

Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson, Executive Director – Place

Report to:	Environment & Economy Scrutiny Committee
Date:	22 February 2022
Subject:	The Landscapes Review - Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Summary:

To provide information to the Committee on the responses given by Government to the Landscapes Review (also known as "the Glover Review") and the potential effects on the existing work of the Lincolnshire Wolds management partnership.

Actions Required:

To endorse officers in their discussions with other partners in the management of the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Countryside Service in respect of the ongoing dialogue concerning the Review and the associated consultation.

1. Background

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, alongside National Parks, were the product of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in recognition of the need to protect the nation's finest countryside.

Most of the Lincolnshire Wolds was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1973 following considerable local campaigning and with some of the most beautiful, unspoilt scenery in the East Midlands. There are rolling hills and hidden valleys, gentle streams and nestling villages. It is a living, working landscape, with woodland, grassland and abandoned chalk pits providing important habitats for rare flowers and wildlife.

The AONB comprises an area of 558 km² (216 miles²), while the wider Lincolnshire Wolds Character/Natural Area incorporates the two neighbouring areas of the "Spilsby Crescent" to the south and the remaining chalk uplands to the north (see Appendix A).

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. In pursuing this aim account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be made to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves help to conserve and enhance the environment.

The Lincolnshire Wolds AONB has an established Joint Advisory Committee being a partnership of public, private and voluntary organisations and representatives who have a special interest or working knowledge of the area. The JAC acts as a forum to advise and guide activity on a wide range of issues across the Wolds and is instrumental in developing, implementing, and monitoring the statutory AONB Management Plan.

This is achieved through a work programme delivered by the Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service which is hosted by the County Council as one of the core funders alongside the other councils, North East Lincolnshire, East Lindsey District and West Lindsey District.

2. The Julian Glover Review

In May 2018 the government asked for an independent review into whether the protections for National Parks and AONBs are still fit for purpose. In particular, what might be done better, what changes will help and whether the definitions and systems in place are still valid.

The final Landscapes Review report has now been published, on 21 September 2019 and whilst recognising all of the hard work achieved since the original legislation in 1949, the Review highlights that much more needs to be done to help address the current pace of change. The recommendations make the case for radical and substantial reform. For the current family of 34 AONBs in England, this includes a proposed change in name to National Landscapes together with a suggested strengthening with increased funding, governance reform, new shared purposes with National Parks and a greater voice on development.

3. Government Response to the Glover Review

In January 2022 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published the [Government response to the Landscapes Review](#) and this is accompanied by a public consultation that will run for 12 weeks until Saturday 9th April 2022. In brief the response covers the following points raised out of the initial Review's 27 recommendations:

New Name

The proposal is to rename all AONBs as "National Landscapes" (e.g., The Lincolnshire Wolds National Landscape). Acceptance of this proposal will be gauged through discussions with the National Association of AONBs and the ongoing consultation.

New National Landscapes Partnership

This proposal will establish a new national landscapes partnership to build on the existing collaboration between National Parks England and the National Association for AONBs, complemented by roles for the National Trails and National Parks Partnerships.

New National Landscape Strategy

Defra will provide clearer strategic direction for protected landscapes through a new national landscape strategy. This will set out a clear national framework to guide the development of plans and programmes by the national landscapes partnership and help to inform the development of local management plans.

Changed Statutory Purpose

- Create a single set of statutory purposes for AONB teams and National Park Authorities
- Propose to amend the current statutory purpose so that:
 - a core function of protected landscapes should be to drive nature recovery
 - a revised purpose should be more specific with regards to nature outcomes and explicitly mention biodiversity
 - the principle of natural capital should also be included to capture the societal value of nature in our protected landscapes and encompass a broader range of ecosystem services.
- Propose to amend the current statutory purpose to:
 - highlight the need to improve opportunities and remove barriers to access for all parts of society
 - clearly reference public health and wellbeing as an outcome
 - take a more active role in supporting access than just promoting opportunities

Defra did not agree with the initial review recommendation on the need to create a new statutory purpose for fostering the economic and community vitality of the area, this is judged unnecessary and a diversion from the core purpose of the designation.

