

Landscape Institute

Response to the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes

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Key messages:

- Designation of landscapes is a success story. However, this review provides an overdue **opportunity for reform**, to protect their original purpose, and to maximise public benefit
- The **original purposes** of designation should be celebrated: special places protected on the basis of their character and natural beauty. However, there is also the potential for these areas of land to do more, and for their governing authorities and landowners to support the delivery of other vital ecosystem services.
- AONB and National Park landscapes sometimes deliver the same “public offer”, but the levels of protection and resources granted are disproportionate. This is an

opportunity for **realignment** of purpose, some additional protections, and to review the typology of designated landscapes.

- There is an opportunity to **strengthen the role** of both AONBs and NPAs to deliver public benefits in two principal areas: their role in guiding public investment into land management, and their role in guiding town/country planning decisions. Specifically:
 - They should guide funding decisions relating to **land management**, especially (but not only) investment made under the new Environmental Land Management System. This could be achieved without additional expenditure by strengthening the status of Management Plans
 - AONBs should be given a stronger role in **plan-making** for development, with different models for different AONBs (for instance Statutory Consultee status)
- Strengthening the role of designated landscapes would require some **greater resourcing**, but not simply in financial terms, but also access to training, advice, information resources, etc. Some of this exists, and simply requires better signposting or minor strategic investment.
- Strengthening their role also necessitates a review of **governance** structures in some cases, particularly a greater role for national expertise on AONB boards.

Who we are

The Landscape Institute (LI) is the royal chartered body for the landscape profession. The LI represents 5000 landscape managers, landscape architects, planners, urban designers, and landscape scientists, working across urban and rural areas.

We accredit our professional members; uphold standards; provide training, information, and guidance; and undertake research and policy work on behalf of the sector. As a professional organisation and educational charity, we work to protect, conserve and enhance the built and natural environment for the public benefit.

Some of our members work directly within the administration bodies of designated landscapes, or within related bodies: such as Local Planning Authorities, Natural England, etc. Many will work in/with designated landscape contexts to some degree during their career: whether designing, planning, assessing, or managing landscapes. This response represents their views, gathered through direct consultation.

Full response

1. The designation of outstanding landscapes has proved to be a success story. Designation is a valuable policy tool, to protect and enhance landscapes, and to achieve a range of other beneficial outcomes. These landscapes retain great support from the public, and their administrative bodies are frequently doing excellent work with very limited resources or powers. This review is an opportunity to celebrate that.
2. However, this review also provides an overdue opportunity for some minor reform: to ensure the original aims of designation are being met, and to maximise public benefit.
3. For the purposes of this response, we have limited ourselves to commenting upon those areas which we believe can/should be improved. We have not focussed upon all the many ways in which National Parks and AONBs¹ are succeeding, or the tools and functions which are working well without reform. Likewise, whilst there are many minor ways in which the administration of designated landscapes, and their interrelation with other public bodies, can be tweaked or improved, we have limited our input to changes which require central government intervention or significant policy change.

Status and constitution

4. In our view, the original purpose of designating landscapes should not be lost: they must remain designated on the basis of their character and natural beauty, and not confused with other environmental land designations. However, it is important to distinguish between the *purpose* of designation, and the additional *benefits* which can arise from designation.
5. A landscape designation does not prevent landscapes delivering additional social or environmental public benefits, such as health and wellbeing or carbon sequestration. In fact, the opposite is true: these landscapes are often best placed to deliver on a range of other national priorities, from climate change to biodiversity. “Landscape” is the framework within which other ecosystem services and functions can be delivered, and this should be encouraged.

6. **The review should champion not just England’s designated landscapes, but also the grounds on which they are designated: landscape character and natural beauty**

¹ Note: when referring to National Parks or AONBs, we are referring to the landscapes themselves, not to the administration bodies – unless clearly identified.

