

Working together for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty:

A memorandum of understanding between Defra, Natural England and the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB)

Purpose: To outline the contributions of Defra, Natural England and the NAAONB to achieving a shared vision for the AONB family in England; to delivering effective, efficient and responsive sponsorship of the individual AONB Partnerships and the relevant local authorities in delivering agreed environmental outcomes through both local decision-making and action. It confirms the commitment of each of the parties to supporting the vital work of AONB Partnerships. It sets out a vision of greater independence, security and clarity of priorities and represents a new stage in the relationship between Defra, Natural England, the NAAONB and AONB Partnerships.

Vision: Working together to ensure that the natural beauty of AONBs is conserved, enhanced and promoted for the benefit of all; valuing the contribution of each AONB and the network as a whole to the protection of our finest landscapes; supporting local action and national collaboration; recognising and meeting the challenges of the future. AONBs are seen as functioning landscapes and exemplars of coherent and resilient ecological networks which can deliver wider benefits for society

General Principles of 3-way working: In working to meet the vision and deliver agreed priorities, Defra, Natural England and the NAAONB will recognise and respect the independence and interdependencies of each party, making best use of each party's role and expertise. Openness in communication so that there are no surprises will underpin a relationship based on mutual trust. In the interests of clarity, accountability and avoiding duplication of effort the key roles of each of the parties are identified, recognising that this is a new and developing relationship. This memorandum will be reviewed annually.

- Planned activities must be proportionate to the resources available to each party.
- Openness and accountability between parties.
- Knowledge and information will be actively shared.
- Value for money considerations must run through all project board arrangements and decisions.

What Defra will do

- Provide grant funding in a timely manner to the host authorities for each AONB Partnership, the Conservation Boards, the NAAONB and to the SE & SW Protected Landscape Forum officers, to achieve agreed business plans and subject to matched funding from other partners. Hold grant recipients accountable for the resources provided by the Government.
- Work with and support ministers on policy, grant funding and issues affecting AONBs.
- Act as advocate for AONBs within Defra and more widely across government.
- Maintain an oversight of the current and likely future progress of Partnership delivery of Management Plans and of the strategic direction for AONBs
- Provide guidance on content and implementation of government policy for AONBs.
- Lead on a review of the funding formula and grant negotiations (including the issue of liabilities for redundancies), implementing agreed changes in a way that ensures successful delivery of outcomes, supports innovation and provides value for money.
- Lead on development of a vision and strategic framework for the Protected Landscapes family.

What Natural England will do:

- Provide technical information and expertise on matters relating to AONBs concerning their statutory powers and duties as well as guidance arising out of local relationships with Partnerships and the Conservation Boards.
- Continue to provide individual AONBs and the NAAONB with support and expert advice on the natural environment.
- Fulfil statutory powers and duties in relation to AONBs.
- Provide advice to AONBs on management plans and business plans and be key partners within those plans.
- Advise government, Defra, OGDs and other key stakeholders on matters relevant to landscape, biodiversity and the natural environment which affect AONBs and protected landscapes generally.
- Advise Defra on development of a vision and strategic framework for AONBs and the wider protected landscape family.

- Act as an advocate for AONBs with local, national and international partners.
- Lead on the development of proposals for strategic environmental outcome monitoring and reporting for protected landscapes

What NAAONB will do:

- Co-ordinate and represent the views of AONB Partnerships.
- Disseminate information, advice and guidance to AONB Partnerships
- Work with Defra and Natural England on developing a vision and strategic framework for AONBs
- Work with government and others to strengthen public policy and practice in pursuit of the AONB purpose.
- Encourage innovation amongst AONB Partnerships.
- Support the identification, collation and sharing of best practice among AONB Partnerships, and more widely in the protected landscape network.
- Seek, and share, experience and expertise from overseas from other IUCN Category V protected landscapes.
- Help facilitate closer working between AONB Partnerships and National Park Authorities.
- Encourage delivery of shared objectives, best practice.
- Lead on development of capacity building for fund raising among AONB Partnerships.

