

Date: 18 December 2018

Report: REVIEW OF DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES - SUBMISSION

Purpose of the report

1. To consider a draft Authority response to the Review of Designated Landscapes and to submit a response following member comments.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That members consider the draft response, comment and submit a final response.

Strategic Planning Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:
 - ***National Park Management Plan objectives***
Objective 26 Operate corporate governance and financial arrangements that are fit for purpose as evidenced through the annual governance statement, the annual governance report and an unqualified audit opinion.

Background

4. Members will recall that in January this year the Government published its 25 Year Environment Plan. One of the actions within that plan was to undertake a review of Designated Areas - National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty [AONBs].
5. At the end of May the Government published the review's Terms of Reference. These included clear statements on what the review would not do. It would not propose reductions in either the geographic extent or the protections given to the designated landscapes within England. The philosophy which underpinned the review was as follows:

The review aims not to diminish the character or independence of our designated landscapes, or to impose new burdens on them and the people who live and work in the areas they cover. Instead, its purpose is to ask what might be done better, what changes could assist them, and whether definitions and systems – which in many cases date back to their original creation – are still sufficient.

7. The Government appointed the writer and broadcaster: Julian Glover, to lead the review. A small panel has been created to assist Mr Glover in his work. The objectives of the review are as follows:
 - Whether the existing Statutory Purposes of the National Parks and AONBs are how effectively being met,
 - The alignment of these purposes with the goal set out in the 25 Year Plan for the Environment,
 - The case for the extension or creation of new designated areas,
 - How to improve individual and collective governance of national parks and AONBs and how that governance interacts with other national assets,
 - The financing of national parks and AONBs,
 - How to enhance the environment and biodiversity in existing designations,
 - How to build on the existing 8 Point Plan for National Parks and to connect more people with the natural environment from all sections of society and improve health and well-being,
 - How well National Parks and AONBs support local communities.
8. As part of the review, government will take advice from Natural England on the process of designating national parks and AONBs and extending boundary areas, with a view to improving and expediting this process.
9. It is anticipated that the review will report in the Autumn of 2019. A call for evidence, for interested parties to respond to the review, was published in October with a deadline of 18th December 2018.

Consultation

10. Members have received reports on the review and its progress at their meetings in June and September. In addition, a Policy Development Forum was held in late November to discuss the issues in more detail.
11. Julian Glover and the panel have visited many National Parks, AONBs and agencies as part of the review. A visit took place in the Yorkshire Dales in September where Mr Glover had the opportunity to attend a 'Landscape Matters' conference in Nidderdale and spend time at the Bolton Abbey estate. He met representatives from the Estate looking at diversification schemes and the relationship with the NPA. He also met with a number of Dales businesses. Mr Glover asked for a meeting with Mr Neil Heseltine and a group of Dales farmers to hear their views on issues around current and future farming in the Park. Finally he met with Mr Foster to discuss socio-economic issues and initiatives within the area.
12. A number of members have met with Mr Glover in different capacities as part of the review.

Response to the Review

13. The draft response for members' consideration is contained in the **annex**.

Conclusion

14. As the anniversary of the Act that created National Parks approaches, the Review of Designated areas provides individuals and organisations with the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on what the role of National Parks and AONBs should be for the next 25 years. The YDNPA has a key role to play in this discussion and should be ambitious in its view of what the Park can offer to the nation as we seek to leave the environment, for future generations, in a better condition than that which we inherited.

David Butterworth
Chief Executive

10 December 2018

Background documents:
[List relevant documents]

The role National Parks and AONBs play in nature conservation and biodiversity

There is an opportunity to deliver a step change in what the nation can expect of its Designated Areas in terms of nature conservation, biodiversity and wildlife.

If the Government's Nature Recovery Network ambition (set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan) is to be realized then Designated Areas ought to be leading the recovery. But the sad truth is that it is possible to stand in many parts of our Designated Areas and be unable to spot any discernible difference in biodiversity compared with non-designated countryside.

More than any other places in the country, National Parks should be bigger and better places for nature. The quality of biodiversity and wildlife should be exemplary. This should not just be an ambition for the UK but should be part of a wider regard to deliver the country's international obligations in relation to nature.

The majority of land in our National Parks is owned and managed by individuals, public agencies and charities. In the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the NPA owns less than 0.001% of the land. NPAs have few powers to manage, or indeed resources to influence, decision-making and activity on the ground.

