



Dorset AONB submission to
the Review of Designated
Landscapes

Tom Munro





The following was submitted using the online form by Tom Munro on behalf of the Dorset AONB Partnership, as agreed by the Partnership Board at its meeting of 15th November 2018.

NB questions 1-5 were concerned with contact details and permission to be quoted.

6. We would love to know what makes National Parks and AONBs special to you

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response, and would like to emphasise the following points with regard to National Parks and AONBs:

They are spaces for recreation, reflection, inspiration, meditation, through which they make an invaluable but undervalued contribution to health and wellbeing.

They act as the country's central banks of natural beauty and repositories of stocks of natural capital, from which flow high quality ecosystem services, again essential to health and wellbeing.

They are also central to this country's sense of identity: these rural landscapes have been sources of inspiration for centuries with many important cultural works associated with them. The evolution of the designations also celebrates a national awakening that an increasingly urban, industrialised population needs these areas to exist and be accessible as an antidote to daily urban life.

Part 1 - Opening thoughts

We would like any opening thoughts on the role played by National Parks and AONBs - you may want to make a more detailed suggestion further on.

7. What do you think works overall about the present system of National Parks and AONBs in England? Add any points that apply specifically to only National Parks or AONBs.

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response, and would like to emphasise the following points with regard to AONBs:

The current governance model facilitates the building of trust across crucial sectors, enabling the necessary brokerage for achieving the statutory purposes.

8. What do you think does not work overall about the system and might be changed? Add any points that apply specifically to National Parks or AONBs.

While the purposes are great and honourable, the landscape quality of AONBs is being degraded through inadequate planning protection in practice, damaging built development decisions, visitor pressure, pollution from various sources and the continued industrialisation of agriculture and forestry in response to national policies and incentives. Social inequality within these landscapes are exacerbated by a high average property cost to local average earnings ratio (>13:1 in West Dorset District). Despite these landscapes being much-loved, public awareness is low, therefore the political leverage that could be exerted to better achieve the purposes is weak.

The resources, tools, levers and incentives currently available to the Dorset AONB Partnership for the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty are insufficient to prevent these declines in a coherent fashion across the large and diverse landscape of the Dorset AONB.

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response, and would like to emphasise the following points with regard to AONBs:



- The statutory purposes should be aligned with National Parks, specifically to include wildlife and cultural heritage into the first purpose, and adding as a subservient purpose the promotion and understanding of the area's special qualities.
- The weak 'duty of regard' should be replaced with a 'duty of due regard' which would provide all relevant bodies with a clear framework within which to operate.
- Giving AONB staff teams the capacity to play a leading role in the local delivery of agri-environment and new environmental land management schemes and to deliver action for climate change adaptation and mitigation can be implemented at the policy level.
- Governance models and resourcing should be reviewed to meet local needs and opportunities. All AONBs are under-resourced to meet local needs and deliver on national priorities. The strong campaign for a Dorset National Park (with no consensus for endorsement among the AONB Partnership Board), and those for other AONBs, are at least in part a reflection of the disparity in leverage and funding between AONBs and National Parks.

We also ask that the panel consider extending Designated Landscapes offshore into the marine environment and giving their Management organisations a role in achieving the co-ordinated management of the coast and marine. Formalising the role of designated landscape management bodies with regard to Heritage Coasts would also help, as these have a seaward boundary.

Part 2 - Views

We'd like to hear views on particular issues.

9. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in nature conservation and biodiversity?

The landscapes and their management organisations are integral to nature conservation and biodiversity enhancement. Good landscape quality in protected landscapes is underpinned by significant extents of semi-natural habitats with consequent benefits to species conservation. Dorset AONB includes the most diverse grid squares in the country for vascular plants and mammals illustrating the rich wildlife of national and international importance which is highlighted as one of the area's special qualities.

