

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	22nd November 2018	Paper: C
Title:	Draft Response from Mendip Hills AONB Partnership to Glover Review on Protected Landscape's Call for Evidence. For discussion and approval.	
Author	Jim Hardcastle, Mendip Hills AONB Unit	
Background. The basis of this paper has been produced by the National Association for AONBs to be submitted to the review. The Mendip Hills AONB Unit has adapted this for discussion and approval by the AONB Partnership prior to submission.		

1.0 A vision for AONBs and new purposes

1.1 Vibrant, vital and beautiful protected landscapes that are working hard for all people; providing jobs, opportunities and well-being.

1.2 AONBs that are modern, forward looking and fit for the challenges of the 21st century, growing nature back to abundance, nurturing heritage and with a healthy bank balance of natural capital providing a range of ecosystem services.

1.3 Four new purposes. Based on the Scottish National Parks purposes.

1. To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area.
2. To promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area.
3. To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public.
4. To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

2.0 Resources

2.1 What needs to change

- 1 AONBs lack £'s and people resources.
- 2 The AONBs are woefully under-resourced compared to National Parks and cannot deliver on all of the functions and responsibilities placed on us by government.
- 3 There is a shrinking pot of available external funding. Heritage Lottery is tightening its belt, EU funding is disappearing.
- 4 Vulnerability to cuts in 3rd sector funding, Local Authority funding and central government funding
- 5 AONB charities have been seen as a future way out.
- 6 Lack of long term funding and funding certainty.

2.2 What's working well

- 1 We're immensely good at leveraging in external funding at scale.
- 2 The Local Authority funding maintains a level of responsibility and cooperation from them.
- 3 We work in Partnership to lever in human resources and necessary skills.
- 4 We are experts at collaboration to achieve best value.

2.3 The proposal

- 1 AONB Partnerships need to be properly funded in line with the ask from Government.
- 2 Long term funding packages should be set in line with the 5 year management plans and be based on clear and agreed outcomes and return on investment.
- 3 Planning work should be properly funded so that AONB staff can pick up the 'death by a thousand cuts' issues as well as major applications and properly manage a new statutory consultee responsibility.

3.0 Status and recognition

3.1 What needs to change

- 1 Low recognition of the AONBs as having the highest status of protection, equivalent to that of National Parks.
- 2 Reality of AONB management is far removed from the ambition, legislation and policies - the purposes are not being effectively met.
- 3 Purposes of 'natural beauty' is not widely understood and means different things to different people.
- 4 Low public awareness. Clumsy acronym. Low brand awareness.
- 5 Lack of advocacy for protected landscapes in government

3.2 What's working well

- 1 AONB teams have a great reputation as being efficient and effective local deliverers.
- 2 AONB partnerships have a strong reputation for enabling sustainable development and promoting living working landscapes

3.3 The proposal

- 1 Rebranding of AONB name
- 2 Government leadership and advocacy - reaffirming that AONBs have the highest status of protection.
- 3 Strengthening of the Section 85 duty based on enhancement i.e "a relevant authority shall ~~have regard to~~ **enhance** the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty"
- 4 Clarity and definition required on the purposes and alignment with the principles of the Defra 25 Year Environment Plan
- 5 Purposes are future proofed, focused on enhancement and equivalent across all protected landscapes (see Scottish National Park purposes above)

- 6 The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership would welcome a boundary review of the existing designated area.

4.0 Governance and operations

4.1 What needs to change

- 1 Partnerships are voluntary.
- 2 There is no statutory duty to implement the management plans.
- 3 Partnerships lack sufficient status and clout to address poor management.
- 4 The AONB is not usually a high priority for member organisations.
- 5 Delivery is now largely undertaken by the AONB teams and Partnerships have become stakeholder forums.

4.2 What's working well

- 1 AONB teams have become very efficient, fleet of foot and great conveners.
- 2 Recognised for doing a lot with a little and respected for achieving so much with so few resources.

4.3 The proposal

- 1 Legal basis for all AONB Partnerships and a statutory duty for all to implement the management plans.
- 2 Duty on committee members to act in the best interest of the protected landscape.
- 3 More weight and emphasis placed by government on AONB management plans as a local delivery vehicle, embedded in the Agriculture and Environment Acts.
- 4 Clear lines of scrutiny and accountability for Local Authorities with respect to delivery of the AONB management plan.
- 5 Incentivisation of Local Authorities to prioritise the delivery of AONB management plans as key Council documents.

5.0 Planning and development

5.1 What needs to change

- 1 Inappropriate and unsustainable development is happening in and around the AONBs. In some AONBs e.g. the SE and SW, the pressure is very great.
- 2 Landscape character and quality, visual amenity, biodiversity, heritage and access are all being adversely affected.
- 3 Development is not addressing social issues such as rural affordable housing.
- 4 Weight attached to AONBs in making planning decisions is often low.
- 5 Decisions are inconsistent across Local Authority Members, Officers and the Planning Inspectorate.

5.2 What's working well

- 1 Great wealth of planning knowledge embedded within AONB teams.
- 2 Good strides made in developing planning advice services.
- 3 AONB teams have successfully influenced and strengthened AONB policy within Local Plans and have produced subsequent planning guidance.

5.3 The proposal

- 1 Statutory consultee status for all AONB Partnerships.
- 2 Government to reaffirm the highest status of protection.
- 3 One common, agreed and consistent policy approach across government on sustainable development in AONBs.
- 4 Government monitoring of Local Authority's planning performance in AONBs and proper accountability.
- 5 Separate NPPF and Local Plans for AONBs.
- 6 Ability of AONB Partnerships to 'call in' cases of concern for scrutiny.
- 7 De-coupling of the hosting arrangement of teams with Local Authorities, but not the financial contribution, to achieve adequate independence and separation. One cohesive national body for protected landscapes

6.0 Landscape and land management

6.1 What needs to change

- 1 Biodiversity, heritage and access are not being managed effectively, we are losing nature, heritage features and well managed routes.
- 2 AONBs are being used for recreation purposes anyway, despite this not being a purpose of the designation, yet there is not the resource to manage these pressures.
- 3 AONB Partnerships require more direct influence on land management in order to achieve management objectives.

6.2 What's working well

- 1 AONBs are delivering some great initiatives for nature, heritage and people and have a track record of success.
- 2 In addition we are already heavily engaged in the health and well-being agenda and are already promoting AONBs for recreation.
- 3 We're encouraging people to get out into our AONBs and we're educating people about our finest landscapes.
- 4 AONB teams well placed and have the tacit knowledge to set land management objectives.

6.3 The proposal

- 1 One common, agreed and consistent policy across government for land use in AONBs.
- 2 Give the AONB team and management plans a central role in the restoration of nature and ecosystem services (including via delivery of the new Public Goods Farm Payment Schemes)

7.0 Call for evidence

7.1 Individuals and organisations are encouraged to submit their own views to the Glover Review panel via <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use/landscapes-review-call-for-evidence/>