

Natural England Board



Meeting: 16
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Paper No: **NEB PU16 06**

Title: **Natural England's Draft Policy on Protected Landscapes**

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1. Purpose

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to present a draft policy for Protected Landscapes. It builds on Natural England's overarching landscape policy (approved February 2008).

Annex 1 sets out the proposed policy.

Annex 2 provides background information on protected landscapes.

Annex 3 lists our informal consultation with external stakeholders.

1.2. Natural England's overarching landscape policy provided the context for the development of four detailed policies: All Landscapes Matter; Future Landscapes; the Historic Environment; and Protected Landscapes.

1.3. The Protected Landscapes policy sets the scene for Natural England to:

- Explore the role of protected landscapes now and in the immediate future;
- Clarify Natural England's position on new and amended designations;
- Review our related advisory and guidance activities;
- Establish our position on the 34 stretches of undeveloped scenically attractive coast 'defined' (rather than 'designated') as Heritage Coasts; and
- Continue to work in partnership with the organisations representing the national family of protected landscapes.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that the Board agrees this draft policy, prior to external stakeholder consultation. A final draft of this policy will be circulated to all Board members, prior to sign off by the Acting Chair.

3. Summary of Context for our Protected Landscape Policy

- 3.1 23% of England is covered by the statutory landscape designations of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs - 15%) and National Parks (including the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads - 8%). In addition, 33% of the English coastline is defined as Heritage Coast, of which the majority (89%) lies within a national park or AONB. Together these designated and defined areas comprise England's most iconic and intrinsically valued countryside, most of which is privately owned. They are lived-in, working landscapes that provide diverse opportunities for tourism, outdoor recreation, enjoyment and understanding with associated economic and improved public health benefits. They also provide a wide range of natural and cultural goods and services.
- 3.2 Natural England has a number of statutory powers and duties in relation to protected landscapes. These encompass their designation and variation, and monitoring and advising Ministers on their management and governance. Like all relevant authorities, Natural England also has a duty to have regard to the purposes of designation of National Parks, AONBs and The Broads when carrying out its functions. We further the management of and support protected landscapes through our advocacy, incentives, advisory and delivery activities. We also have a shared outcomes agreement with the English National Parks Authorities Association.
- 3.3 England's AONBs and National Parks fit within the six IUCN (the world conservation body) protected area categories as "category v – protected landscapes". Recent debate has challenged the category v classification for providing insufficient attention to nature conservation objectives. In response, IUCN has adopted a new principle for recognising a place as a protected area - requiring nature conservation to take priority over other objectives in cases of conflict. As a consequence, there is concern that without a stronger specific commitment to nature conservation the approach to managing our protected landscapes, that has evolved over the past 60 years and is often cited as an international exemplar, may fall out of the international system, with a risk that their standing, and thus their protection, would be weakened.
- 3.4 Going forward, our challenge is to embrace past successes whilst articulating what a protected landscape system may look like and what it should deliver in the 21st Century. In doing so we will especially need to consider how protected landscapes could strengthen nature conservation, improve connectivity and linkages across the wider countryside, support the implementation of the European Landscape Convention and embrace with climate change, other environmental and social change agendas.
- 3.4 This is particularly relevant in the 60th year of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act where, with our partners and stakeholders, we are seeking to celebrate past achievements, reaffirm and strengthen partnership working and our commitment to shared objectives, and together act as a champion and advocate for England's protected landscapes through exploring and maximising what our AONBs and National Parks can further deliver for the nation.

4. Summary of Natural England's Draft Policy on Protected Landscapes

Natural England believes that:

- 4.1 England's nationally protected landscapes are of intrinsic value and deliver an important range of public benefits associated with a healthy and accessible natural environment. Natural England will continue to be a determined champion for their conservation, management and special status.
- 4.2 Protected landscapes are capable of delivering more for the nation. As they evolve, they should demonstrate exemplary environmental management, adaptation to climate change and maximise their contribution and relevance to the needs of 21st century society both within and outside protected landscapes.
- 4.3 Elements of public policy, legislation and guidance that govern protected landscapes urgently require review and clarification so that they can address the challenges of today and maximise their potential within and beyond the designation, as well as to ensure that all public bodies understand their own responsibilities in supporting the stewardship of protected landscapes.
- 4.4 Statutory protection should be applied to landscapes of national significance that meet the statutory designation criteria and where designation is genuinely needed. Where necessary we will use our legal powers to achieve this.
- 4.5 The management of Heritage Coasts needs to be reviewed and set in a new context reflecting increased recognition of the importance of the marine and coastal zone.
- 4.6 Partnership working is central to achieving the most effective representation, governance, management and delivery mechanisms for protected landscapes.
- 4.7 Protected landscapes organisations have an important role, individually and collectively, in supporting the implementation of the European Landscape Convention at an England, UK and international level.

