



Landscapes review (National Parks and AONBs):

The Government are seeking public support for their proposed legislative changes, and the potential effects on different groups and interests. They are also interested to hear any wider views on other aspects of their review. The consultation closes at 11:45pm on **9 April 2022**. This consultation is open to the public.

They have a consultation website: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/future-landscapes-strategy/government-response-to-the-landscapes-review/> Also one can email them at:

Landscapesconsultation@defra.gov.uk

The National Park have submitted an [initial response to Defra's somewhat delayed response to the Landscape Review](#). The National Park say ""Defra's response to the Landscape Review is welcome, but nature recovery and climate change demand greater resource and ambition" The [Campaign for National Parks](#) have also welcomed the proposals but say it must be backed by resources and delivery plan to meet the Government's own net zero legally binding net zero and biodiversity targets. We agree with both of these comments.

To help prepare responses we are lucky to have had some research carried out by one of our volunteers. Luca Wilde reports as follows:

Landscape Report

Report by: Report by Luca Wilde¹, 1st Class BA Hons, English Literature. SDN Researcher

England and Wales are home to 15 National Parks, the legislation behind the protection and preservation of these specific areas of natural significance was initially devised by Sir Arthur Hobhouse in his 1947 report. In addition, England and Wales are home to 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) which meet Hobhouse's original requirements that these should be areas of 'great natural beauty, a high value for open-air recreation and substantial continuous extent'². Both AONBs and National Parks are designated and protected under the [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#). The purpose of the designations of National Parks is to conserve and enhance their natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and promote public understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities. Furthermore, the legislation was originally created to promote preservation of these landscapes and also reiterate this message to the public who experience and appreciate them.

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² See: <https://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/learning-about/about-the-national-park/our-history>

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This legislation was originally considered sufficient for protecting both AONBs and National Parks; however, in a modern world which is more aware of the effects of climate change and the environmental impact we have on our places of natural significance, a review of this legislation needed to be carried out. This independent review was led by journalist Julian Glover and was commissioned by the government in May 2018 into the 'efficacy of protections for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).'³ This report was published in September 2019 and consisted of [twenty-seven proposals](#) that focused on implementing revised ideas to improve the protection and governance of our National Parks and AONBs.

As mentioned, a key factor that the report focuses on is the preservation of these areas aiming to achieve this by aligning the revised protections with the goals set out in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#). This can be seen specifically in proposal 3 of the report which focuses in part on the implementation of tree planting and peatland restoration which must be backed up by stronger status in law.

As well as the protection of the landscape and biodiversity the report focuses on the importance of National Parks and AONBs in the societal significance of these areas. Particularly in proposal 7 of the review which aims to connect all people with our national landscapes. This is being implemented for the health and wellbeing of all sections of society and aimed to build on the [existing 8-point plan](#).

Additionally, Julian Glover placed a great emphasis in proposal 26 on the existing governance for National Parks and AONBs and how effectively they are being managed at both a national and local level. The report also states that the individual governance of National Parks is important. This is evident specifically in proposal 13 which proposes that a ranger service be set up in all our national landscapes to not only better inform and guide visitors, but also to create a more authoritative presence in these areas.

Comparably, the review underlines the 'process of designating National Parks and AONBs and extending boundary areas, with a view to improving and expediting the process.'⁴ This is also echoed in proposal 25 which suggests bringing National Parks and AONBs together as one family of national landscapes under a new organisation with the proposed title of National Landscape Service (NLS). As well as bringing these organisations together under a cohesive title, the report also proposed that AONBs should be strengthened, with the possible renaming of AONBs as 'National Landscapes' to reflect their national significance.

Despite these ambitious suggestions, the report recognises in proposal 27 that they are all reliant on the necessity of increased funding and further government interaction in order to put them into action.

In January 2022, after over 2 years, the government released its response to Glover's in-depth review.