The AONB Partnership supports wildlife conservation by securing significant external funds for wildlife conservation from Heritage Lottery, National Grid, Natural England, Environment Agency, development compensation and local delivery partner contributions. These are used to resource

- Direct land interventions by contractors, partner staff and volunteers
- Adviser time to broker agri-environment agreements
- Brokering and convening partnerships between conservation organisations and landowning / land managing representatives and individuals, such as the Wild Purbeck Partnership led by the Dorset AONB unit.
- Commissioning research and disseminating information supporting conservation delivery at the landscape scale. The Dorset AONB unit, through its Wild Purbeck NIA initiative, commissioned and developed a study into Landscape Permeability for biodiversity (<https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/wildpurbeck/146-researchplanning/571-landscape-permeability>). This has been the foundation work for ongoing habitat restoration, as well as the development by the Dorset Local Nature Partnership of its existing and potential eco-networks mapping. (https://www.dorsetlnp.org.uk/ecological_networks.html)



a) Could they do more to enhance our wildlife and support the recovery of our natural habitats?

Yes. Designated landscape managing organisations are well-placed to deliver much more positive change for wildlife. The Dorset AONB Partnership feels the following issues limit its ability to deliver for wildlife, and invite the review panel to consider how they may be best overcome:

- A current peripheral role in the development and delivery of Countryside Stewardship. We hope and expect to have a greater role in determining local priorities for the new ELMS, and in its delivery. This has a resource requirement: we would welcome the additional responsibilities with proportionate additional resources.

- Access to resources. AONB landscape character assessments should guide biodiversity improvements resulting from implementing the net-gain principle for development. AONB Partnerships are well-placed to provide appropriate advice on appropriate onsite net gain and be a conduit for investment into off-site enhancements. As a possible template of the latter, the Dorset AONB Partnership is administering a £1.7M fund held by Dorset County Council for landscape (including biodiversity) and access enhancements secured by planning agreement related to the ongoing operation of the Wytch Farm Oilfield <https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/local-action/wytch-farm-fund>

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response, and would like to emphasise that

- the designated landscape management organisations are ready to play a central role in supporting the Nature Recovery Network: indeed they should be priority areas for off-site 'net gain' investment, and
- the potential role that coastal AONB management units can play in facilitating integrated coastal zone management. The Dorset AONB unit was a contributor to the Europarc Atlantic Isles manifesto for coasts and seascapes https://www.europarc-ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Seascapes-manifesto_A4.pdf

At the time of writing, with the Extinction Rebellion high in public awareness, drawing attention to the inextricable link between anthropogenic climate change and biodiversity loss and the need for a fundamental shift in societal norms for the planet to be able to sustain human and non-human life long term. The designated landscapes are well-placed to be the areas where models of sustainability are trialled, developed and rolled out. The place-based approach underpinned by natural beauty and the cyclical management planning process is where awareness can be developed, and resources prioritised to adopt new practices. AONBs and National Parks should be the leaders for implementing local solutions to global issues. This would be facilitated by a review of the purposes and duties to include responsibilities related to sustainability and climate change.

10. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in shaping landscape and beauty, or protecting cultural heritage?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response, and would like to emphasise that AONBs, National Parks and their management organisations are the primary contributors to the conservation of natural beauty in this country, and as such perform a valuable service for the nation's wellbeing and sense of identity.

Alongside its wildlife of national and international importance, the built heritage of the Dorset AONB (particularly its World Heritage Site, 543 Scheduled Monuments, 18 Registered Parks & Gardens and 4,009 Listed Buildings) contribute strongly to its natural beauty. It is also an area rich in landscape-related but non-physical cultural expressions, including local customs, oral histories, the expression of the strong cultural sector, dialect.

As trusted brokers between land owners, land managers and conservation organisations, the designated landscapes' management organisations have a pivotal role to play in the conservation of assets associated with those landscapes which add to the sense of place. They also have a role in developing cultural heritage.



As an illustration, the Dorset AONB Partnership developed and brokered the South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership attracting significant support from Heritage Lottery between 2013 & 2018, to raise awareness of, and conservation effort for, this landscape with an incredible density of prehistoric monuments.

