



## **Report of the Chair**

### **Gower AONB Partnership Steering Group – 23 September 2019**

#### **2019 NAAONB Conference Report**

This year's conference which formed part of the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act that paved the way for designated landscapes was held in the University of Essex, Colchester with its theme "Outstanding landscapes, outstanding beauty" & the themes explored included the role of landscapes in mitigating the effects of climate change, the importance of beauty in times of change & the impacts nature on health & wellbeing.

Set against a backdrop of unprecedented change & opportunity for designated landscapes, the conference was certain to engage & inspire delegates.

With the Designated Landscapes Review in progress in England, the Environment & Agriculture Bills due soon, the Welsh Government's publication of its Valued & Resilient policy paper & the UK government's 25 Year Environment Plan, it has never been a more important time to demonstrate the value of designated landscapes.

One of the main elements of the conference was the Glover Review of AONBs /National Parks in England. The purpose of the review is to renew the mission as set out in the 1949 National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act. The review was led by Julian Glover & supported by an experienced advisory group. The review has considered National Parks & AONBs in England, including the role of these areas in relation to other places designated for environmental purposes. Landscapes in Wales & Scotland are under devolved administrations & therefore don't fall under the scope of the review.

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.

Objectives: In the context of meeting both local & national priorities & wider environmental governance, the review will examine & make recommendations on:-

- \* the existing statutory purposes for National Parks & AONBs & how effectively they're being met.
- \* the alignment of these goals set out in the 25 year plan for the environment.
- \* the case for extension or creation of new designated areas.
- \* to improve individual & collective governance of National Parks & AONBs, and how that governance interacts with other national assets.
- \* the financing of National Parks & AONBs.
- \* how to enhance the environment & 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 & wellbeing.
- \* how well National Parks & AONBs support communities.

Please see below the Interim findings of the review-

**Landscapes review - National Parks and AONBs:** Review to consider the next steps for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty sites (AONBs) in England.

## Interim findings of the landscapes review

### Letters between Julian Glover and Michael Gove setting out the interim findings of the designated landscapes review

July 2019

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## **Letter from Julian Glover to Michael Gove**

Julian Glover  
**BY EMAIL**

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra

Seacole Building

2 Marsham Street

London SW1P 4DF

15 July 2019

### **DESIGNATED LANDSCAPES REVIEW**

Dear Secretary of State,

It is a year since I began leading the Designated Landscapes Review, which the government commissioned in response to the 25-year Environment Plan.

I intend to be ready to publish a complete report in the autumn. Before then we have agreed that it would be helpful to provide you with a short guide to our thoughts.

This letter sets out in broad terms what we have found, what we think could be done better and what officials might start doing now to prepare to implement the review, if ministers decide to do so.

#### **What we have done**

I have made sure our review has been open and responsive, and have given everyone a chance to tell us what they think.

In the last year members of our panel of six have been to every English National Park and - soon - will have been to every AONB, as well as to National Parks in Scotland and many unprotected landscapes.

Our call for evidence received over 2,500 responses - detailed and enthusiastic submissions from organisations and individuals. We have held many meetings in London with bodies representing those interested in our landscapes. We have also worked with the Policy Lab team in the Cabinet Office, who have made powerful films working with people whose voices are less likely to be heard, including those in cities who are not traditional visitors to the countryside - and we hope an ambitious response to this will be a core part of the new ways our landscapes work.

People everywhere have been generous with their time and ideas. I thank in particular the members of our panel: Sarah Mukherjee, Fiona Reynolds, Jim Dixon, Ewen Cameron and Jake Fiennes, as well as the excellent support we have received from Defra officials.

## **What we have found**

The message from all this work has been vigorous and clear. We should not be satisfied with what we have at the moment. It falls short of what can be achieved, what the people of our country want and what the government says it expects in the 25-year plan for the environment.

Some of this failure comes from the fact that our protected landscapes have not been given the tools, the funding and the direction to do the job we should now expect of them. I want to praise the commitment of those who work to protect our landscapes today. Everywhere I've seen energy, enthusiasm and examples of success.

Supporting schools, youth ranger schemes, farm clusters, joint working with all sorts of organisations, tourism, planning and design, backing local businesses, coping with the complexities of local and central government - things like this happen every day, not much thanks is given for them and yet much of it is done well, for relatively small sums.

But all this impressive effort is not achieving anything like as much as it could.

Why? Because the national zeal of the founding mission for landscape protection has been eroded. There is a culture which has neither kept pace with changes in our society nor responded with vigour to the decline in the diversity of the natural environment.

We need to reignite the fire and vision which brought this system into being in 1949. We need our finest landscapes to be places of natural beauty which look up and outwards to the nation they serve.

In essence, our review will ask not ‘what do protected landscapes need?’, but “what does the nation need from them today?”.

## **What needs to change**

The underlying argument of our review is that our system of designated landscapes should be a positive force for improvement with big ambitions made possible by these 44 areas uniting to become more than the sum of their parts.

More must be done for nature and beauty. More must be done for people who live in and visit our landscapes, too. And a lot more must be done to meet the needs of our many fellow citizens who do not know the countryside at the moment, or do not always feel welcome in it, but should be able to enjoy it. Our landscapes are open and free to all, but nonetheless can seem exclusive.