Monitoring

- By January 2023, new ambitious outcomes will be agreed for the role of protected landscapes in delivering on the government's goals for nature recovery and climate, aligned with the revised 25 Year Environment Plan and interim environmental targets under the Environment Act 2021 and the Net Zero Strategy.
- Natural England will monitor and evaluate progress against the key indicators and outcomes and will also support individual protected landscapes to translate these targets into their management plans.
- Developing the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA), which will provide data on habitats, natural capital, and ecosystem function. This will help to monitor progress against agreed outcomes.
- Natural England will produce an outcomes framework, provide annual reporting to track progress against the outcomes, and advise on where further action is needed.

Management Plans

- Ambitious goals to increase carbon sequestration, together with improved natural capital reporting, should be embedded in all protected landscapes' management plans.
- Management plans should also set out their local response to climate adaptation, managing long-term landscape change to increase the resilience of local communities and ecosystems.
- Natural England will review all revised management plans, ensuring that these make fair and ambitious contributions. To facilitate this new process, Natural England will also update their guidance on management plans for protected landscapes.
- We will also ensure clear alignment with Local Nature Recovery Strategies, to facilitate delivery of priority nature recovery actions without duplication.
- Look to strengthen management plans and consider how best to ensure a smooth transition so that valuable work is not lost.

The existing Management Plan for the Lincolnshire Wolds is already considered to be a very good example of such Plans. The changes proposed here would be incorporated into the forthcoming plans in due course. This is currently due in 2023.

Planning reform

- Recognise the special role that protected landscapes hold within the planning system and will continue to explore opportunities for how this role could be developed further.
- An integral part of reviewing the planning reforms is considering how they align with and support our wider mission to level up the country and regenerate left-behind places.
- Intend to review the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and we will further consider how policy for protected landscapes is set out.
- Recognise that AONB teams can bring substantial evidence and expertise to the planning process and wish to seek views on how the AONB teams can achieve better outcomes through the plan-making process.
- The review also identified strong support for AONB teams to be granted statutory consultee status for planning applications. Whilst we acknowledge the resource implications this would place on AONB teams, we recognise the benefit of further strengthening their role and are seeking views on this potential change.

Currently AONB have little sway on planning matters in their protected landscape areas (unlike the National Parks) and these proposals seek to redress the balance through including teams as statutory consultees to ensure AONB management groups are able to shape and determine the direction of planning matters with the local planning authorities in a better fashion. This will in likelihood create a resource pressure to ensure that timely and effective advice is given during consultations.

Permitted development

- The Government will continue to monitor the use of permitted development rights in protected landscapes and identify future opportunities to review their use.

AONB Partnerships

- Natural England will replace the former Countryside Agency guidance for AONB Partnerships, to set out clear governance principles, processes, and structures that local authorities would be expected to follow. This guidance will be flexible enough to be adapted to local circumstances but would aim to improve consistency, performance, and transparency.
- To ensure a high level of uptake and to incentivise positive reforms, we could include conditions in our grant agreements, requiring evidence that this guidance has been applied to local governance structures and processes.

Whilst this may generate some change for the existing partnership arrangement for the Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service, the current set up is considered to be a robust example of an appropriate management regime. This is not shared across the whole family of AONBs so may generate more changes in other areas.

Duty of Regard

- The current vagueness of the existing duties can lead to disagreements about their interpretation and allow damaging practices to occur. It is proposed that the wording of them is strengthened so that they are given greater weight when exercising public functions.
- The current duties are also not clear that public bodies are expected to contribute to the delivery of management plans, which can lead to the underperformance of key partners and under-delivery of management plan objectives. The wording should also be made clearer with regards to the role of public bodies in preparing and implementing management plans.
- The government will produce guidance for public bodies on the application of the strengthened duties, making it clearer when and how it should be discharged in respect of public functions. These changes would help avoid disputes, reduce damaging practices, and lead to much more effective management of our protected landscapes.

