



Report of the Gower AONB Officer

Gower AONB Advisory Group – 26 February 2024

AONB Rebrand Proposals

Background

In England, the National Landscapes Association (formally the National Association of AONBs) has been working with DEFRA (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) to develop proposals to reinforce our commitment to protecting Areas of Outstanding Natural Heritage – their natural and cultural heritage, and to launch ambitious targets addressing the aims of the AONB family.

The intention is to raise the profile of these landscapes, to protect them for the future, and to make sure that everyone can enjoy them.

The proposals include:

- **For the AONBs to be known as National Landscapes.**
The legal designation will remain as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but the new name and identity is a powerful illustration of the size and scale of the entire network, with National Landscapes covering 14% of the land area of England and 5% of the land area of Wales.
- **To recommit ourselves to protecting these precious landscapes – their natural and cultural heritage.**
We must continue to protect and regenerate our landscapes. They are under threat from climate change and biodiversity loss. We need to help our communities understand the history and significance of our landscapes, to help shape them for the future, to tackle the Nature and Climate Emergencies.
- **To ensure that everyone can enjoy these landscapes.**
Bring people together via strong, inclusive partnerships. We want to collaborate on protecting and regenerating our landscapes, while opening them up for all to enjoy.

These proposals have already been adopted in England, with a formal launch held on 22nd November 2023.

National Landscapes now have a name which really underscores the vital contribution of these places, and of the partnerships that care for them. The natural

beauty of these areas is the sum of their 'sense of place': including geology, climate, landform and species which together give rise to the industry, heritage, culture and language of a place. Together these iconic places form our national identity: from the Isles of Scilly to the Northumberland Coast, Kent Downs to Gower.

National Landscapes aspire to be exemplars of how thriving, diverse communities can work with and for nature in the UK: providing clean air and water, restoring ecosystems, providing food, storing carbon to mitigate the effects of climate change, safeguarding against drought and flooding, whilst also nurturing people's health and wellbeing.

In Wales, the AONB's have the opportunity to adopt these proposals ahead of a celebratory event in the Senedd in April, which will mark the 75th anniversary of the milestone legislation which marked the establishment of the AONBs – the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Because of the work carried out by the English National Landscapes, the costs of adopting the changes would be minimal – a draft logo was included in the design work funded by Defra, should the proposals be adopted.

Although the proposals were originally focused on the English AONBs, adopting them in Wales would have benefits for the 4 Welsh AONBs:

- Helping to raise their public profile.
- Emphasising their part in a national family of protected landscapes, whilst retaining their individual identities.
- Emphasising their importance in responding to the nature and climate emergencies.
- Helping to build strong, inclusive partnerships.

The proposals support both Welsh Government and Swansea Council corporate priorities, ensuring that Gower AONB remains relevant and central to future action on nature and climate emergencies, and the needs of both our landscapes and our communities.

The rebranding proposals are supported by Brand Guidelines, setting out a visual identity and tone of voice, ensuring that all the National Landscapes are recognised a part of a strong national family, who share the same values.

The Gower AONB Advisory Group was briefed on the proposals by John Watkins (Chief Executive of NLA) on 29th January 2024, with a discussion following the presentation.

The members of the Advisory Group were asked to submit written responses to the proposals ahead of the next meeting of the group.

Members Responses

Members of the group have submitted 8 written response (as on 19th February) – copies of these are attached as below. Overall, 7 were in favour of adopting the proposals.

Most responses were positive, although several highlighted the need for this to be a real change indirection, with real changes, not just window dressing. The issue of resources for the work of the AONB team, and the need for this to be a real partnership was also highlighted.

There was a desire to retain the “Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” as part of the formal name – both as an acknowledgement of Gower’s place as the first AONB, and because of it use by local businesses.

While some mentioned the need to raise the profile of Gower (and the work of the partnership), others spoke of “if it a’int broke, don’t fix it”. For some, the policy connections were important, moving to reinforce the importance of the AONB, and its relevance to local government/Welsh Government priorities.

There will be further opportunity to discuss the issues, before the Advisory Group makes a recommendation at its meeting on 26th February.

Mike Scott,
19th February 2024