, and government, both local and national has arguably never been greater. The challenges faced by all sectors can only be tackled effectively in collaboration with others; we need integrated solutions to deal with complex problems. The AONB designation helps facilitate this at the local level.

The Charity, in its position of oversight, provides strategic leadership, encourages collaboration, shares learning, and supports a progressive approach to delivery such that the natural beauty of AONBs is better valued and more secure at the UK level. It does this by supporting and developing a network of ambitious AONB partnerships and Conservation Boards and acting as a strong collective voice for the AONB Family.

² Designated under the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949 with updates in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

Who we are

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are some of the UK's most outstanding landscapes and belong to an international Protected Landscape Family. There are 38 AONBs in England and Wales, and a further eight in Northern Ireland. For further information about the **AONB Family** visit www.landscapesforlife.org.uk

The **National Association for AONBs (NAAONB)** is a charity that provides a strong collective voice for the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Its objectives are to promote the conservation and enhancement of AONBs, advance the education, understanding and appreciation by the public of AONBs, and promote the efficiency and effectiveness of those promoting or representing AONBs, other Protected Areas and those areas for which designation might be pursued. It does this by taking a collaborative and partnership based approach to working with our membership and other organisations at a national level to achieve shared goals. For more information see

Web: www.landscapesforlife.org.uk Twitter: @naaonb @AONBFamily

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