In terms of delivering a more ambitious agenda for wildlife and biodiversity we believe there are two issues to consider for the Review Panel, and the Government. The first is a radical new approach to agri-environment schemes, which is fleshed out in more detail in the next section.

Second, there is a judgement for Government as to who is best placed to play the leading role in improving the state of nature in our National Parks. At present, National Park Authorities look to influence and support the national statutory agencies that have the necessary powers to prioritise action and positively restore biodiversity in National Parks. If a new ambition is to be realized there will have to be a renewed Government focus on Designated Areas; in effect, 'instructing' those agencies with primary responsibility for these matters to place more emphasis on National Parks and AONBs as their primary consideration.

An alternative approach would be to provide National Park Authorities with some of the same powers and resources so that they can act, in effect, as the local 'delivery arm' of the statutory environmental agencies. There is potential here to not only deliver national priorities through more effective, locally-tailored action but also to rationalize the inevitable overlap and duplication between those bodies delivering national programmes and the work of the National Park Authorities on the ground. Whichever course of action is taken, the importance of conservation and farming, and their interconnectivity, is critical to understand.

The Yorkshire Dales is a living, working landscape and has been significantly shaped by its cultural heritage which is an integral part of the landscape character and beauty of the Dales. The National Park is unique in the density and geographic scale of its traditional fieldbarns and dry-stone walls. Two extensive areas have been designated as conservation areas – they have national heritage importance and have long been identified as being 'at risk'. At the moment there are no public resources available for their repair or conservation. We will be seeking a locally tailored environmental land management scheme that is adequately resourced to meet this unique challenge.

The role National Parks and AONBs play in working with farmers and land managers and how this might change as the current system of farm payments is reformed

There is no uniformity of approach, in the relationship with farmers/landowners, across the family of National Parks. The value and importance of farming is different depending in which Park farming takes place - but then it would be. In the case of the Yorkshire Dales, farmers and landowners play a significant and central role in maintaining the National Park. The next few years will see major changes in UK farming practice and there appear to be new opportunities being developed for upland farming. Government is promoting the delivery of more public benefits from farming and that suggests a move toward a policy of paying public money for the delivery of 'public goods'. National Parks Authorities can have a central role in helping to provide a system that better integrates environmental and wider rural development objectives.

The Yorkshire Dales NPA has a close working relationship with farmers and land managers. This has been developed over many years, with the Authority sometimes running its own local agri-environment schemes, as well as supporting the delivery of national schemes (and occasionally directly delivering them). The most high-profile example currently is the 'Payment by results' pilot project in Wensleydale. This builds on the wider work of the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnership and the Northern Hill Farming Panel, which highlighted the need for action to support 'High Nature Value farming'. In particular it identified a need for: "a more collaborative approach to the delivery of agri-environment schemes, using the skills and knowledge of HNV farmers to deliver environmental outcomes in a way that allows the whole farm to work and make sense as a system".

Land Management is critical to the wider economies of National Parks and sustaining the special qualities found in them, but the contribution of farmers and land managers to their communities is also important and should not be overlooked.

From our experience through the pilot, and the wider feedback from farmers, we believe that National Park Authorities should be involved in the direction, co-design and delivery of the new environmental land management system. The aim being to provide a system that is responsive to our landscapes and farming practices; that better integrates and works alongside local farmers and land managers and ensures positive outcomes for nature and those who work the land. These schemes should be:

- Locally-tailored and locally-administered;
- Based on a more collaborative approach that uses the skills and knowledge of the sort of High Nature Value farmers found in the National Park
- Paid by results not by adherence to a tangle of rules and prescriptions
- Focus on delivering multiple benefits (biodiversity, water management, heritage, etc.)

The role National Parks and AONBs play in supporting and managing access and recreation

Promoting opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities is one of the National Park Authority's two Statutory Purposes. NPAs play a key role in encouraging outdoor recreation and increasing understanding of the environment. The quality of access and Rights of Way in the Yorkshire Dales is, on a UK scale, outstanding. The Rights of Way network, which plays a critical role in delivering the 2nd

Purpose and in driving the economy of the area, is in a better condition within National Parks than anywhere else in the country.

At the present time responsibility for Rights of Way rests with county councils and unitary authorities. Unsurprisingly, the priority that these bodies attach to this role is low and falling, primarily due to the enormous financial pressures that they face. At the moment it is the NPA that is funding this statutory function [of another body]. It is, therefore, suggested that the transfer of legal responsibility for the practical management for Rights of Way is given over to NPAs – alongside the allocation of the resources directly to NPAs to fund this responsibility.