The programme included practical conservation: 43 monuments are now in improved condition, 540m stone walls restored (with 1190 volunteer days), and 40 traditional fingerposts, street signs and milestones were restored.

The programme also revived cultural traditions by creating a West Gallery choir which is now self-sustaining and held well-populated workshops exploring the area's links to Thomas Hardy's writings and Reverend Barnes' dialect poetry; it also delivered what may become a new tradition: greeting the summer solstice sunrise at a newly-built, solar-aligned stone sculpture at Black Down.

This role can be strengthened by

- changing the 'duty of regard' to a 'duty of due regard'
- placing a duty for the relevant authorities to support the delivery of the management plans they are required to develop
- statutory consultee status for AONB units

11. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in working with farmers and land managers and how might this change as the current system of farm payments is reformed?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response. The Dorset AONB Team has significant experience in working with farmers and landowners to achieve the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and to facilitate public access to it.

As the majority of land within designated landscapes is in private ownership or tenure, the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty can only be effected at a landscape scale with the cooperation and goodwill of farmers and land managers.

Designated landscape management organisations have a strong track record with engagement with farmers and other land managers and are extremely well-placed to deliver greater impact and value as the farm payments system is reformed. Many currently employ agri-environment advisers either directly or indirectly through project support to delivery partners.

Experience from the Dorset AONB shows that the managing Partnership has good levels of trust from within the land management sector.

We would like to emphasise that

- AONB Management Plans and related guidance developed from an understanding of landscape character provide the appropriate framework to develop targeting and priorities for public investment in public goods through the new ELMS for widest benefit.
- AONB management units are well-placed to provide brokerage with land owners and managers for ELMS roll-out

The Dorset AONB team also attempts to develop markets for goods which conserve and enhance the AONB in their production. The team has worked with forestry and woodland working businesses through its Woodlink programme, and has supported the locality accreditation of charcoal, firewood and craft woodland products. The Partnership also devised and created the Dorset Food & Drink programme (DF&D), now transitioning into the private sector as a Community Interest Company. This is a sector-wide support programme to which several farming businesses subscribe to enhance their connection with consumers, business-to-business connections and access to the signposting service that DF&D provides.



12. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in supporting and managing access and recreation?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response.

Both AONBs and National Parks have a large role to play in access and recreation management. It is important to recognise that AONB management units are frequently requested or required to invest time and effort in access management and recreation by their managing partnerships and local audiences. This is despite having no statutory duty to do so and no additional resources to match the expectation of responsibility.

However, these management units have great potential to deliver on local and national priorities for access and recreation. The Dorset AONB management unit has led investigations into the potential for waterborne coastal transport, is supporting access development around Corfe Castle to relieve pressure on the site and has taken on responsibility for the visitor management of the World Heritage Site. The Dorset AONB management unit has promoted walking and cycling trails and has is seen as an additional tourism information resource.

Tourism pressure within Dorset is huge, (c3.5M annual staying visitors and 25.5M day visitors). There are increasing access-related adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites, SSSIs, National Trails (and the wider rights of way network), Scheduled Monuments, tranquillity, landscape character and the visitor experience. Successful management of this designated landscape requires additional resources and leverage dedicated to understanding, reversing and monitoring these adverse effects, and promoting access and recreation within environmental limits where carrying capacity exists.

13. What views do you have about the way National Park and AONB authorities affect people who live and work in their areas?

a) Are they properly supporting them and what could be done differently?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response.

AONB partnerships support local people in a number of ways across the landscape and its communities. They influence the local economy, community cohesion, community identity, and individual and collective wellbeing. Latter aspects will be covered in question 17.

ECONOMY: A study commissioned in 2015 recognised the role the Dorset AONB designation and management unit provides in supporting the local economy. The annual GVA influenced was estimated to be around £65M: <https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/news/1204-aonbcontributes65million>

The Dorset AONB Partnership also created Dorset Food & Drink <https://www.dorsetfoodanddrink.org/> as a subscription service for businesses in that sector. It support nearly 200 businesses with better access to local markets, promotion, networking and signposting.