Finances

- Relatively limited scope to increase the core grant by the scale suggested in the review, or to provide longer funding settlements that extend beyond a spending review period. Therefore, the core grant does not provide the opportunity to increase funding to the scale needed to deliver our vision.
- There has been increasing interest in private and blended financing models for nature recovery and nature-based solutions, and we believe that this area provides significant opportunities to lever more investment into protected landscapes.

4. Consultation

As part of the Response to the Review the Government has launched a consultation which ends on 9 April 2022. The questions are listed below. It is the recommendation of this report that the Executive Director of Place be given the discretion to work with the

partnership organisations forming the Joint Management Group in formulating appropriate responses with the Lincolnshire Wolds Countryside Service

a) Consultation Questions

1-5 Personal details.

6. Should a strengthened first purpose of protected landscapes follow the proposals set out in Chapter 2?

7. Which other priorities should be reflected in a strengthened first purpose e.g., climate, cultural heritage?

8. Do you support any of the following options as we develop the role of protected landscapes in the new environmental land management schemes? Tick all that apply.

- Designing the environmental land management schemes in a way that works for all farmers and land managers, including the specific circumstances for those in protected landscapes, recognising that farmers in these areas are well-placed to deliver on our environmental priorities.
- Using Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) to identify projects or habitats within protected landscapes.
- Monitoring the effectiveness and uptake of the new environmental land management schemes in protected landscapes. Using this to inform whether further interventions are needed to ensure we are on track for wider nature recovery ambitions.
- Creating a clear role for protected landscape organisations in the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Our recent LNRS consultation specifically asks for views on the role of different organisations in the preparation of LNRSs, including protected landscapes.
- Building on the Farming in Protected Landscape scheme empowering protected landscapes to support decision-making and delivery against agreed priorities, including through dedicated project coordinators and advisers.

9. Do you have any views or supporting evidence you would like to input as we develop the role of protected landscapes in the new environmental land management schemes?

10. Should AONBs have a second purpose relating to connecting people and places, equivalent to that of National Parks?

11. Should a strengthened second purpose of protected landscapes follow the proposals set out in Chapter 3 to improve connections to all parts of society with our protected landscapes?

12. Are there any other priorities that should be reflected in a strengthened second purpose?

13-15 only relevant to National Parks and the Broads

16. Should we legislate to restrict the use of motor vehicles on unsealed unclassified roads for recreational use, subject to appropriate exemptions?

- Yes – everywhere
- Yes – in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty only
- Yes – in National Parks only
- No
- Unsure

17. What exemptions do you think would be required to protect the rights and enjoyment of other users e.g., residents, businesses etc.?

18. What roles should AONBs teams play in the plan-making process to achieve better outcomes?

19. Should AONB teams be made statutory consultees for development management?

20. If yes, what type of planning applications should AONB teams be consulted on?

- AONB teams should formally agree with local planning authorities which planning applications should be consulted on.
- AONB teams should be consulted on all planning applications that require an Environmental Impact Assessment and are categorised as ‘major development’ as well as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

21. Which of the following measures would you support to improve local governance? Tick all that apply.

- Improved training and materials
- Streamlined process for removing underperforming members
- Greater use of advisory panels
- Greater flexibility over the proportion of national, parish and local appointments
- Merit-based criteria for local authority appointments
- Reduced board size
- Secretary of State appointed chair
- Other (please state)

22. Should statutory duties be strengthened so that they are given greater weight when exercising public functions?

23. Should statutory duties be made clearer with regards to the role of public bodies in preparing and implementing management plans?

24. National Parks and the Broads only

25. If you have any further comments on any of the proposals in this document, please include them here.

b) Risks and Impact Analysis

It is considered that the recommendations of this report carry some risk in that the Government's final proposals may have an effect on the required level of funding and resources the partnership organisations will be expected to provide to cover new duties.

A full assessment will be made when the Government's proposals are known to be being implemented.