Annex 1: Natural England's Draft Policy on Protected Landscapes

Context

England's system of protected landscapes has its roots, arguably, in Victorian times with pressure for mountain and moorland Bills and access to the countryside for health, exercise and recreation for an urban working population. In 1949, legislation enabled a system of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Parks to be set up, with the first National Park (Peak District) designated in 1951 and the first English AONB (the Quantock Hills) designated in 1957. Since 1949, the system has evolved with changes to legislation, purposes and governance (see timeline in Annex 2). For example, in 1991 the 'Fit for the Future' National Park review paved the way for independent National Park Authorities funded directly by central government. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 introduced a requirement for AONB management plans, established a mechanism to create AONB conservation boards, and placed a duty of regard to AONB purposes on relevant authorities, similar to that applying to National Parks. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 gave Natural England very similar responsibilities to those of our protected landscape partners, providing greater potential for the delivery of shared outcomes.

There are currently 8 statutorily designated National Parks plus the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads which has equivalent status (8% of England), and 36 statutorily designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (15 % of England). Confirmation of the South Downs National Park designation order would increase the National Parks count to 9 and would entail total or partial revocation of 2 AONBs. In addition there are 34 stretches of defined Heritage Coast covering 33% of the English seashore. Although Heritage Coasts do not have the same statutory status as National Parks and AONBs, 89% lie within one of these two designations.

England's AONBs and National Parks fit within the six IUCN (the world conservation body) protected area categories as "category v – protected landscapes". The UK model is often referred to as The Protected Landscapes Approach and is cited as an international exemplar. Some 6.4% of all the world's protected areas are category v, with around 40% concentrated in Europe. Recent debate has challenged the category v classification for providing insufficient attention to nature conservation objectives. In response, IUCN has adopted a new principle for recognising a place as a protected area - requiring nature conservation to take priority over other objectives in cases of conflict. As a consequence, there is concern that without a stronger specific commitment to nature conservation the approach to managing our protected landscapes, that has evolved over the past 60 years and is often cited as an international exemplar, may fall out of the international system, with a risk that their standing, and thus their protection, would be weakened.

The European Landscape Convention definition, endorsed by the UK government and by Natural England, says "*landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of their natural and/or human factors*". This holistic and interdisciplinary approach is at the heart of managing AONBs and National Parks in England. It emphasises the integration of people and nature over time, and the importance of involving local communities living in or near to them in their management.

Issues

The statutory basis for our protected landscapes dates back to a very different time in terms of environmental pressures and public expectations. Then the priority was to safeguard extensive areas of great natural beauty and its coastline from “ill considered building development” during the period of post-war reconstruction while offering access to outdoor recreation “to give our young people a chance to roam about and get their exercise” (Minister of Works and Planning, 1942).

Today, while demand for housing and infrastructure remains an ever present issue, new social, economic and environmental challenges have arisen, such as climate change, water resource management, renewable energy demand, changes to the CAP and calls for food security. The public’s recreational aspirations have also changed. England’s relatively mobile population seeks a different kind of outdoor recreation experience from that envisaged in the post war years – with access to cultural heritage, easy walking opportunities and refreshment facilities required alongside adventure, solitude and spiritual renewal. There is now an increasing expectation that protected landscapes should help deliver a range of ecosystem goods and services including assisting species migration and habitat connectivity as well as increasing the public’s enjoyment across the wider countryside. This will need to be achieved alongside the conservation and enhancement of the nationally important qualities for which protected landscapes are designated.

There have been very few nationally co-ordinated surveys of the environmental condition of protected landscapes and the environmental outcomes they deliver. Their potential contribution, however, is significant: National Parks and AONBs comprise 23% of England, 51% by area of England’s SSSIs and 70% of England’s blanket bog habitat. Encouragingly, evidence from the “Countryside Quality Counts” studies from the mid 1990s suggests that the character of designated landscapes is generally being maintained or enhanced.