7. The current model (two designation categories, with differing designation criteria and purposes, and correspondingly different resources and powers) is the product of history and can seem anachronistic.
8. In practice, AONB boards and NPAs have an ambition to deliver the same “offer”: both aim to support the management of land for the national public benefit. Whilst National Parks notionally have additional purposes (to promote “wildlife and cultural heritage”, and recreation), in reality AONB landscapes also deliver these services, and some AONB bodies work practically towards the achievement of these (for instance through the formal or informal maintenance of Rights of Way). These outcomes are often necessary by-products of well-managed landscapes. The original designation of AONBs was also predicated upon arguments in favour of their recreation benefits for people.

9. A secondary purpose should be added to AONB designation, as with National Parks, to clarify that they too have a role in supporting public understanding and enjoyment of landscapes

10. In some cases, AONB/NP landscapes are of an equally distinctive character and have comparable features (in terms of scale, land type, urban/rural mix, etc.). Conversely, AONBs can be very different to one another, with huge variations in size, scale, challenges, resourcing, etc. The same is true to a lesser extent of National Parks (e.g. those in the South East facing higher pressures on housebuilding, greater visitor numbers, etc.).
11. In terms of the character and visual qualities of their landscapes, AONBs can sometimes be perceived as the same as National Parks. However, whilst the levels of protection and resources granted to each are not the same, this is not in itself a reason to conflate the two. Government should be cautious of standardising all aspects of operations within designated landscapes, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach.
12. It is our view that, in the statutory protections, there should be greater parity between National Park and AONB landscapes. Here, it is important to distinguish between the *purpose and criteria* of designation, the *statutory protections* afforded to that designated land, and the *operational and regulatory policies* needed to manage an effective National Park Authority/AONB. This review is an opportunity to ensure that an alignment of purpose is met with a re-alignment of the powers needed to achieve that purpose. (This is discussed further in Sections 2-4.)

13. Section 85 of the Countryside Rights of Way Act should be amended to strengthen the “duty of regard” given to AONBs

14. AONBs/National Parks should enjoy equal protection (the “highest status of protection”) in law

15. Designated landscapes are not the only landscapes in the UK that have value, and there are many managed landscapes which do not enjoy the benefits of designation: regional parks, urban parks, heritage parks and gardens, urban landscapes, coastal landscapes, seascapes, “valued landscapes” under paragraph 170 of NPPF18, etc. The European Landscape Convention, to which the UK is a signatory, is clear that all landscapes have value, and that those values should be protected and enhanced.

16. This does not mean that these other landscapes should be designated as National Parks/AONBs. There are other methods to protect/enhance these places. For some (e.g. urban landscapes) designation could create significant confusion amongst the general public about what designated landscapes are for. National Parks and AONBs are more than just a name or a “brand”, but that name is nevertheless important.

17. With that said, the review should take this opportunity to acknowledge that the existing typology of other valued (but non-designated) landscapes is confused and piecemeal, and in many cases non-functional. In some cases, there are opportunities to address this through the existing typology, in others, there may be a case for new designations.

18. Heritage Coasts, for instance, are often located adjacent to protected landscapes – but have little or no protection, and public understanding of them is limited. However, they play a major role in contributing to natural beauty in many instances. Environmental designations have several offshore alternates (for instance Special Protections Areas) which have the same/similar weight as their terrestrial counterparts. In some cases, existing landscape designations could be extended to cover adjacent coastlines, allowing for improved management.

19. The review should look at the typology of other valued (but non-designated) landscapes, and suggest opportunities for new designation categories, where this would create clarity

20. Most obviously, there are areas of open land which do not currently meet a high standard of “natural beauty”, but which have the potential to do so in the near-to-medium future, and could deliver significant benefits for nearby urban populations.

21. At the moment, no national process exists through which an area of land could be designated in order to receive enhancement – through proactive investment, management and development – and become a future AONB (for instance). This review could be an opportunity to create that route.

22. The review should consider recommending an intermediate stage in the designation process (e.g. “National Landscape/Park Designate”) which would identify landscapes that do not currently meet designation criteria, but which have the potential to do so in the future, to positively encourage the change and invested needed to make progress

23. Finally, there are many areas that would like to attain AONB or National Park status, and some will be bidding for that status as part of this review. We have not taken a view here on the aspirations of specific areas. Natural England should continue to consider new designation on their individual merits: including continuing to give great weight to landscape character and natural beauty, and using expert technical assessment.