Since 2006 the Dorset AONB's Sustainable Development Fund (nearly £575k distributed) has supported 215 local initiatives with a total combined value of over £3.4M. Project beneficiaries include businesses, community groups, individuals and third sector organisations. The available fund in Dorset has fallen from nearly £100k in its first years to around £20k in the last two years.

A dedicated Sustainable Development Fund for designated landscapes would enhance their delivery for local people.

14. What views do you have on the role National Park and AONB authorities play on housing and transport in their areas?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response.



This partnership has given significant support to infrastructure development and promotion of non-car access and transport options, including

- the development of park and ride facilities, for example at Norden (for Corfe Castle)
- feasibility research developing the potential for waterborne coastal transport

<https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/coastal-corridor/waterbornepassengertransportstudy>

Reductions in the local authorities' available funds is hindering the support of adequate sustainable transport within the designated landscape; it is hard to promote inclusive travel options with this backdrop.

This AONB team also has experience of road-building within the designated landscape with the Weymouth Relief Road. The team maintained an objection to the development on the grounds of significant adverse landscape impacts. While the scheme went ahead, this objection and the status of the landscape ensured that the scheme was developed with a strong regard to minimising those effects and maximising potential enhancements. The approach to landscaping was pioneering and has resulted in large areas of species-rich sward supporting a high diversity of animals, particularly butterflies and moths. Significant off-site landscape enhancements were also secured.

The Dorset AONB's role in decluttering the road network has been important, as well as developing design guidance for road-related interventions in its rural areas <https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/rural-roads/traffic-in-villages-toolkit>

Part 3 - Current ways of working

We'd like to ask some specific questions about the way National Parks and AONBs work at the moment.

15. What views do you have on the way they are governed individually at the moment? Is it effective or does it need to change, if so, how?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response.

In Dorset, there is a local campaign pushing for the re-designation of the Dorset and East Devon AONBs and some additional areas as a National Park. While there isn't consensus among the AONB Partnership, the 2 Dorset local authorities that have examined the proposal have resolved to keep the opportunities under review.

It is also fair to say that the AONB Board agree (whatever the individual positions on the National Park proposal) that resourcing, profile and status are insufficient to be able to manage the pressures and effectively conserve and enhance natural beauty across the area; all agree that a 'beefed up' AONB model would be better than the status quo. Perhaps the panel could conceive of a 3rd model of designated landscape management that achieves this end?

16. What views do you have on whether they work collectively at the moment, for instance to share goals, encourage interest and involvement by the public and other organisations?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response.

Collective working is seen as essential to delivering the AONB Management Plan, requiring as it does the buy-in of many sectors, organisations and individuals.

The Dorset AONB unit is also an active participant in collaborative activity between and across the protected landscape family, at a regional level through the South West Protected Landscapes Forum and nationally through the NAAONB.

The Dorset AONB Partnership also works closely with our neighbours in the East Devon AONB in respect of World Heritage management. The AONB designations provide the statutory landscape protections for the Dorset & East Devon World Heritage Site (Jurassic Coast), and the teams share a steering role for the Jurassic Coast Trust.



17. What views do you have on their efforts to involve people from all parts of society, to encourage volunteering and improve health and well-being?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response, which highlights our Stepping into Nature initiative (<https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/stepping-into-nature>) developing and promoting social, nature-based prescribing for older people, particularly those living with dementia, their partners and carers.

It should be underlined, however, that the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty is in itself an important contributor to national health and wellbeing. While not explicit in the 1949 National Parks & access to the Countryside Act, a significant part of its intention was to improve human health and wellbeing. Much of the committee stage deliberations included reference to a natural health service and the need for all walks of life to be able to access the benefits conferred by viewing, accessing, inspiring and experiencing natural beauty.