Recent designation orders for the New Forest and South Down National Parks have highlighted difficulties with the interpretation of existing protected landscape legislation and guidance, particularly around the natural beauty designation criterion. Natural England has also inherited a backlog of pressures for designation work ranging from relatively minor boundary adjustments to entire new AONB designations. We need clarity around the legislation, and to develop a transparent, legally sound approach to delivering our statutory functions in respect of designations and variations.

Recent Government initiatives on coastal access and the marine environment focus attention on England’s non-statutory “Heritage Coast” definition. Currently they receive virtually no direct Natural England funding and their status in land use planning is uncertain. Opportunities now exist to provide a new role for England’s coasts, integrating land, coastal and marine issues. This will necessitate a refreshed approach for Heritage Coast management arrangements.

England’s system of protected landscapes is broadly representative, appropriate and an international exemplar in its governance and management. It is inevitable and also appropriate that England’s protected landscapes will continue to evolve. This needs to be in ways that continue to value the special qualities of designation and respect for the communities of interest that sustain them.

Policy 1

England's nationally protected landscapes are of intrinsic value and deliver an important range of public benefits associated with a healthy and accessible natural environment. Natural England will continue to be a determined champion for their conservation, management and special status.

England's system of landscape designations affords the highest level of statutory protection for our nationally important landscapes. It also provides opportunities for the public to benefit from high quality, outdoor recreational experiences. Although largely unchanged since 1949, the purposes of AONBs and National Parks remain highly relevant to 21st century needs. Natural England will be a determined champion and advocate for our system of protected landscapes, and will work to support their effective stewardship now and in the future.

We will work with organisations that represent protected landscape interests at an England, UK, European and international level to demonstrate the environmental benefits, goods and services that protected landscapes provide. We will champion the importance of these nationally important landscapes, their achievements and good practice amongst the public, government and professional bodies

Evidence

The NERC Act 2006 provides for Natural England, as the Government's statutory advisor, to conserve and enhance the landscape as well as furthering study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment.

AONBs and National Parks contain a substantial share of England's biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural interest. AONBs represent 15% of England by area and contain around 24% by area of English SSSIs. The 8% of England within National Parks designation holds approximately 27% by area of England's SSSIs. The landscape designations hold, by far, the largest proportion of England's semi-natural habitats - over 90% in the case of upland calcareous grassland.

The ecosystem goods and services provision arising from AONBS and National Parks has not been fully assessed, but is substantial. For example, they contain almost 70% of England's blanket bogs. This represents, by far, our largest terrestrial carbon store, and is a significant water source in northern England.

According to National Park Authority estimates, the English parks and The Broads are collectively the destinations for over 88m visitor days per annum, with walking being the most popular activity undertaken.

Policy 2

Protected landscapes are capable of delivering more for the nation. As they evolve, they should demonstrate exemplary environmental management, adaptation to climate change and maximise their contribution and relevance to the needs of 21st century society both within and outside of designated areas.

A range of environmental and societal benefits flow from our landscape designation system, including links to public health, education and economic agendas. Society as a whole should reap even greater rewards from public investment in landscape and

nature conservation, and widening the role of protected landscapes to maximise their contribution to deliver a healthy natural environment should be vigorously explored.

Climate change is likely to have significant impacts on all England's landscapes. Protected landscapes can potentially make a significant contribution towards the national response to climate change through adaptive measures such as improving habitat connectivity to facilitate species migration, and through mitigation measures such as management of peat and woodland resources, and promotion of small scale renewable energy development. The geographic distribution of protected landscapes is important, as key strategic areas across England in leading the delivery of climate change activity.

Evidence

The joint Natural England, Defra and English Heritage *Countryside Quality Counts* survey of landscape character change placed all of the National Parks, The Broads and the majority of AONBs in the stable/maintained or changing/enhancing indicator categories. Natural England scoping of existing landscape evidence has identified the need for further information on the condition of landscapes, the services they provide and changes in landscape character.

The sustainable development fund (SDF) operated by National Parks and the Broads and, more recently by AONBs, has stimulated pioneering approaches to small scale renewable energy generation, materials recycling, and waste management in some of our most sensitive landscapes. It illustrates how effectively protected landscape managers can rise to new challenges and develop new ways of working.

