

National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – response to the [interim findings of the designated landscapes review](#)

18 July 2019

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty welcomes the initial findings of the Designated Landscapes Review as outlined in the exchange of letters between Review Chair Julian Glover and the Secretary of State Michael Gove, and we eagerly await the publication of the final report in the coming months.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty teams are acutely aware of the need to significantly increase the scale and pace of nature conservation activity in their areas – indeed the AONB Partnerships jointly pledged to do exactly this at their recent conference in Colchester. The Colchester Declaration sets specific out ambitious, stretching targets specifically designed to protect what remains and recover what has been lost in our natural environment. This will build on the significant, and often unpublicised work that AONB teams have been carrying out to restore nature: from Anglesey, where the Source to Sea project restored polluted waters to create habitats for fish and other wildlife; to Suffolk Coast and Heaths where the precious saltmarsh habitat for fish fry and birds has been restored; and valuable carbon capturing Peatland Restoration work has taken place across the country – in Cornwall, North Pennines and Forest of Bowland AONBs.

We welcome the recommendation that **Designated Landscapes become leaders in the government’s planned Nature Recovery Networks**; one of the earliest commitments of the Colchester Declaration is for each AONB to create an initial Species Action Plan for a species in their area in order to increase numbers such that at least 30 native species can be taken off the red list of endangered species by 2030. AONB Partnerships have a strong track record in this regard as demonstrated by the wide range of projects showcased in our [70@70 project](#), and in countless other examples.

It is important to note that while we have the proven knowledge and capability to deliver what is needed, AONBs are important landscapes that are, on the whole, in private ownership. Much of the richness these places have to offer is the product of the stewardship of generations of farmers and landowners. Whilst accessible to many, they are the working ‘factory floor’ of the UK’s food and timber production and support a growing and important domestic tourism industry. AONB teams, therefore, work in established partnerships with their local landowners: farmers, large estates, charities, local authorities and other conservation organisations such as Natural England, the National Trust and the RSPB to effect positive landscape change. We are therefore very pleased to see the recommendation that **designated landscapes be prioritised for the new Environmental Land Management Schemes**. The new schemes present a more simplified way to incentivise landowners to manage their land to maximise benefits for nature, and we believe, with their existing relationships with local partners, that AONB teams are ideally placed to be able to support delivery of these Schemes.

We welcome the recommendation that designated landscapes **take a lead in the national response to climate change**. Climate change and the crisis in nature that we are seeing across the UK are two sides of the same coin. The depreciation of natural environments affects not only our native species, but also our national finances, amplifying the effects of climate change as evidenced by the many recent extreme weather events, from flooding to grassland fires. We welcome the recommendation that designated landscapes **develop landscape scale, long term strategies to assess and improve**

natural capital in the areas they oversee. Many of the AONB teams' host authorities have taken the step of declaring climate emergencies and are actively seeking ways to achieve net zero.

We believe that the AONBs' Colchester Declaration takes us one step further, joining up all of these dots.

AONB Partnerships are committing to:

- achieving net zero by 2050 by incorporating meaningful actions in AONB Management Plans in their next cycle (2024);
- embedding an ecosystems services approach – maximising the benefits that nature can provide through carbon sequestration and flood alleviation, and
- actively working to restore habitats and re-establish species on a landscape scale through strong connections with their local landowners. The Colchester Declaration commits AONB Partnerships to specific ambitious targets to be achieved by 2030:
 - o at least 200,000 ha of SSSIs in AONBs will be in favourable condition
 - o at least 100,000 ha of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites will have been created/restored in AONBs to further support the natural movement of plants and animals
 - o at least 36,000 ha of new woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate in AONBs following the principle of the right tree in the right place

We are proud of how much has been achieved with very little: AONBs receive around 20p per person in the UK per year and one year's funding for one of the English National Parks is greater than the annual funding for all 34 of England's AONBs combined – but we would never advocate robbing Peter to pay Paul. We are very conscious of how much more there is to do and recognise the pivotal role AONBs and National Parks will play in jointly improving the health and wellbeing of the nation. We therefore strongly welcome the assertion that there is a clear case for increased funding for AONBs. Unlike National Park Authorities, AONB Partnerships were only given their limited powers in the year 2000, fifty-one years after the act that brought them into existence. Now is exactly the time to bring the 'founding zeal' to life. We have the all energy, skills, ambition and strong partnerships needed to deliver, and we call on Westminster to provide us with the policy framework to enable us to do so.