24. Some of our members have made a strong case for the larger AONBs being supported to attain National Park status. The designation process can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, and where there is evidence of high landscape quality and clear community support, government could consider giving greater facilitation to this process as part of the 25-year Environment Plan.

Land management:

25. The re-design of the UK’s agricultural policy provides an opportunity to ensure that public money is being spent in the best way possible: maximising the public benefit from land, and protecting our natural capital assets. In many cases, designated landscape authorities are already working successfully in partnership, for instance through Farm Clusters, to align the delivery of different environmental outcomes with that of the wider landscape. This is especially vital for AONBs bodies, for whom partnership-working is often one of the few tools available to them.

26. Landscape management priorities can provide a framework for determining strategic priorities and funding decisions for any area of land: especially (but not only) investment made under new Environmental Land Management Schemes. It does not make sense for such funding to run at cross-purposes to the ambitions for our designated landscapes: public money should be pulling in the same direction within these landscapes.

27. This could be achieved through strengthened Management Plans. At present, designated landscapes are obliged by statute to develop Management Plans, but no-one is statutorily obliged to deliver them. Influencing the management of land is the main mechanism through which the purpose of protected landscapes are delivered. There is a diverse set of stakeholders and funders in this area (Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Natural England, Rural Payments Agency, Historic England, Local

Government, etc.) and ‘statutory’ Management Plans are not always well embedded in their decision-making or funding priorities.

28. “Landscape” is a term understood by the public, and it can help to mediate discussions with communities about value and change in their surroundings. Management Plans can articulate this long-term vision for a landscape: its history and geodiversity, what people value about their present landscape including its ecosystem services, and options for change.

29. National Park/AONB Management Plans should be the primary strategic articulation of land management goals for that area, and public bodies should be obliged to work towards their delivery through their interventions

30. Management Plans should encourage partnership working with/amongst landowners and farmers, to align farm/estate business needs with the delivery “public goods for public money”

31. Use of established methodologies such as Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) should inform priorities within these plans, to articulate a long-term vision for the landscape

32. Funding decisions should still continue to be made by the most skilled and appropriate body, and projects led by the most suitable provider: whether this is a farmer or land owner, the designated landscape team, or another strategic body (incl. Local Nature Partnerships). Better use of Management Plans to direct resources can increase transparency amongst the general public, and thereby improve accountability. The Plans can also help members of the farming community understand what public goods are relevant to the specific characteristics of their farm.

Planning and development

33. Responsibility for planning operations is the primary difference between National Parks and AONBs. At the moment, there is a two-tier system: National Parks, who have a plan-making and decision-taking function, and AONBs, who do not.

34. These two tiers are far apart: AONBs are neither statutory consultees, nor are they always adequately considered by Local Planning Authorities, or statutory consultees with landscape responsibilities (e.g. Natural England, Historic England).

35. Given that, as above, AONB landscapes frequently deliver a similar public offer, and are sometimes greater in size than National Parks, there is a clear need to nuance this arrangement. We would anticipate that giving a stronger voice to AONB bodies in plan-

making will lead to more proactive and positive development planning within AONB areas.

36. AONBs should be given a stronger voice in plan-making for development, with different models for different AONBs, as below

37. For instance, for some larger AONBs, a stronger partnership with the Local Planning Authority would benefit both parties, for instance through the publication of Joint Local Plans or an extended Duty to Cooperate. (An example of Joint plans is the Joint Minerals Plan between Hampshire County Council and the New Forest National Park Authority.)
38. At the least, there should be a requirement for AONBs to be directly consulted on major decisions within – or near to – their borders. Some individual AONBs should be added as Statutory Consultees, where they could have the capacity to respond effectively.
39. Conversely, there are some smaller AONBs, for whom this level of responsibility (and the associated resources) may not be appropriate. However, greater weight in planning decisions is still desirable.
40. In these instances, a solution may be the creation of Supplementary Planning Documents, bespoke to the AONB area, to ensure that landscape priorities are upheld through the planning system. The recent joint venture between Natural England and Lancaster City/South Lakeland District Council to produce a Development Plan Document for Arnside & Silverdale AONB should be evaluated as a potential future model.