Policy 3

Elements of public policy, legislation and guidance that govern protected landscapes urgently require review and clarification so that they can address the challenges of today and maximise their potential within and beyond the designation, as well as to ensure that all public bodies understand their own responsibilities in supporting the stewardship of protected landscapes.

English legislation provides for our finest landscapes to be designated to secure the conservation and enhancement of their natural beauty, biodiversity and, in the case of National Parks, cultural heritage. National Parks also have an equally important purpose to promote understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities by the public.

The current approach to landscape designation focuses on the legally undefined concept of "natural beauty". This limits the potential of protected landscapes to deliver against wider environmental objectives and a more modern criterion would be needed to properly integrate landscape, wildlife, cultural and environmental protection goals. Although current legislation allows protected landscape managers to undertake work outside their boundaries there is no requirement for designations to be promote landscape and habitat connectivity.

Our legal system supports the conservation of protected landscapes indirectly through the spatial planning system, and directly by conferring certain powers and duties on protected landscape managing bodies and other relevant authorities. We want to see the level of statutory protection afforded to AONBs and National Parks

maintained and a more transparent and meaningful duty of care placed on relevant authorities. Whilst PPS7 and earlier guidance, transposed through the regional and local government planning system, appears to have been effective in limiting damaging development in protected landscapes, there remain challenging issues around integrating policy objectives in the setting of protected landscapes.

Natural England has a range of additional powers and duties to designate, monitor and advise Ministers on the management of AONBs and National Parks. Recent testing in the High Court has exposed flaws with the wording of the designation criteria. We will pursue modernisation of specific aspects of the 1949 designation legislation and new Government policy guidance that addresses designation criteria, as well as bring greater clarity to Natural England's various oversight and advisory functions, and the "have regard" duty.

Important improvements to the way protected landscape deliver environmental and social benefits can be achieved without recourse to amended legislation and we will explore all possible ways, within existing legislation, to help AONBs and National Parks push at the boundaries of their role. Defra's planned new circular on National Parks will provide an early opportunity to refresh public policy guidance, and we will fully engage with the development of this important document.

Evidence

The last two National Park designation order determinations have highlighted fundamental difficulties with the way designation criteria are interpreted by planning inspectors. These have seen an additional qualification "characteristic natural beauty" attached to the natural beauty criterion with no legal basis for doing so; the meaning of natural beauty called into question; interpretation of the "opportunities afforded for open air recreation" criterion; and misconceptions of the differences between AONBs and National Parks.

Natural England has applied its AONB and National Park oversight duties variously: We have contributed to significant planning cases affecting protected landscapes. We have not undertaken consistent monitoring of progress with accomplishment of purposes or made recommendations on action required under designation and planning legislation to deliver these purposes.

Relevant authorities, including Natural England, have a duty of regard to the purposes of protected landscapes. Natural England has a pivotal role in overseeing this duty, in particular when relevant authorities need advice about their activities. Major activities such as mineral extraction, military training and infrastructure development, including wind turbines in or near to protected landscapes provide challenges of scale and of national interest. Only one legal action has ever been mounted in respect of alleged non-compliance with the duty of regard. Compliance with the legal requirement to "have regard" appears, in practice, challenging to either prove or disprove.

Policy 4

Statutory protection should be applied to landscapes of national significance that meet the statutory designation criteria and where designation is genuinely needed. Where necessary we will use our legal powers to achieve this.

Once clarity over the application of current designation legislation has been provided through the South Downs National Park designation confirmation process, Natural England will recommence work in the North West to vary the boundaries of the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks.

While there may be justification for undertaking some further landscape designation work in the future we recognise that the family of landscape designations cannot grow indefinitely. Future designation work on the current legal basis is likely to be confined to a limited number of particularly important boundary variations. This would change if the legal basis for designations changed, for example, to provide for adaptation to climate change or more integrated purposes. For the time being, Natural England will decide on the appropriateness of future designation projects taking into account:

- (i) the implications of our statutory duties and powers in respect of designations;
- (ii) how effectively designation would achieve our statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing the landscape;
- (iii) evidence supporting designation;
- (iv) the range of public benefits designation would bring;
- (v) the level of priority to be attached to any individual case; and
- (vi) the level of local authority and other support for a new designation or variation.