The importance of access remains fundamental to NPAs and it is with some concern that we note the increasing disconnect of young people to their environment. National Parks should inspire the next generation to experience and appreciate the value of the environment in general and National Parks in particular. This work can take place on so many levels; whether that is the responsible stewardship of our environment, or making much clearer the connection between food, farming and the links to peoples' lives. National Parks already have millions of visits from the general public but the disconnect with younger people is clear and should be addressed.

We would like to see a Government commitment so that every primary school child has the opportunity to visit a National Park, to enjoy outstanding learning experiences, during their time at school. NPAs working with other organisations already facilitate thousands of experiences in our national parks that can be transformative and inspirational for the young people involved. That opportunity should be a right for all, whatever their background or circumstances.

How National Park and AONB authorities affect people who live and work in their areas

There is a widespread recognition that the achievement of the statutory purposes for which national parks are designated is critically dependent on the socio-economic well-being of the communities within them. There is, therefore, lots of well-intentioned work by NPAs to try to support local communities and the local economy. This is evidenced by a plethora of local initiatives – some developed by NPAs, others led by other bodies and organisations. However, the overall impact of these initiatives is incremental at best and they cannot realistically combat the effects of the global and national market pressures that are currently affecting National Park communities. These are national rural issues, not just National Park ones. They include:

- Large demographic shifts;
- An increasingly affluent but aging population;
- Younger working people not being able to afford properties;
- A huge increase in the number of second homes since 2001;
- A more educated and ambitious younger generation who see their future beyond their local community;
- A major reduction in some local services (e.g. transport, health, schools, banks, post offices) and the slower roll-out of others (e.g. broadband and mobile telecommunications) because of less demand/lower populations/the impacts of austerity.

The introduction of austerity measures from 2010 saw a dramatic reduction in services in sparsely populated rural areas, at the expense of the more populous areas within Unitaries, Counties and Districts (cities, towns and main road corridors). Expectations that NPAs should somehow 'fill this gap' seem to have increased - but NPAs have few resources and no statutory remit (beyond planning matters) to be able to undertake such a role on any kind of scale.

What could be done differently? There is a debate about whether the socio-economic duty on NPAs should become a '3rd Purpose', alongside conservation and recreation. Some feel that the transfer of the statutory responsibility and resources away from District/County and Unitary Authorities to NPAs could make a significant difference in the sustainable development of local communities.

On balance, the YDNPA would not support this course of action. These organisations have the democratic mandate and the expertise to tackle these issues and the role of the NPA should remain a supporting one – with a focus on those parts of the local economy that are dependent on the Park's natural capital, and the way that the land is managed (which is inextricably linked with the statutory purposes).

Some of the societal problems identified above are so significant it does appear that there will need to be major shift in national Government policy to address them.

There are two policy changes that could assist efforts to support the socio-economic well-being of communities in National Parks. The first is that the duty on relevant public bodies to 'have regard' to National Park purposes should be strengthened. It should be replaced by a duty to 'further' National Park purposes when those bodies are operating in National Parks. This would give more weight to the value of National Parks (and the communities and businesses within them) but without compelling those public bodies to totally skew their own priorities.

Secondly, all the relevant public bodies should be under a duty to co-operate in the development and implementation of National Park Management Plans (NPMP), as the primary place-shaping document for the area. This would mirror the arrangements that already apply to statutory development plans. The NPMP should also be a required input into the key strategic documents of other bodies e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships to raise the profile of the National Parks' economies, which currently struggle to compete for investment against the more accessible and populous parts of the country.

The role National Park and AONB authorities play on housing and transport in their areas

Housing

Relationships between NPAs and statutory housing bodies have become closer in recent years as a result of increasing housing pressures. By any conventional measure, there is no shortage of housing in the YDNP; there is just a chronic shortage of *affordable* housing. This problem is exacerbated by many factors, some of the most significant are: -

- The increasing number of domestic planning permissions that never get completed;
- Unwillingness on the part of landowners to provide land for housing at a price that makes it viable.
- The emphasis in national parks on smaller developments (<20 houses) that fit

with the character of local settlements means that:

- development per unit is more expensive because of the absence of economies of scale; and,
 - the combination of Government-imposed thresholds and the viability of development makes it much more difficult to get *affordable* homes built by the private sector
- A large and increasing number of under-occupied properties.

