
National Landscapes: Realising their Potential

The Review of
Designated Landscapes
in Wales

Final Report

Professor Terry Marsden

John Lloyd-Jones

Dr Ruth Williams

31 July 2015

Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales was commissioned by the Minister for Natural Resources, Carl Sargeant AM in 2014 to “ensure that our designated landscapes are best equipped to meet current and future challenges while building upon their internationally recognised status”.

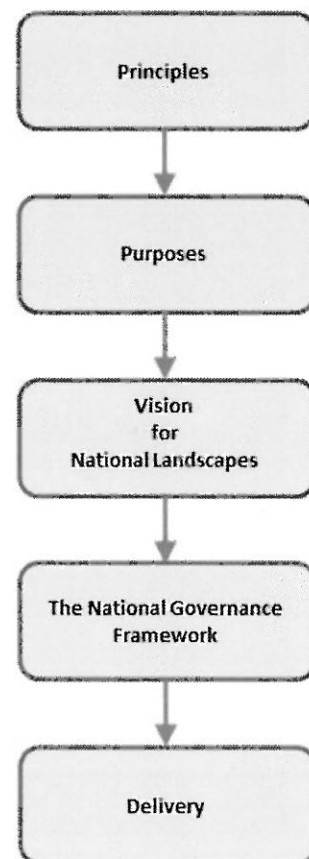
He also wanted us to consider the governance and management arrangements of Wales’ eight designated landscapes; how any future governing body/bodies would best promote collaboration and joint working while avoiding duplication and how any future governing body would best reinforce local accountability and decision making. We were also asked to consider the future role of National Park Authorities as planning authorities and to consider the promotion of diversity on the boards of bodies managing these areas.

Over the past year we have taken a wide range of evidence, locally, nationally and internationally, upon which to basis our findings and recommendations these are set out in greater detail in the following Chapters.

This report presents a set of recommendations that meet the requirements set by the Minister and are interconnected (see Figure i). We have produced a suite of guiding **Principles** which have, in turn, informed the changes we have made to the **Purposes** of designated landscapes in Wales. We then set out a new **Vision** for the National Landscapes, which represent 25% of the land area of Wales, and finally set out our recommended **Governance Framework** for delivery.

Our perspective of our designated landscapes has changed, they remain, in some sense the passive ‘green lungs’ for the urban populations, but they also have the potential to become

Figure i: Governance from principles to delivery



dynamic and productive ‘factories of well-being’. Our recommendations help our designated landscapes realise that potential and we look forward to the support of the Welsh Government to allow this ¼ of Wales deliver for the Nation as a whole.

The Principles

Recommendation 1

Our guiding principles are:

- **We need to examine the refreshed purposes within a medium to long term time frame, so as to give equivalent continuity in the future to that achieved over the past sixty years.**
- **It is important, however, not to be too reliant on the past in formulating a new and refreshed vision for the designated landscapes which recognises the significant challenges they face in the future.**
- **To align the purposes such that they recognise that both designations have over some considerable time been operating de-facto and to varying degrees beyond their original remits.**
- **That any changes in purposes and accompanying duties should be lasting, clear and likely to ensure and embody the precedence placed under ‘the Sandford Principle’, giving priority to the first purpose. It also became clear that if there were to be an increase in the actual number of purposes then the others would (a) need to give priority to the first if there were clear conflicts; and, as importantly, (b) the rest would be mutually reinforcing and binding on delivering the first. This “Sandford Plus” approach needs to link and integrate any additional purposes.**
- **There was also a strong argument for revisiting the statutory duties on related bodies, to clarify and strengthen them. This should ensure that the designated landscape bodies themselves and the relevant national and local organisations – including utility companies and the Welsh Government comply with both the purposes and duty.**
- **To realise the importance of international obligations; lessons and the opportunities they provide for Wales.**

