



The Rt Hon Lord Benyon
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
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Sent by email: ps.lord.benyon@defra.gov.uk

8th April 2022

Dear Lord Benyon

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's response to the Landscapes Review

I enclose a copy of the Yorkshire Dales NPA's response to the Landscapes Review. We are grateful to the Government in setting out the potential legislative changes that might enable us to play a full and constructive role in delivering for nature, climate, people and place.

Our response, although coming from the National Park Authority, includes the views of those who often find their voices little heard in consultations of this kind. We consulted with bodies representing the voices of younger people and the BAME community and they form part of our overall submission.

We really welcome the overall level of ambition in the government's response and that set out in your foreword. We are ambitious and committed to helping to address the four great challenges we face around climate, nature recovery, the future of Land Management and access and engagement. The Landscapes Review represents the opportunity to accelerate that work - at scale - in response to the climate and nature emergencies.

We believe that Government needs to be bolder and more assertive in stating that the delivery of its wider environmental agenda and ambitions should be centred on the protected landscapes of England. To be frank, if this is not recognised, then we believe, there is little chance of these objectives being delivered at all. This focus on protected landscapes should manifest itself in the policy development around Environment Land Management Schemes [ELMS], Local Nature Recovery Strategies [LNRS] and the delivery of 30 by 30. All three of these are intrinsically linked. We would welcome a direct role for national park authorities in the delivery of ELMS. The Farming in Protected Landscapes [FIPL] programme has already started to show the benefits of a more targeted and delegated approach in delivering national policy objectives.

There is much that we welcome in the detail of the proposals.

We support the case for legislation to strengthen Section 62 of the Environment Act and improve governance, and would hope that this can be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

We welcome the announcement of a new Landscape Strategy that provides greater clarity on the priorities and outcomes that the family of protected landscapes can deliver for the nation. We would ask only that this national strategy does not lose sight of the importance and the benefits of strong and effective engagement of local stakeholders and communities. NPAs are based in, and are responsive to, local circumstances, which is part of what makes them ideal vehicles for (cost-)effectively delivering national objectives.

We also welcome the increased importance placed on access to Protected Landscapes for the nation's health and well-being. However, the value of residential experiences for young people (highlighted in Julian Glover's report) should not be overlooked. The proposal for 'a night under the stars' was fundamentally about connecting people with nature and the experience of waking up in a national park; such experiences can be transformative in the lives of young people.

We are generally supportive of the Government's commitment to explore ways for Protected Landscapes bodies to support responsible authorities in preparing and delivering LNRs but this commitment is too vague. Past experience suggests that environmental issues will never be top of local authority agendas. There is an opportunity here to ensure that Protected Landscapes lead the way in nature recovery, and that requires a *strong* voice for NPAs in the process

Overall, we have serious concerns about the gap between increasing expectations and the lack of resources to deliver them. Indeed, these resources are continuing to erode. By 2024, the real value of our Defra grant will be half what it was in 2010. We have made great strides in securing other funding sources (see below) but we are moving beyond the limits of our capacity to deliver more. It is essential to secure grant funding that is maintained at least in real terms over the period of the comprehensive spending review to allow NPAs to meet at least some of our shared aspirations. Of course, AONBs will need a much more significant increase in resources if they are to deliver even a fraction of Defra's new expectations for them.

Given the importance that the Government attaches to nature recovery and climate change it is disappointing that the response contains no specific proposals for funding Protected Landscapes that would enable them to take the lead on these issues. Working with local partners, the YDNPA has secured significant external investment in nature recovery and climate change mitigation. These currently include the 'Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected programme; the Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership; 'Grow Back Greener' woodland creation programme; the 'Payment by Results' trial; and investments in water quality through the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme.

At a more prosaic, human level, I must put on record our disappointment at the Government's response on affordable housing. We certainly agree that it is an issue common to all remote rural areas but we can see no merit in simply continuing the current approach through Homes England (HE). The relatively small size of the housing developments we need mean that – without some Government direction or additional incentives – they will never be priorities for HE. In the meantime, the absence of affordable housing remains the single most important issue raised by young people here. This national park, in common with so many continues to see a haemorrhaging of fully occupied housing into second homes and holiday lets. This matter dominates all others in terms of impact on housing.

We welcome the new National Landscape Partnership as a stronger voice for Protected Landscapes on the national stage. There is an opportunity to set national targets that can help deliver ambition through clear and consistent monitoring and reporting. We already have highly developed relationships with our local AONBs and welcome the opportunity for greater collaboration with the wider AONB family.

I am grateful for you taking the time to read this letter and would be happy to provide further details on this or any of our response. More importantly, we would welcome a visit from you to the Yorkshire Dales. We know the passion and commitment you have for the national parks and that has been clear in the way in which the Government's response to the Review has been developed. We would be delighted to show you some of the work we are doing with our partners to help deliver the Government's ambitions.

Your sincerely



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