In identifying cases potentially requiring exercise of our designation powers we will have regard to proposals made by third parties but only as advice. We will not be seeking “bids” for either new designations or variations.

Evidence

In 2004, the then Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality wrote to the Countryside Agency advising that *“the Agency, or any successor body, will be expected to deliver realistic boundary variation orders that stand a good chance of being confirmed within a reasonable time and without disproportionate cost to the public purse”*. The Minister also made it clear that there should be no need for boundary variation projects to snowball into comprehensive “whole boundary” reviews. It would be for the designating authority to manage stakeholder expectations effectively when undertaking boundary variation work.

Demand for designation work has been accumulating for many years. Natural England’s “record of known pressures for designation work” now has 32 different entries including 6 proposed new AONBs. There is wide anticipation among a number of local authorities and interest groups that Natural England will implement a protected landscape boundary review programme. This has never been suggested either by Natural England or the Countryside Agency.

Policy 5

The management of Heritage Coasts needs to be reviewed and set in a new context reflecting increased recognition of the importance of the marine and coastal zone.

Heritage Coasts can provide places for innovation, sustainable adaptation, high quality access, renewable energy, planning and integrated management, without compromising the natural beauty of their landscape or seascape. This will require better join up between terrestrial and marine planning systems.

The advent of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management, Shoreline Management Plans, proposed revisions to PPS 20 and the European Landscape Convention (which applies to the 12 mile territorial waters) offer important levers for achieving a more holistic and integrated terrestrial and coastal and marine management. We will review how the special qualities of Heritage Coasts can be conserved and enhanced, as well as providing social and economic benefits, as part of England's natural coastline and its seascapes, in the context of this emerging and more holistic marine and coastal policy agenda.

Shoreline Management Plans are a crucial planning tool for all coasts and the direction set by these plans will have implications for the purposes of protected landscapes and their special qualities, especially for coastlines vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Such change is inevitable and the sound management of such change should assist adaptation of our coastal protected landscapes.

Evidence

AONB and National Park Management Plans currently guide activities for 89% of Heritage Coasts, the remaining 11% stand alone. There is no national Heritage Coast funding stream.

In 2006 a review and evaluation of England's Heritage Coasts was undertaken by Land Use Consultants. It revealed that the Heritage Coast programme had been successful in developing a positive national profile and brand for the coastlines covered and that the definition was valued by Local Authorities. Heritage Coast teams were effective locally in protecting and improving the coastal environment, facilitating visitor management and engaging with local communities.

Less positively, the review identified that Heritage Coast definition had led to minimal conservation work on the marine environment with littoral zones benefiting most. The adoption of effective planning policies supporting Heritage Coast conservation had been patchy, and effort put into coastal zone planning had been of little positive effect.

There are currently varying levels of coverage and consideration of Heritage Coast in current Regional Spatial Strategies.

Policy 6

Partnership working is central to achieving the most effective representation, governance, management and delivery mechanisms for protected landscapes.

Protected landscapes should be appropriately resourced, governed and managed, with national, regional and local delivery mechanisms, such as management plans, agri-environment schemes clearly working to co-ordinate activity and add value to the delivery of protected landscape purposes. Local and regional delivery mechanisms should support protected landscapes through investment, with the conservation and enhancement of protected landscapes embedded within strategies and plans at all levels.

Whilst there will be times when unilateral action is useful and desirable, collaborative working across protected landscape organisations will maximise effectiveness. Natural England will engage with protected landscape stakeholders at an international, national and local level. We will seek to strengthen the effectiveness of protected landscape organisations and jointly pursue opportunities to deliver shared environmental outcomes through our funding, advocacy, research and delivery activities.

Evidence

Natural England works with a range of external partners on protected landscape matters. We financially support membership organisations such as the UK Association of NPAs, National Association of AONBs, Campaign for National Parks and Europarc Atlantic Isles. We also hold membership of the Federation of Nature and National Parks (EUROPARC), IUCN (the world conservation body) and ICOMOS UK (sites and monuments). We also work closely with the English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA).

A recent Executive review of European Networks endorsed our membership of IUCN as providing both value for money and considerable worth and potential. It also endorsed our continued engagement with Europarc in providing leadership and influence, particularly in implementation of the ELC, as well as in encouraging National Parks and AONBs develop their role as carbon managers in a time of climate change.