- To ensure the purposes can continue to meet and encourage their relevant bodies to maintain, and exceed, international obligations and standards of nature conservation and landscape protection e.g. IUCN categories and the European Landscape Convention.
- To strive for purposes which are both enduring and have the ability to be applied to other candidate areas, including marine areas, at some future date.
- Any recommended changes made to the direction and/or wording of the purposes should be made in the context of them being: (a) clear, precise, unambiguous and consistent; (b) able to be clearly understood and convey clarity of direction; and (c) legally and technically robust.
- Any changes recommended should strike a judicious balance between providing overall consistency of purpose, and encouraging and celebrating the natural and cultural diversity of the family of protected landscapes themselves.
- To remain mindful of the strength and value of the National Parks and AONBs, and not to undermine their benefits across Wales.
- Avoid compromising these places through any unnecessary additional burden on the public purse; and enhance the efficiency of public funding where possible.
- To interpret the purposes and duties in ways that deliver across the whole Welsh Government policy agenda.

The Welsh Government should adopt these guiding principles.

Recommendation 2

There should not be a single designation.

The Purposes

Recommendation 3

There is **ONE** set of statutory purposes and an associated single statutory duty for both designations.

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government should retain the names of “National Parks” and “Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty” (AONBs) as the key designations of the “National Landscapes of Wales”.

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Government should establish a consistent and resilient nomenclature, such that both designations collectively become:

“The National Landscapes of Wales”

“National Park” and “Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” which are “The Equivalent Designations”

The Equivalent Designations would possess identical statutory purposes and duties

Recommendation 6

There should be **THREE INTERLOCKING** statutory purposes for both the National Parks and AONBs.

These are:

“To conserve and enhance the distinctive landscape and seascape qualities of the area¹.”

(the Conservation Purpose)

“To promote physical and mental well-being through the enjoyment and understanding of the landscape of the area.”

(the Human Well-being Purpose)

“To promote sustainable forms of economic and community development based on the management of natural resources and the cultural heritage of the area.”

(the Sustainable Resource Management Purpose)

Recommendation 7

The Sandford Principle, confirming the primacy of the conservation purpose, will be applied across all the designated landscapes.

Recommendation 8

There should be a new single Statutory Duty that removes the weak “have regard to” prefixes in the current duties on relevant public bodies, and replaces them with a single and clear duty:

“To contribute to the delivery of the three purposes of the National Landscapes.”

¹ Where ‘landscape’ incorporates the total natural environment of the area, together with its biodiversity, human settlements and cultural aspects. It is particularly important to stress the significance of progressing bio-diversity protection and restoration in the Conservation Purpose and to promote progress towards international standards relating to the International Biodiversity Convention so far unattained in Wales. This also incorporates the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, 2000) definition as ‘an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’ (Article 1a.). And it assumes the enhancement of ‘actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity’ (Article 1d.).

The Vision

The vision needs to preside and give direction to the dynamic and multi-level governance for these special places. The National Landscapes can then be positioned as leading and innovative places for capturing and integrating the environmental economy, and the well-being and sustainability goals, and installing them as regional hubs for sustainable rural development and the providers of ecosystem services.

Recommendation 9

A Vision for the National Landscapes of Wales

The National Landscapes of Wales are valued by the nation as important “factories of well-being”, improving the lives of current and future generations through their three purposes. Their special qualities are maintained, enhanced and widely appreciated. They are areas for innovative, place-based collaborations that address the economic, social and environmental challenges facing Wales, and are recognised internationally as leaders in the delivery of sustainable development.

Recommendation 10

As the 'factories of well-being' which we envision, the National Landscapes of Wales should develop and stimulate more local enterprise partnerships, sustainable affordable housing, green energy and retailing ventures.

Recommendation 11

Building on the community development initiatives in National Landscapes will require continuity of seed-corn funding for integrated projects which contribute to their three integrated shared purposes.

Recommendation 12

Welsh Government should empower the National Landscapes of Wales to become official centres for innovation and catalysts for regional development in rural Wales, within their environmental limits.

Recommendation 13

The Welsh Government should ensure that the National Landscapes of Wales can and do contribute to the Welsh Government's 'Partnership for Growth: Strategy for Tourism 2013-2020' – both collectively, and individually.