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Map of the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB

5. Background Papers

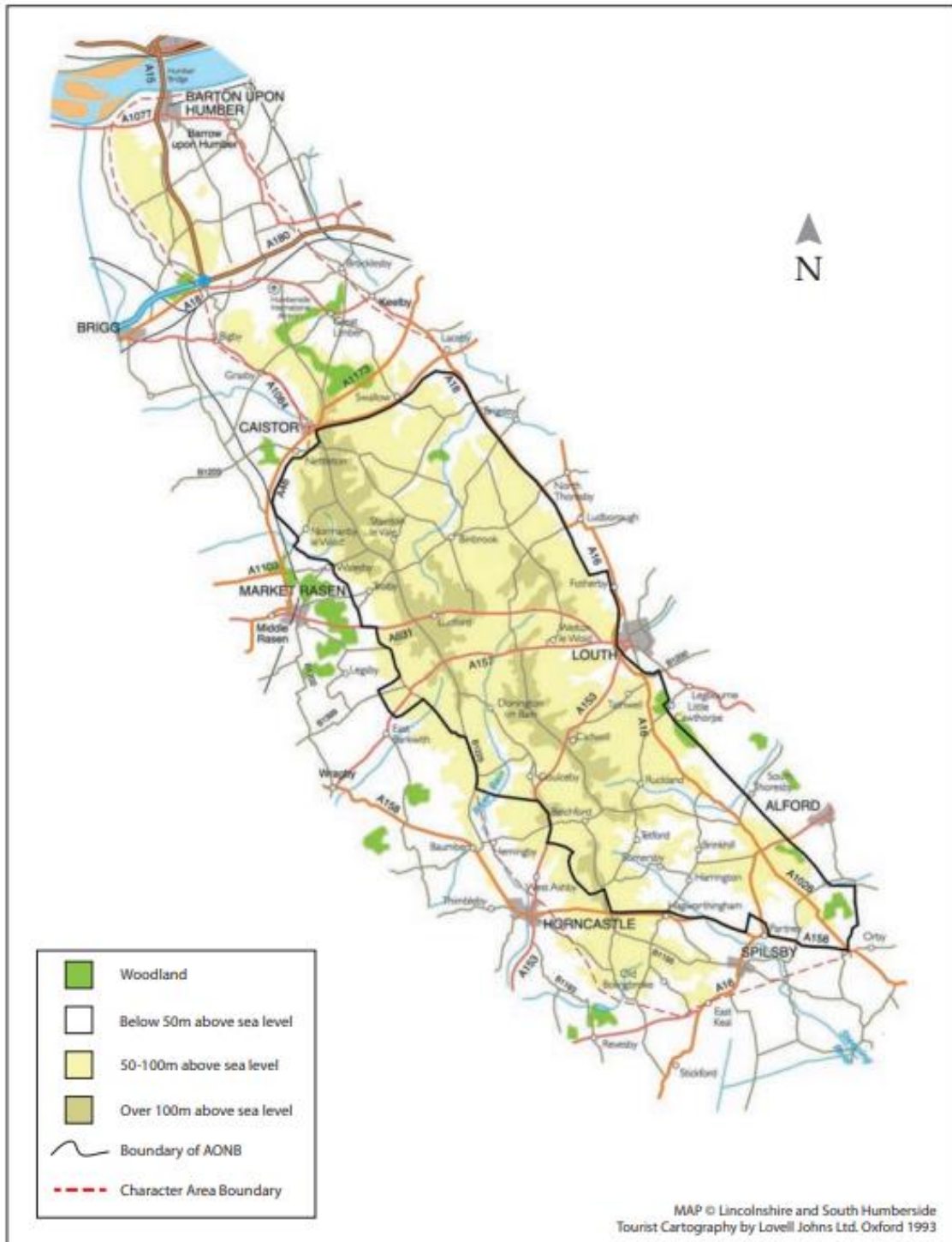
The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
The Landscapes Review (the "Glover" Review)	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-national-parks-and-aonbs-2018-review
The Government Response to the Landscapes Review	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response
Lincolnshire Wolds Management Plan 2018-2023	https://www.lincswolds.org.uk/our-work/management-plan

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Map of the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB

AONB/Character Area Map



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