- Our system of landscape protection today is fragmented, sometimes marginalised and often misunderstood. We believe this leads to duplication, wastes resources and diminishes ambition. We will make proposals to address this, and will explore the potential for a National Landscape Service in the final report.
- We think in particular the current system of governance for National Parks should be reformed. Time after time we have heard and seen that boards are too big, do not do a good job in setting a strategic direction and ambition, and are unrepresentative of both society and, at times, of the things parks should be leading on, such as natural beauty, climate change, and diversity.
- We think that AONBs should be strengthened, with increased funding, new purposes and a greater voice on development. We have been impressed by what they often achieve now through partnership working.
- We would like to see the encouragement of a wider range of non-designated systems of landscape protection. This could include new areas of forest, along the lines of the successful National Forest in the East Midlands, and support for proposals for new urban National Parks such as the one proposed for the West Midlands, and the impressive work being done to bring the South Pennines together as a regional park. We also praise London’s National Park City movement.
- The 2010 Lawton Review and the most recent 2016 State of Nature Report are explicit about the crisis of nature and what needs to be done to bring about a recovery. We agree and we want to see designated landscapes lead the response.
- Our system of landscape protection has been hampered by having little influence over the things which have done most harm to nature, including a system of farming subsidies which, although it has improved, rewarded intensification regardless of the consequences.

- But we would also like to see a change in internal culture to do more on this. As the National Trust put it, in its submission to our call for evidence, “We believe that National Parks and AONBs are not currently delivering on their duty in relation to nature”.
- We would like to see designated landscapes become leaders in Nature Recovery Networks.
- Our landscapes are largely farmed landscapes and we think a partnership with farming which promotes nature recovery is needed. Our designated landscapes should be bold about the potential of subsidy reform, with the forthcoming Environmental Land Management System. We think all protected landscapes should be priorities for ELMs payments delivering nature recovery through farming.
- We would like to see them develop landscape scale, long term strategies to assess and improve natural capital in the areas they oversee as it is now, and as it could become - working with landowners through local ELMs plans.
- We want to see them take a lead in the national response to climate change in order to help them meet the goal of net-zero by 2050.
- We have found that many National Parks have not moved quickly or smartly enough to reflect our changing society, and in some cases show little desire to do so. We are all effectively paying for Designated Landscapes through taxation. Much more must be done to encourage first time visitors and a more diverse range of visitors.
- We heard repeatedly that the MOSAIC programme working with BAME groups had been a huge success - but it was a one-off, and largely fell away when its initial funding ran out. We want to see a new version of it brought in as a priority.
- Although there are already examples of links with the National Health Service there is no overall agreement about how these two great institutions from the post-war settlement might work together. Social prescribing has huge potential to improve physical and mental health at low cost.
- In almost every place we visited we heard similar warnings about the challenge communities face. Residents are getting older. Local communities see housing costs climb while not much affordable housing is built to add to the supply. We will make a specific proposal in our final report to for a proactive way for landscapes to address the shortage of social housing.
- We recognise that all calls for more public money to be spent will face understandable scrutiny. Budgets are tight for a reason. But doing more will cost more. We want to see our landscapes funded from a wider range of sources and will make proposals in the final report.
- But as John Dower wrote in 1945, “if National Parks are provided for the nation they should clearly be provided for by the nation”. At the very least we want to see existing budgets for National Parks secured in real terms and sustained for a further five year period. Any new

National Park designations must be funded with additional money not from the current budget.

- We believe there is a very strong case for increasing funding to AONBs. We will make proposals in our final review.
- We have been asked to give our view on the potential for new designations. We will set this out in our final report.

With best wishes



Julian Glover

Independent Review Lead

Designated Landscapes Review

## Letter from Michael Gove to Julian Glover



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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16 July 2019

Dear Julian,

Thank you for your letter detailing the interim findings of your Review of Designated Landscapes. I am immensely grateful to you and your panel for all the hard work you have undertaken to date.

Last year I asked you to conduct a Review of England's Designated Landscapes as part of the Government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment. We recognised the value of beautiful landscapes in creating a thriving natural environment - I asked you and your panel to ask open questions about how National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty could meet the needs of those who work, live and seek enjoyment there, and be truly special places for nature and beauty.

One year on, I am delighted to read your analysis of what needs to change and can be done. I believe your findings will spark enthusiasm and debate in all those who care about our designated landscapes – and for those who do not ordinarily consider National Parks and AONBs to be 'their' places. Your report can also provide the foundation for the renewed vigour that I agree is needed to rediscover that national zeal illustrated by those founders of the National Parks movement that you describe.

It is fitting that, on the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Act of Parliament that made our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty possible, you are setting out your views on what is needed for the long-term health of these places. You urge ambition – this is a challenge and a call to action to which all should listen. I look forward to the completion of your report, and your formal recommendations later this year. With every good wish,



**Michael Gove**



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Another main subject on the agenda was the AONBs Draft Declaration for Nature. "The Colchester Declaration"

Set against a backdrop of unprecedented concern for the future of the natural world, and intergovernmental reports that the current global response to the effects of human impact on nature is insufficient, the AONB network believes that now is the time to significantly increase the scale & pace of our delivery to address these issues.

Using the unique network & partnership model, the AONB network made a collective Declaration on Nature in AONBs setting out a strategy for change. The pledges include the following :-

- \* to create opportunities within AONBS for people to make an emotional connection with nature.
- \* to prepare a nature recovery plan for each AONB.
- \* that at least 200,000 hectares of SSSIs in AONBs will be in a favourable condition by 2030.
- \* that each AONB adopts a species on the threatened list & prepare & deliver a species action plan.

The AONB network has called on the government & the Welsh government to provide the power & resources to ensure that the aspirations outlined in the declaration can be met.