As stated in the review, a key concept put forward is the need for preservation of areas of natural significance. There is a specific government response to proposal 3 which demands greater works to be done for tree and peatland restoration. The government response claims it will treble tree planting rates in England through the [England Trees Action Plan](#) which is funded in part by the Nature for Climate fund which is worth more than £750 million across this parliament. The government response also commits to fund at least 35,000 ha of peatland restoration by 2025. This includes a £2.7 million

³ See: <https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/news/examining-government-response-landscapes-review/>

⁴ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response>

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investment through the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme into the Great North Bog.⁵

Despite claiming to offer funds for the environmental regrowth, some feel it is very vague in the nature of how this applies to National Parks and AONBs. This sentiment is felt by Rebecca Wrigley, Chief Executive of Rewilding Britain. Rebecca claims that although the gov response is committing to provide funds for farmers to rewild and restore natural habitats under new [Environmental Land Management schemes](#), she still feels there has been a major 'missed opportunity' by failing to adopt Glover's recommendations in regards to wilder areas.⁶ The charity is calling on the UK Government and devolved administrations to create core rewilding areas on public land across 10% of national parks. The charity is asking that another 50% of the parks become nature recovery areas.⁷ Charities like Rewilding Britain and others agree that more definitive plans need to be put in place for the restoration of National Parks and AONBs. The misleading government response to land restoration is made apparent in recent LINK [report which](#) puts the figure of land protected for nature within National Parks and AONBs at only 3% despite the 26% of land the government currently claims is protected.⁸ This is recognised by Joan Edwards of the Wildlife Trust who claims in response to these figures that more needs to be done to restore these 'amazing places.'⁹

Glover's review also focuses on the access and inclusion for society in regards to National Parks and AONBs. The government responded to this call for a wider focus of these areas being accessed by all society by supporting initiatives such as [Farming in Protected Landscapes Fund](#) to support or reward landowners for offering enhanced access to their land in some circumstances. In addition, it has committed to support the [green social prescribing pilots](#) at several sites in or near protected landscapes, which will test how connecting people with nature can improve mental wellbeing. These initiatives are both examples of how the government claims to enhance access to National Parks and AONBs and also considers them a potentially instrumental support tool for the mental health and wellbeing of visitors.

National Park England responded to the government's commitment to support these types of initiatives positively, stating that they are looking forward to working with the government to implement them, recognising that 'these special places can inspire future generations to care for the environment'.¹⁰ Despite this seemingly optimistic approach, there are some that are less confident in the government's commitment. The Open Space Society (OSS) suggest that it is 'not clear how greater public access, from all parts of society, will be achieved' and much more work is needed from the government from the limited scope within the response.¹¹ The CPRE reiterate this frustration as the organisation wants to see more progress made on 'ensuring every child spends a night in the countryside and for it to be embedded in the national curriculum'.¹² Again, the government is faced with more pressure to act on the proposals put forward in Glover's review.

⁵ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response#foreword>

⁶ See: <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/news-and-views/press-releases-and-media-statements/uk-government-response-to-glover-review>

⁷ See: <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/news-and-views/press-releases-and-media-statements/uk-government-response-to-glover-review>

⁸ See: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/time-nature-be-restored-national-parks>

⁹ See: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/time-nature-be-restored-national-parks>

¹⁰ See: <https://www.oss.org.uk/a-step-up-for-englands-protected-landscapes/>

¹¹ See: <https://www.oss.org.uk/a-step-up-for-englands-protected-landscapes/>

¹² See: <https://www.cnp.org.uk/news/campaign-national-parks-calls-new-landscapes-bill-government-responds-glover-review>

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As mentioned in the Landscape Review there is a call for greater governance on a national and local level. The government responded to this in part by introducing more definitive sanctions for unruly behaviour in National Parks and AONBs. An example of this is the implementation of Fixed Penalty Notices for byelaw infringements and also make [Public Space Protection Orders](#) (PSPOs) to deter genuinely antisocial behaviour. These are put in place in order to increase the presence of authorities and give them the legitimate means to impose punishment within these areas. National Park's England bolsters these suggestions from the government claiming that National Park Authorities (NPA) are 'key to generating both local action and delivery on the ground and to ensuring accountability.'¹³ It is clear that these ideas are positive steps forward to create more governance; however, as Emilia Clarke at Wildlife and Countryside Link remarks these 'purposes should be complemented with the duties, powers, plans, monitoring, resources, and governance needed to deliver them.'¹⁴ Many others working in National Parks and AONBs also recognise this is a difficult process without the necessary funding and support to back it. The [New Forest Verderers](#) even went as far to claim that the new fines for byelaw infringements was an expensive process and sometimes were not even worth the hassle, exposing the government's response as relatively redundant. Clearly there is feeling that more needs to be done from the government in order to heighten this local authoritative presence and to curb any anti-social behaviour in National Parks and AONBs.