Recommendation 14

The Welsh Government should ensure that the National Landscapes are involved in all infrastructure planning and development in Wales such as the National Infrastructure Investment Plan, the Green Growth Strategy and the National Planning Framework.

Recommendation 15

The National Landscapes need to better understand their local and regional economies, and especially their tourism economies.

Recommendation 16

The Welsh Government should empower the National Landscapes to deliver its 'Green Growth' agenda, founded on a marriage of exceptional landscapes and sustainable development.

Recommendation 17

The Welsh Government should champion the National Landscapes as international flagships for Wales in the fields of sustainable development, health and tourism in particular.

Recommendation 18

The National Landscapes of Wales upgrade their health and well-being policies to align with the new second purpose. This can be linked to wider, deeper access and sustainable tourism dimensions.

Recommendation 19

The National Landscapes of Wales undertake more health and well-being related experiments in developing and reaching challenged urban and rural communities and sections of the population. These could be delivered jointly with local health boards.

Recommendation 20

The Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales should extend the coastal National Landscapes to cover adjacent sea areas and take an integrated approach to coastal resource management in these areas.

Recommendation 21

The National Landscape managers should ensure that coastal users are at the centre of their coastal management planning processes.

Recommendation 22

The successful Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum model should be applied more widely across the coastal areas of the National Landscapes.

Recommendation 23

The National Landscapes of Wales should interpret and incorporate recommendations 9 to 22 above into pan-Wales indicators and targets for management planning purposes and well-being reporting.

The Governance Framework

A New Framework for Wales' National Landscapes

In order to 'realise the potential' of the National Landscapes of Wales, to address the barriers and weaknesses and to attain an optimum fit between the reorganisation of purposes and duties - we recommend a new framework of governance. The framework encompasses all eight of the designated landscape management bodies and we hope they will all see its worth and contribute to its success.

Recommendation 24

The Welsh Government should adopt the following new Framework of Governance for the National Landscapes of Wales, as portrayed in Figures 16 (p.130) and 19 (p.164) and described in detail in all our following Recommendations 25 to 69.

National Park Authorities and AONBs: A Model for Delivering National Priorities Locally

We believe that a modified statutory identity based upon the Single Purpose Authority model for National Parks and the flexible multi-model governance approach for AONBs is the most effective approach for fostering greater local and regional representation, management and accountability. They are recognised internationally for effectively balancing national objectives

with local considerations. This approach should also provide the designated landscape bodies with further opportunities to draw in additional external funds and resources.

Recommendation 25

Retain the single purpose local authority model for National Park management.

Recommendation 26

Retain and develop flexible AONB management models.

Recommendation 27

National Park Authorities and AONB bodies will need to consider how they restructure themselves in order to deliver the three new purposes.

Recommendation 28

The Welsh Government should reduce the disproportionate regulatory burden on National Park Authorities that is designed for larger and more complex local authorities.

Recommendation 29

The Welsh Government should give National Park Authorities and AONB bodies the means of applying for and drawing down funding from a wider range of sources.

Leadership: A Radical Change in Institutional and Inter-agency Culture and Working

We want to shift the institutional culture of governance of the designated landscapes from one of “deference” to a more accountable and innovative one that enhances existing “soft” powers to convene.

Recommendation 30

The Welsh Government should establish a 'National Landscapes Partnership Board' as per Figure 17 (p.138).

Recommendation 31

The 8 National Park Authorities and AONB bodies should establish a light-touch 'National Landscapes of Wales Committee' as per Figure 18 (p.139).

Recommendation 32

The Welsh Government should work with the National Landscapes bodies and the relevant stakeholders through the Partnership Board and the National Committee to agree, and keep under review an over-arching 'Strategy for the National Landscapes of Wales'.

National Landscapes and National Government

Given the national importance of the designated landscapes to Wales we envisage a far higher profile for them within the National Assembly for Wales. We also envisage direct Ministerial engagement with the National Landscapes Framework.

Recommendation 33

The statutory Partnership Plans of each of the National Landscapes of Wales should be scrutinised by the National Assembly for Wales prior to adoption.