In 2008/09 Natural England funding for AONB Partnerships was approximately £9.5m and National Park Authorities received, direct from Defra, approximately £47.5m. Funding for AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards was reviewed in 2008 with a commitment to 3 year funding through a flexible “single pot” linked to the delivery of environmental outcomes. Conservation Boards have been established for the Cotswolds and the Chilterns AONBs. A 5 year review of these governance structures is a priority to determine their effectiveness and appropriateness as a model for larger, more complex AONBs.

Annual trilateral meetings are held with National Park Authorities, Defra and Natural England covering funding needs and pressures. Nationally, Natural England and ENPAA are developing a shared outcomes agreement, and locally, several Joint Action Plans are in place. A protocol for agri-environment delivery by the National Park Authorities has been agreed and provides a framework for future working at a local level. A large part of the HLS targeting area falls within protected landscapes.

Policy 7

Protected landscapes organisations have an important role, individually and collectively, in supporting the implementation of the European Landscape Convention at an England, UK and international level.

All of England’s landscapes matter for the health, wealth and well-being of society, for our cultural identity and for the diverse habitats that exist as part of them. In implementing the ELC through our own Action Plan we will encourage protected landscape organisations and stakeholders to incorporation of the spirit and intent of the Convention into their work.

Exemplary management, knowledge and good practice should be developed within protected landscapes and shared across England and beyond. We should work collectively to raise awareness and understanding of models of governance, management and partnership working that delivers maximum environmental outcomes.

Evidence

The European Landscape Convention is the first international treaty devoted exclusively to the management, protection and planning of all landscapes in Europe. It seeks to maintain and improve landscape quality and bring the public, institutions and local and regional authorities to recognise the value and importance of landscape and to take part in related public decisions. UK Government's ratification of the ELC recognises that England's landscapes matter for the health, wealth and well-being of society, for our cultural identity and for the diverse habitats that exist as part of them.

Natural England is leading the implementation of the ELC in England on behalf of Defra. An implementation framework has been prepared with Defra and English Heritage to guide the development of Action Plans by other stakeholders and organisations. Natural England has prepared its own ELC Action Plan to embed the Convention's measures through its own work and through others.

The UK model of protected landscape management is often referred to as the Protected Landscape Approach and is increasingly applied in many developing nations as it links the conservation of nature and culture with stewardship by local people, reflecting the ELC's principles. Natural England, together with Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage have collaborated over a number of years with IUCN's Protected Landscape Task Force to promote and showcase the England/UK experience through a series of publications and international workshops.

Recent debate has challenged the category v classification for providing insufficient attention to nature conservation objectives, leading to the IUCN to adopt a new principle for recognising a place as a protected area - requiring nature conservation to take priority over other objectives in cases of conflict. As a consequence there is concern that without a stronger specific commitment to nature conservation the approach in managing our protected landscapes, that has evolved over the past 60 years and often cited as an international exemplar, may fall out of the international system with a risk that their standing, and thus their protection, would be weakened.

Annex 2: Background Information on Protected Landscapes

AONBs and National Parks, created out of the same legislation in 1949, are nationally important as characterised by their natural beauty. However their status, resource base and ability to deliver public benefits have developed differently.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The 1949 legislation also enabled the designation of land that was not in a National Park but that appeared to Natural England (or our predecessor bodies) to be of such outstanding natural beauty that statutory protection should be afforded to it. These designations are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

The designation criterion of natural beauty is common to AONBs and National Parks and identical in its application. Neither designation has natural beauty superior to the other - a fact made clear in Government guidance. Wildlife and cultural heritage may, however, additionally be given consideration in the case of a National Park designation. National Parks also have their recreation criterion and the consequential need for them to have the organisational capacity to manage recreation. These factors set the two designations apart.

AONBs are run by a partnership. This is usually through an Advisory Committee of local authority, other public, private, NGO and community interests. As such they have generic local authority obligations to promote recreation, biodiversity, cultural heritage and socio-economic activity. The CRoW Act 2000 introduced a requirement for AONB management plans; placed a duty of regard to AONB purposes on relevant authorities; and empowered the Secretary of State to establish Conservation Boards to manage AONBs where appropriate. Conservation Boards have almost identical purposes to National Park Authorities but are not granted land use planning powers. As with National Parks, AONBs are subject to national guidance but receive significantly less public financial support than the parks. Government funding to AONBs is currently provided via Natural England.