To illustrate the impact of the latter point, more than a fifth of properties in the Yorkshire Dales NP are now under-occupied (up from 15% in 2001).

There are significant market failures in relation to housing. These would require radical solutions in order to deal with them. Whether these are restrictions in the growth of 2nd homes, an active programme of compulsory purchase of appropriate land to deliver more affordable housing, or planning conditions to enforce completion or risk losing permission. These are national rather than local or even just rural issues.

Transport

All National Park Authorities have significantly reduced their role in the provision of public transport. In past years, Transport Authorities provided mainstream services and National Park Authorities added to these through the provision of [primarily], visitor transport services. Most transport authorities have almost abandoned their role in public transport provision, and the NPA does not have the remit, expertise or resources to play any significant role. Moreover, wider societal changes mean that there is not only a greater reliance on the private car; there is an active desire for this mode of transport above any other.

Government policy decisions in relation to subsidizing older peoples' travel on public transport, has not been helpful in that:

- a) It targets benefits on [often] the most affluent members of society; and,
- b) Services are unsustainable because those who are the principal users of the service do not pay anything like the economic rate.

A more radical solution would be to target these benefits on younger people – students and younger workers.

How are NPAs governed individually at the moment? Is it effective or does it need to change, if so, how?

There is a wide recognition that National Park Authority boards are too large and cumbersome. In the YDNPA the board is also unrepresentative of the population at large [as a consequence of the 2016 boundary changes].

A governance review is planned for 2019-20 but is likely to encounter a familiar problem in that decisions on the size and composition of the board will be made by those who are most affected by any changes.

What is critical in any future arrangements is that the balance between national and local members is recognized.

NPAs working collectively

NPAs are first and foremost independent of each other. This is best illustrated by asking the question of Cumbria CC and Lambeth Borough CC in terms of how they work collectively and share goals etc. What type of answer would you expect to receive? Having said that; the Chairs and Chief Executives meet regularly at UK level and very regularly at an England level to share experience, look for opportunities for joint working etc. At a 'lower level' the NPUK professional officer working groups are an outstanding example of joint working.

Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing.

Volunteering

Volunteering in national parks has been increasing in importance and value for some years. There are good opportunities for individuals and the volunteers' contributions are critical to the future well-being of National Parks and National Park Authorities.

Health

This subject has been talked of incessantly for the last 20 years at least. There have been some minor initiatives in National Parks e.g. walks for mental health/GP prescriptions but most of the 'activity' has really been 'talk'. While National Parks clearly have the potential to play a bigger role in the health and well-being of the nation, their distance from large urban centers will act as an insurmountable barrier unless there is an active 'push' from Government/NHS/GPs to promote opportunities and prescribe action.

Funding

For many years National Park Authorities have sought long term funding decisions to enable their programmes to be better planned and managed. Ironically, the 2010 austerity cuts meant that, for 5 years, NPAs knew exactly what their funding was as it decreased by over 40% in real terms between 2010 and 2015. On a more positive note, the commitment of successive National Park Ministers at Defra ensured that the last comprehensive spending round again gave some certainty in relation to National Park funding. A continuation of this approach is critical to the future well-being of the organization and the area and is a strong 'ask' of Government.

2010 saw a significant increase in all NPAs efforts to raise more of their own funding, and reduce reliance on the core Defra grant. This has been a significant cultural shift for NPAs, and has led to some conspicuous successes for National Park Authorities. However, it is important to understand that this has only been possible because of the continued existence of the Defra grant, which enables the Authority to retain a core set of permanent specialist and corporate staff that underpins the management and delivery of externally-funded projects.

Lessons from other Designated Areas.

At a UK level the development of devolved administrations in Scotland Wales and England has been a positive experience in terms of the learning opportunities that have accrued. A lot of time and effort has been put into ensuring that learning can be shared

across the three nations.

However, the sharing of experiences between designated landscapes (within England) remains far too insular to outside influences – particularly at a European level. This has regressed since the 1990s when these organisations, and indeed UK agencies were far more open to outside experiences and influences.

The importance of National Parks, AONBs and country agencies looking at how other designated areas are managed remains important. There are significant opportunities, probably even more important with Brexit looming, for UK designated areas to learn from and share their experiences with European areas. There are existing mechanisms such as the Europarc Federation and the UK section [European Atlantic Isles] that, given a small increase in resources, could have a significant impact on improving the way in which designated areas are managed within this country.