Recommendation 34

The National Assembly for Wales, as it evolves its own internal architecture, should consider the relationship between itself and the National Landscapes of Wales to maximise scrutiny and accountability.

Recommendation 35

The Welsh Government should set performance targets and indicators for the National Landscapes of Wales that derive from and align with the Well-Being Goals.

Integrated Planning and Reporting

It is both timely and more efficient to integrate the planning requirements of recent legislative developments into ONE statutory Partnership Planning exercise which embodies, at its centre, the statutory Partnership Plan, but also embraces plans concerning well-being and natural resource management.

Recommendation 36

There should be One statutory partnership planning exercise for each of the designated landscapes.

Recommendation 37

The statutory Partnership Plan for an area should integrate the current management plan, well-being plan and natural resources area statements.

Local Partnerships

Successful management of the special areas depends on productive partnerships with all those who have an impact on them. We want them to be even more relevant economically, socially and culturally, which will require enhanced and effective local engagement between all relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation 38

Formally constituted 'Partnerships' should be established in each National Park which are closely involved in the preparation and delivery of the statutory Partnership Plan.

Recommendation 39

The National Park Partnership should be chaired by the Chair of the National Park Authority.

Recommendation 40

There should be a formally agreed relationship between the National Park Partnership and the National Park Authority.

Recommendation 41

The AONBs should continue to develop their trusted partnership-working models, however we do not feel a 'one size fits all' would benefit the AONBs.

Fostering lateral relationships with Natural Resources Wales and local authorities

NRW will be a major source of professional advice on the sustainable management of natural resources from which the designated landscapes should benefit. As larger local authorities emerge existing links between them and their AONBs may prove too fragile, it is therefore essential to ensure continued strong links between local authorities and AONBs. We wish to reinforce and spread existing good practice across all eight designated landscapes.

Recommendation 42

Natural Resources Wales should build and make available to the Welsh Government an exhaustive list of their statutory duties and powers in relation to Wales' designated landscapes.

Recommendation 43

Natural Resources Wales will involve and champion the national landscapes on the relevant Public Service Boards.

Recommendation 44

Natural Resources Wales and local authorities will have regard to the statutory Partnership Plans in the conduct of their planning exercises in their area.

Recommendation 45

Natural Resources Wales will share data and provide professional advice on the sustainable management of natural resources to the National Landscapes.

Recommendation 46

Local authorities should reinforce and spread the best practice of their joint working in the AONBs across all eight National Parks and AONBs.

Forward Planning and Development Management

We found the case for removing planning powers from the NPAs unpersuasive, based on dated examples that did not reflect contemporary experience and largely based upon perception. The National Park Authorities, which manage the landscape of 20% of Wales, will need to be more integrated in the delivery of their three purposes. While planning will remain one tool amongst the several required to deliver the new purposes, it will serve a key function delivering consistency across our National Parks.

Recommendation 47

The National Park Authorities should retain their strategic planning policy and planning development control functions.

Recommendation 48

The Welsh Government should reinforce and support the provision of pre-application planning advice from the National Park Authorities.

Recommendation 49

The National Landscapes Committee should co-ordinate and help share the costs of training and education in land use planning matters especially for delivery of the new purposes.

Recommendation 50

The AONB bodies become a statutory consultee on planning applications with a potentially significant impact on the special qualities of their area.

Recommendation 51

A system of independent planning advice for AONBs across Wales is developed and resourced.

Recommendation 52

A suite of indicators on planning outcomes in the National Parks and AONBs is developed for the National Landscapes of Wales.

Local Representation and Diversity

We want to further harness the potential and passion of both the national importance and local opportunities in National Parks and AONBs, to ensure greater diversity in decision-making, and to build stronger bridges between the designated landscapes and their constituent local authorities.

Recommendation 53

Each National Park Authority should comprise: ½ nominated County Councillors, ¼ representatives of the national interest appointed by Welsh Government via open competition, and ¼ representatives of the local interest appointed via open competition by the members listed above.