There are 36 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (15% of England).

National Parks

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 provides for National Parks to be designated for the purposes of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and for promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities by the public. If the two purposes ever came into irreconcilable conflict, legislation requires that precedence be given to the conservation purpose. This conflict resolution provision dates back to 1974 and is known as “the Sandford principle”.

Each National Park is run by a free standing body with land use planning powers, which receives almost all of its funds direct from Government, via Defra. National Park Authorities are charged with delivering the two designation purposes and, like other local authorities, have a duty to foster the social and economic interests of their local communities. They work in partnership with other national, regional and local organisations to meet integrated objectives and are subject to national guidance.

There are eight National Parks in England plus the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, which has equivalent status. (8% of England).

Heritage Coasts

Heritage Coasts date back to the 1970s when 34 stretches of undeveloped scenically attractive coast were identified. At the time the Government, while accepting the need for special management and protective measures, rejected a statutory designation approach and as a result Heritage Coasts were “defined” and agreements were established with Local Authorities to manage them with the assistance of grant aid. 89% by length of Heritage Coasts lie within AONBs or National Parks. Durham, Flamborough Headland, Spurn, Lundy and St Bees Heritage Coasts stand alone. Inland boundaries vary significantly and seaward boundaries are not defined.

In 1992 Heritage Coast purposes were redefined to address conservation, recreation, environmental health of inshore waters, and socio-economic issues. From 1995 Heritage Coast management was integrated into respective AONB or National Park Management Plans. Currently they receive no direct Natural England funding.

There are 34 stretches of Heritage Coast covering 33% of the English seashore. 89% fall within an AONB or National Park.

Partner Organisations

IUCN (The World Conservation Body) is the global organisation that develops conservation science, manages field projects all over the World and speaks authoritatively on conservation. The IUCN definition of category V is: “Protected Landscape/ Seascape – protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation”

Europarc Federation is the voice of Europe’s protected areas and acts as their umbrella organisation to raise awareness of and support for protected areas as well as promoting good management practices among them. Its overall purpose is to promote “Conservation Without Frontiers” and it brings together a wide range of organisations with members representing a network of some 400 protected areas, State agencies (including Natural England), NGOs and local government across 38 countries.

Europarc Atlantic Isles ‘section’ works for protected areas in England, Ireland, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Many English AONBs and National Parks are members of EAI, as is Natural England and currently it has over 60 members. In addition to EAI there are other ‘national’ sections including Nordic/Baltic, Germany and Spain.

UK Association of National Park Authorities manages joint training projects, public relations activities and special events for all 14 National Parks in the UK. It promotes the family of National Parks to the wider public and supports best practice through sharing experience between the parks.

National Association of AONBs, acts on behalf of and promotes the interests of AONBs in England and Wales.

Campaign for National Parks is a national voluntary lobbying body and registered charity campaigning to protect and promote National Parks for the quiet enjoyment of all. CNP is an umbrella of almost 40 environmental and amenity groups across England and Wales

English National Park Authorities Association exists to promote and further the needs of the 8 English National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority by providing a collective voice to policy makers, politicians and various partner organisations.

International Committee on Monuments and Sites is concerned with furthering the conservation, protection, rehabilitation and enhancement of monuments, groups of buildings and sites at the national and international level.