Benefits for AONB Partnerships will be:

- Closer relationship with Defra with increased opportunities to input to policy development affecting AONBs.
- Greater Ministerial engagement with AONB Partnerships.
- Better join-up with other protected landscapes.
- Increased local 'ownership' of delivery of AONB purpose.
- Multi-year funding aligned to Spending Review period
- Defra provision of additional influence to maintain/secure local authority input and support

Measures of success:

- Transition to new sponsorship arrangements is implemented smoothly with minimal disruption to AONB Partnership functioning, including:
 - 3-4 year indicative allocations and single pot funding approach continued;
 - Grant payments are made to schedule (from April 2011);
 - AONB Partnerships, local authorities and funding partners are clear about where responsibilities lie (by April 2011); and
 - The new relationship is bedded in and working effectively across Defra, Natural England and the NAAONB (by April 2011).

- Existing sponsorship arrangements are reviewed and any new arrangements are implemented in a way which maximises value for money and the efficiency and effectiveness of sponsorship delivery, including:
 - AONB grant funding formula is reviewed in consultation with Partnerships. Any changes agreed (by April 2013) and successfully implemented (by April 2014);
 - Sponsorship models reviewed including scope for possible synergies with sponsorship of National Park Authorities explored. Any changes agreed (by April 2013) and successfully implemented (by April 2014).

- There is a clear understanding of government strategic aims for AONBs and the collective effectiveness of AONB Partnerships as a national network, providing improved outcomes including:
 - Environmental outcome monitoring, linked to management plan objectives, developed and adopted as a measure of environmental change within AONBs (by April 2013);
 - AONB Partnerships continue to work together as a coherent collective where a national collaborative approach to delivering their purpose is appropriate. Examples of good practice shared and joint projects developed, including with National Park Authorities where relevant.

- AONB Partnerships' capacity to deliver their purpose(s) further developed (by April 2014), including:
 - AONBs are more independent in deciding how to achieve the objectives of their management plans;
 - AONB communities are increasingly empowered and engaged in locally relevant decisions and action;
 - AONBs capacity for leveraging in new sources of funding encouraged and supported. Examples of good practice shared.

Background

14% of England is designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). The purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. Of equivalent status to National Parks for their outstanding landscape qualities, AONBs bring great benefits to the nation, from conserving and enhancing the landscape and biodiversity and providing opportunities for public enjoyment, to supporting the rural economy and delivering environmental goods and services.

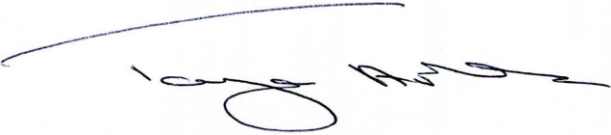
34 separate AONBs have been designated, each with their own governance and management structures, tailored to local circumstances. The majority of AONBs are managed as AONB Partnerships within a local government context. Two (Chilterns and Cotswolds) are managed through Conservation Boards established as independent organisations. The Boards have two purposes: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, and to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the AONB. They also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the AONB. There are a few other variations in AONB governance and purposes.

Defra is the principal funder of AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards in England. Natural England is a key statutory adviser in AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards in England. The National Association for AONBs is an independent organisation that represents the interests of all AONBs.

Explanation of Terms Used

- **AONB** means an area designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- **AONB Partnership** includes any management Partnership, Conservation Board, Joint Advisory Committee or Joint Committee
- **New sponsorship arrangements** from 1 April 2011 responsibility for funding and strategic oversight of AONBs and of the NAAONB will pass from Natural England to Defra. Natural England will continue to provide technical support and advice to AONBs at the local level. As part of the new arrangements Defra has said it will review the formula currently used by Natural England to set grant offers
- **Management Plan** means the AONB management plan that the Conservation Board or relevant local authority has a statutory duty under S89 of the CROW Act to produce and review in relation to any AONBs in their area
- **Annual Business Plan** means the AONB business plan which sets out the work to be undertaken in line with the Management Plan for the financial year(s) in question

Signed on behalf of Defra

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tanya Arkle', with a long horizontal stroke above it.

Tanya Arkle

Deputy Director Landscape and Outdoor Recreation Programme

Signed on behalf of Natural England

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Helen Phillips'.

Chief Executive

Signed on behalf of NAAONB

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Stened'.

Chairman