Recommendation 54

The recruitment and appointment processes for the 'national interest' and 'local interest' members of National Park Authorities should include best practice to ensure diversity in the Authority's membership.

Recommendation 55

To develop and embed in all three National Parks the positive steps already piloted by the National Park Authorities to increase diversity on their Authorities i.e. the Mosaic, mentoring and Ambassador approaches.

Recommendation 56

The Welsh Government should remove the requirement for political balance of local authority members on National Park Authorities, to increase local representation. Thus Councillors appointed to National Park Authorities should represent wards within, or straddling, the National Park boundary. [Section 15 of the Local Government & Housing Act, 1989 and Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.]

Recommendation 57

There should be formal reporting arrangements between the Councillors on the National Park Authority and their parent local authority.

Recommendation 58

The Welsh Government should place a statutory duty on local authorities to establish a formal committee to oversee the management of the AONB and to delegate the local authority's responsibility for preparing the AONB Management plan to this Committee (but not delegating its responsibilities under the duty to the AONB purposes and delivering its aspects of the Management Plan). We recommend this be renamed the 'AONB Delivery Committee' rather than the usual name: Joint Advisory Committee.

Recommendation 59

The Welsh Government should direct each AONB Delivery Committee to include at least one Cabinet member from each constituent local authority, at least two representatives of the national interest appointed by the Welsh Government via open competition, and at least two representatives of the local interest appointed via open competition by the rest of the members.

Recommendation 60

The Welsh Government should remove the requirement for political balance of local authority members on AONB formal committees, to increase local representation. Thus the Councillors appointed to AONB formal committees (in addition to the Cabinet members in Rx above) should represent wards within, or straddling, the AONB boundary. [Section 15 of the Local Government & Housing Act, 1989 and Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.]

Recommendation 61

The appointment processes for the 'national interest' and 'local interest' members of AONB Delivery Committee should incorporate equalities best practice to ensure diversity of Committee's membership.

Recommendation 62

The AONBs should actively learn from, and apply, the NPAs' pilot programmes to increase diversity on their Delivery Committees. (This learning can be facilitated by the National Landscapes of Wales Committee.)

Recommendation 63

Natural Resources Wales should continue to be a key adviser to the AONB Delivery Committee.

Recommendation 64

There should be formal reporting arrangements between the Councillors on the AONB Delivery Committee and their parent local authority.

Funding Arrangements

We believe that funding arrangements for the designated bodies need to be streamlined and simplified. Effective performance requires sufficient support, including financial support, to deliver for designated landscapes. In the current economic climate the AONBs are especially vulnerable to having their base-line funding undermined due to the discretionary nature of their local government and NRW funding.

Recommendation 65

The Welsh Government should provide the annual core grant allocation to all National Landscapes of Wales, thereby removing NRW and local authority levies.

Recommendation 66

The Welsh Government should top slice the core allocation for specific strategic, collaborative and national initiatives (as currently allocated through SDF and competitive grants such as the Nature Fund).

Recommendation 67

The Welsh Government should manage accountability of core funding through an annual review process administered by an agreed performance criteria linked to the Well-Being Goals and to the statutory Partnership Plans of the National Landscape bodies.

Recommendation 68

The National Landscape bodies should have greater flexibility to leverage external funding sources. This will require a shift in the internal management structures and function of these bodies and, in the case of the AONBs their relationships with their partner local authorities.

Recommendation 69

The National Landscape bodies should have greater flexibility to generate their own revenue streams through developing a wider range of Payments for Eco-system services, in line with delivering their purposes. Their ability to use and draw down rural Development Plan and related EU funding will be important.

The New Governance Framework for Wales' National Landscapes

The new governance framework is an outcome of the evidence received and the careful deliberation of the panel over the past year. We believe that in its structures and processes it delivers a robust framework for more effectively delivering performance, leadership and direction, voice, accountability and public efficiency of the landscape areas, and in this it embodies a far more partnership-based approach with greater representation. It allows for the clear delivery of the revised set of purposes and, in our opinion will deliver the Welsh Government's ambitious legislative programme on the ground in the National Landscapes.