Another key factor referenced in the Glover review is the need to solidify the relationship between National Parks and AONBs under the new collective organisation of National Landscape Services. The government disagreed with this proposal stating that there is no need to create 'another organisation within an already complex governance system, at the cost of great public expense.'¹⁵ Rather than having a new organisation the government has committed to reinvigorating existing organisations through [the Joint Agreement](#). This agreement will put more of pressure on organisations such as Natural England as statutory advisor on England's landscapes. The government response does however appear to recognise the importance of AONBs and are testing out using the title of 'National Landscapes' for existing AONBs. More specifically it will replace former Countryside Agency guidance for AONB Partnerships, to set out clear governance principles for AONBs.

In response there has been relatively positive reactions, notably from Kate Ashbrook, the general secretary for Open Spaces Society who claims she is relieved that government has dropped the idea of an expensive and bureaucratic new National Landscape Service suggesting that the partnership is much more appropriate.¹⁶ In addition, government organisations have voiced their approval of this proposal as Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England claims that he looks 'forward to playing a leading role in the national landscapes partnership and working closely with Government [and] protected landscape bodies'.¹⁷ Organisations are relatively uniform in their response against the proposed NLS, but they also demand the implementation of the changes put forward by the Joint

¹³ See: <https://www.nationalparksengland.org.uk/news-and-media/press-releases/landscapes-review-government-response>

¹⁴ See: <https://www.wcl.org.uk/delivering-nature-climate-people-government-response-to-glover-review-should-include.asp>

¹⁵ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response#foreword>

¹⁶ See: <https://www.oss.org.uk/a-step-up-for-englands-protected-landscapes/>

¹⁷ See: <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2022/01/17/coverage-of-the-governments-response-to-the-landscapes-review/>

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Agreement; as CPRE chief executive Crispin Truman states, 'the government must now put forward funding and legislation to turn rhetoric into action.'¹⁸

The government was urged to provide more funding for National Parks in proposal 27 of the Glover review. In response, the government claims the increase of almost £1 million to its own core grant to support AONB teams for the current financial year. Although, it does recognise that this is part of a 'relatively limited scope to increase the core grant' and that this grant does not provide the 'opportunity to increase funding to the scale needed to deliver [their] vision.'¹⁹ As a result, the government has suggested that much of the funding could be generated through 'the sale or trade via environmental markets' and also a reliance on 'private investment through [their] Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund'.²⁰

Kate Ashbrook at the OSS responds directly to these claims suggesting it is 'deeply uncomfortable' to expect private funding to support one of our national assets which 'should be funded by the nation'.²¹ This sentiment is again echoed by Trevor Beattie of the South Downs National Park who comments on the lack of detail given about the private finance that the government has put forward.²² There is a collective agreement amongst organisations and individuals involved in the preservation of National Parks and AONBs, that this is not sufficient evidence of funding.

Furthermore, it can be felt that the government response to Glover's review offers limited commitment to provide legitimate funding and support for the preservation and restoration of these areas of natural significance.

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- d) Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, *Landscapes review: final report - summary of findings*, September 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-national-parks-and-aonbs-2018-review/landscapes-review-summary-of-findings>
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- f) The Wildlife Trusts, *Time for nature to be restored in National Parks*, January 2022 <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/time-nature-be-restored-national-parks>

¹⁸ See: <https://www.cpre.org.uk/news/our-iconic-landscapes-will-they-get-the-money-they-need/>

¹⁹ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response>

²⁰ See: <https://www.oss.org.uk/a-step-up-for-englands-protected-landscapes/>

²¹ See: <https://www.oss.org.uk/a-step-up-for-englands-protected-landscapes/>

²² See: <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/landscape-review-sdnpa-response/>

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- i) National Parks England, *Landscapes review - government response*, June 2021 <https://www.nationalparksengland.org.uk/news-and-media/press-releases/landscapes-review-government-response>
- j) Wildlife and Countryside Link, *Delivering for nature, climate and people: What the Government's response to the Glover Review must include*, December 2021 <https://www.wcl.org.uk/delivering-nature-climate-people-government-response-to-glover-review-should-include.asp>
- k) Countryfile, *Snowdonia*, February 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0014jgc/countryfile-snowdonia>
- l) Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, *Landscapes review (National Parks and AONBs): government response: Foreword*, January 2022 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response#foreword>
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