Timeline of significant protected landscape events

- 1810 William Wordsworth publishes guide to the Lake District
- 1872 World's first National Park created in Yellowstone, USA
- 1909 Europe's first National Park in Sweden
- 1931 The Addison Committee established to consider National Parks
- 1932 The Kinder Scout mass trespass
- 1945 The Dower report proposes protected areas
- 1947 The Hobhouse report listing National Parks and conservation areas
- 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (ability to create NP's/AONBs/ NNRs/SSSIs)
- 1950's Ten National Parks were designated
- 1951 First National Park, Peak District, designated
- 1956 The first AONB designated (Gower- Wales)
- 1957 First English AONB, Quantock Hills, designated
- 1963 Government Circular on Coastal preservation published
- 1970s Heritage Coast defined and by 1973 pilot projects established
- 1974 The Sandford review of NPs and conservation test
- 1981 The Wildlife and Countryside Act (enabled voluntary land management agreements with farmers; mapping of moor and heath in National Parks)
- 1984 Review of National Park Boundaries commenced
- 1984 A Better Future for the Uplands. Geoffrey Sinclair Report
- 1987 National Parks Awareness Campaign
- 1989 The Broads became, in effect, a National Park plus navigation powers.
- 1991 Fit for the Future NP review
- 1991 Areas of Outstanding Beauty - Policy Statement, Countryside Commission
- 1993 Dartmoor Boundary Public Inquiry - first/only completed review, England
- 1995 Environment Act (strengthened NP purposes and made them independent local authorities)
- 1995 Most recent AONB designation – Tamar Valley
- 1996 Government Circular 12/96 on National Parks published
- 1996 AONBs Future Direction – updated policy position by Countryside Commission
- 2000 Countryside and Rights of Way Act (created open access to moor and heath; required AONBs to produce management plans; AONB conservation boards)
- 2000 Government confirms equal landscape status of AONBs and National Parks in revision of PPG7
- 2001 Most recent Heritage Coast designation - Durham Heritage Coast
- 2001 Government Circular 04/2001 on AONBs published
- 2002 Review of English National Park Authorities
- 2004 AONB Conservation Boards created in Cotswolds and Chilterns; Management Plans produced and adopted for all AONBs
- 2005 New Forest National Park created
- 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act – establishes Natural England

Annex 3: External Stakeholder Consultation

External stakeholders have been engaged in the policy development process through a scoping workshop and via a small focus group.

1. Scoping Workshop

A facilitated workshop was held in June 2008 with a mixed audience of Natural England staff and external partners with an interest in Protected Landscapes.

Key Issues raised

- Climate Change – how do we maintain the quality of Protected Landscapes ensuring changes to their special qualities are acceptable, whilst recognising that change will happen? Also need to continue to maintain their role in providing best practice in sustainable management and development?
- Spatial Planning – the problems resulting from the impacts of the many incremental many small developments. Lack of consistent approaches by Protected Landscape partnerships, planning authorities & agencies. Need better national policy framework and strong national leadership.
- Legislation – needs to be ‘fit for purpose’. Lack of equality between the Protected Landscape family. Definition of ‘natural beauty’ needs reviewing & clarifying.
- Natural England should champion Protected Landscapes – constant celebration of their value needed. Set them in the context of ELC – a good tool to promote awareness of the importance of landscape and the benefits from use of landscape as an integrating management framework.

2. Focus Group

A small focus group of representatives of key national Protected Landscape organisations has shaped early working draft papers. It comprised:

English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA)
Campaign for National Parks (CNP)
National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB)
Europarc Atlantic Isles (EAI)
Heritage Coast Officer, Durham County Council
Team Leader, Landscape Conservation, DEFRA
Landscape Conservation, DEFRA

Summary of key recommendations

- Explain the scope/focus of this paper (AONBs, NPs & HCs) but note that the Protected Landscapes exist and operate alongside a range of other designated and protected areas such as WHSs, Biospheres.
- Make link to other landscape policies more explicit.
- Natural England should be clearly seen as a committed and proactive champion for Protected Landscapes, with an associated guardianship. (respecting the role and independence of NPAs).
- Focus on the future role of Protected Landscapes, for example in adapting to climate change and as multifunctional landscapes. Need a bold vision, although the paper is very process focused.

- But also be celebratory about the past and current roles, successes and benefits from these special landscapes.
- Highlight their intrinsic values as well as stressing the range of important ecosystem services and public benefits they provide at national, regional and local levels. Cultural services should be reinforced.
- NE needs to strongly champion the benefits to promote and justify appropriate levels and mechanisms of resourcing.
- Explore and promote the opportunities for the Protected Landscape family to be more joined up and working collaboratively. Promote the importance of partnership working.
- Commitment to a review of Heritage Coasts welcomed. Important that Natural England continues its commitment to the Heritage Coast 'brand'. The references and acknowledgment of seascapes as integral to the coastal zone important and welcomed.
- Consideration should be given to whether Heritage Coasts should be made statutory designations.
- More reference to how Natural England expects to influence the planning system to ensure this and other landscape policies and the role and needs of Protected Landscapes are properly integrated.
- Stress the importance of Protected Landscapes being well represented in fora/areas where decisions affecting them are made.