There is intrinsic value in natural beauty, but that is still intrinsic to us (humankind). It may not always achieve that aim, but fundamentally the duty to conserve and enhance is for prolonging human prosperity; for intergenerational equity; for the health and wellbeing of everyone now and in the future.

The addition of a second purpose for the promotion and understanding of the area's special qualities (to align with National Parks) would underline the AONBs' roles and reinforce current practice.

Many of the designated landscape management organisations are engaged in work which develops and increases people's emotional connection with natural beauty. Emotional connections to nature have been shown to have a greater beneficial effect on wellbeing than intellectual connectedness; wellbeing is enhanced through calm, contentment, feelings of joy and purpose, and a diminishment in anxiety and stress.

The Dorset AONB Partnership has worked closely with artists and producers to events and experiences which celebrate, interpret and animate the landscape and its important features in beautiful and creative ways. This has become an integral part of our delivery.

18. What views do you have on the way they are funded and how this might change?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response and would like to highlight the key issues experienced locally:

- the volume of funds available for AONB management
- the stability and predictability of those funds (we suggest that funding agreements span Management Plan periods)
- the disparity in funds provided by central government for AONB management in comparison to those for National Park management.

19. What views do you have on the process of designation - which means the way boundaries are defined and changed?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response but would like to point out that while the process itself is satisfactory, it is inadequately resourced at the Natural England level so proposals for boundary alterations or new designations can take a long time to be considered. Utilising local knowledge and enthusiasm can facilitate the process.



20. What views do you have on whether areas should be given new designations? For instance, the creation of new National Parks or AONBs, or new types of designations for marine areas, urban landscapes or those near built-up areas

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response that form follows function and should be developed and tailored to the needs for conserving and enhancing natural beauty (and promoting access to, and understanding of it) within each designated landscape.

In Dorset, there is a local campaign pushing for the re-designation of the Dorset and East Devon AONBs and some additional areas as a National Park. While there isn't consensus among the AONB Partnership, the 2 Dorset local authorities that have examined the proposal have resolved to keep the opportunities under review.

21. Are there lessons that might be learnt from the way designated landscapes work in other parts of the United Kingdom, or abroad?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response.

Part 4 - Closing thoughts

22. Do you think the terms currently used are the right ones? Would you suggest an alternative title for AONBs, for instance and if so what?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response.

There is little understanding of, and visibility for the AONB brand in comparison for that of the National Parks. However, the 'natural beauty' descriptor is held to be important by those working within it. Perhaps there is a solution for a promotional brand which could be used alongside a statutory label which encompasses natural beauty.

23. The review has been asked to consider how designated landscapes work with other designations such as National Trails, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Special Protected Areas (SPAs). Do you have any thoughts on how these relationships work and whether they could be improved?

The Dorset AONB includes 9 SACs, 3 SPAs, 9 NNRs, 67 SSSIs (which cover >7% of the AONB) and over 70 miles of National Trail. In addition to the cultural heritage designations mentioned in our response to Q10, each designation has a specific purpose and contributes to the conservation (and access to) the AONB.

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the National Association for AONBs response but would like to add that:

The key relationships are not between the designations themselves but between their management organisations – largely Natural England (for the wildlife and geological designations), Wildlife Trusts (for local designations) and in our case, the South West Coast Path Association. The local relationship with Natural England and Historic England is strong and mutually beneficial, but would be further enhanced by

- a duty to deliver management plans
- inclusion of 'wildlife and cultural heritage' within the statutory remit of AONBs
- a duty of due regard

The relationship with the National Trail organisation would be enhanced by an additional statutory purpose for the promotion and understanding of the area's special qualities.



24. Do you have any other points you would like to make that are not covered above?

The Dorset AONB Partnership endorses the NAAONB response. We would like to add that we are delighted with this once-in-a-generation opportunity to contribute to positive changes to the designated landscapes, their governance, funding and purposes, and wish the panel the best of luck in developing and negotiating your recommendations.