41. Government should explore alternative planning arrangements for different AONBs: Joint Local Plans, additional Supplementary Planning Documents, or Statutory Consultee status.

42. Some larger AONBs (e.g. the Cotswolds) have made a case for obtaining the full planning responsibilities granted to National Parks or a version of that model (such as was granted to the South Downs NPA). Adoption of planning powers may be appropriate in such cases, and this would normally be achieved through the existing designation process for National Park status. Natural England are best placed to decide upon this.
43. Regardless of additional responsibilities, National Parks and AONBs will continue to require exemptions from permitted development (PD) rights. New PD rights should continue to grant special consideration to designated landscapes.

44. Planning within NPAs is, for the most part, working successfully. However, feedback from some of our members suggests that NPAs have not always struck the right balance between conservation aims and the promotion of social and economic growth within the landscape. In particular, development which would lead to high-quality jobs and diversifying regional industries should be encouraged, particularly in light of likely economic challenges for the future farming industry in many of these landscapes.
45. NPAs are not currently well incentivised to promote sustainable development. One surviving anomaly is the New Homes Bonus (NHB) which is retained wholly by the Local Authority, regardless of whether they are the plan-making authority for the National Park area. It is right that local authorities retain most of the NHB, as they will provide the services to any new areas, however as an incentive to promote housebuilding in designated areas, it is not functional.

46. Government should review the incentives for encouraging positive development within National Parks, to ensure that it is fit for purpose. These incentives should not be tied simply to ‘number of new houses’ within National Parks, where sustainable and sensitive development is essential.

47. The new policy wording within the 2018 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is positive (i.e. the addition of “enhancement”, not just “protection”), and we would hope would lead to greater proactive planning for designated landscapes.

Governance and skills

48. Strengthening the role of designated landscapes would, in most cases, require greater resourcing and a strengthening of their operations and governance.
49. Resource challenges will always exist, not just for the administration bodies themselves, but also related pressures linked to the wider public sector, including local authorities in which staff are often housed (or who may even share an individual officer’s time).
50. These resources are not just financial, but equally in terms of access to training, advice, information resources, and so forth. Strengthening designated landscapes will require investment in these resources. Many of these assets already exist, and simply require better signposting, or very minor strategic investment to realign their content.

51. The review should examine the existing sources of information and advice for designated landscape staff/members, and recommend filling any gaps

52. At the moment, staff within designated landscapes come from a range of backgrounds, and cover a very diverse set of skills. It is, relatively speaking, a small workforce, and

there are challenges related to finding new staff and ensuring that there is a pipeline of future talent for the sector.

53. Likewise, the skills base is not always correctly aligned. Landscape management skills can sometimes be lacking, and there is very limited skills development infrastructure, partly due to the disparate nature of the sector, and occasionally isolated working.
54. There is a role for professional bodies like the Landscape Institute to do more to support this sector, and we have already committed to doing so, working in partnership with bodies like the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB). We are keen to work with others in the sector to understand gaps, barriers, and opportunities, which we can help to address.

55. The Glover Report should give its backing to the Landscape Institute giving more support to landscape managers, and promote further links between those in the sector

56. There is additionally a need in some cases to modernise the governance arrangements that exist for both National Park Authorities and AONB boards.
57. There is a case on paper for defending (or even bolstering) local accountability of board members. However, in practice, the governance of designated landscapes does not always work as well as it could. In most cases, governance should be rebalanced towards a greater role for national appointees, who are appointed on the basis of their skills and experience, and ability to lead designated landscapes boards for the national interest.

58. Governance arrangements should remain locally appropriate, however a greater role for national appointees should be encouraged in most cases.

59. There is a need for more leaders within the sector, who can be more visible in the public eye, and ensure that the national importance of these landscapes is understood. Better governance can encourage this (for instance through the promotion of leading Board Chairs), but there is also a case for a national advocate within government (for instance an identified member of Defra's non-executive board members) with a remit to ensure landscape considerations are embedded in good policy-making at all levels.

60. Government should consider identifying a national Landscape Champion, with a remit to ensure landscape issues are considered within policy, and to promote their importance amongst the public