



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	Cabinet – 16 March 2022
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 10
Subject	Glover Review of Protected Landscapes - Consultation response to Government Report
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Jeff Haine, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning
Accountable officer	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager Tel: (01993) 861686 Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To note the report and proposed consultation response to the government's formal consultation.
Annexes	Annex A. Consultation questions and proposed West Oxfordshire DC responses to the questions.
Recommendation/s	<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. To approve Annex A for submission to Government as the Council's response to the consultation on the Government response to the Glover Review.b. To give delegated authority to the Chief Executive to make minor alterations to the responses in Annex A in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning prior to submission.
Corporate priorities	Within the consultation response attention has been drawn to meeting the challenges of the climate and ecological emergencies as well as supporting Council Plan's vision, in particular in relation to Climate Action, Healthy Towns and Villages, a Vibrant District Economy, Strong Local Communities and Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population.
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	A range of Officers across Publica have been consulted on this report. No public consultation has taken place, however members of the public can respond directly to the Government's

	consultation at: https://consult.defra.gov.uk/future-landscapes-strategy/government-response-to-the-landscapes-review/
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I. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At the beginning of 2018, the government published its environment plan - A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment¹ – which sets out goals for improving the environment within a generation, ‘leaving it in a better state than we found it.’ A key part of the approach is to focus on the recovery of nature and the enhancement of the beauty of landscapes. Within this, the Plan commits to conserving and enhancing ‘the natural beauty of our landscapes by reviewing National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) for the 21st century, including whether more may be needed.’
- 1.2 Following up on the commitment, in May 2018 the government sought an independent review into whether protections for National Parks and AONBs are still fit for purpose. In particular, what might be done better, what changes will help and whether the definitions and systems in place are still valid. The review, led by Julian Glover, published its final report² in 2019 and included 27 wide-ranging proposals.
- 1.3 West Oxfordshire District Council submitted evidence to the Glover Review in December 2018.
- 1.4 The Glover Report argued that more must be done for nature and natural beauty, for the people who live in and visit our landscapes, and to introduce those who are not familiar with the countryside to get to know it, with an emphasis on ensuring that our national landscapes are for everyone.
- 1.5 The government has now published a Policy Paper as their response³ to the Glover Review and has invited consultation feedback to that response from local authorities, other interested organisations and members of the public. The consultation is in the form of a list of set questions⁴ with a deadline for completion by 9 April 2022.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 The government’s response emphasises the benefits people get from having access to nature-rich landscapes, benefits which have been sharply focused over the last two years. National Parks and AONBs – known as our ‘protected landscapes’ - are seen as a vital resource, particularly recently in supporting the nation’s health and well-being, but one that can be hard to reach and also experience significant visitor management challenges. In addition to boosting biodiversity, improving public access for all is, therefore, identified as a priority.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-national-parks-and-aonbs-2018-review>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response>

⁴ <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/future-landscapes-strategy/government-response-to-the-landscapes-review/>

2.2 Reflecting on the comprehensive findings by Glover, the Policy Paper sets out to redefine the role for protected landscapes. The vision is for:

‘A coherent national network of beautiful, nature-rich spaces that all parts of society can easily access and enjoy. Protected landscapes will support thriving local communities and economies, improve our public health and wellbeing, drive forward nature recovery, and build our resilience to climate change.’

2.3 The Government's response describes some of the commitments it has already made since the Glover Review was published, such as:

- Protecting 30% of UK land for nature by 2030 (30 by 30)⁵. Achieving 30 by 30 will rely on improvements in how National Parks and AONBs are protected and managed for nature recovery.
- Undertaking an All-England Assessment⁶ by Natural England to explore new approaches to improve landscapes for people and nature, particularly in and around towns and cities, and enable a more collaborative process to designate new National Parks and AONBs.
- Launching the ‘Farming in Protected Landscapes’⁷ programme which funds projects to deliver ‘nature recovery, mitigation of the impacts of climate change, provision of opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand landscape and cultural heritage, and support for nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses.’ The Cotswolds National Landscape (Cotswolds Conservation Board) is administering this 3-year Defra fund for the Cotswolds which is helping to deliver the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan, including contributing towards Evenlode Catchment Partnership project.
- Publishing the Net Zero Strategy which sets the ambition to use land more effectively to tackle climate change, for which protected landscapes have a key role. The Cotswolds Conservation Board are currently updating their Climate Change Strategy Topic Paper.
- Announcing funds for nature’s recovery through the 2021 Spending Review. Designated landscapes have a major role to play in achieving, and benefitting from, these funds. The Cotswolds Conservation Board adopted a Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan in October 2021⁸.

2.4 The Government’s response to the Glover Review are set out in four themed chapters, some of the key issues of which are summarised below. These are:

1. A more coherent national network
2. Nature and climate
3. People and place
4. Supporting local delivery

⁵<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-commits-to-protect-30-of-uk-land-in-boost-for-biodiversity>

⁶<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/natural-england-announces-landmark-new-programme-for-protected-landscapes>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-farmers-in-protected-landscapes> ⁷

⁸ <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/looking-after/cotswolds-nature-recovery-plan/>

A more coherent national network

- 2.5 The Glover Review highlighted the opportunity to unify protected landscapes, providing more consistent national leadership and setting a clear mission. The government agrees that the national significance of AONBs should be reflected in their names and is proposing to rebrand/rename them as 'National Landscapes'. The Cotswolds AONB adopted the name 'Cotswolds National Landscape' in 2020.
- 2.6 The government is proposing to provide strategic direction through the establishment of a new national landscapes partnership (building on the existing collaboration between National Parks England and the National Association for AONBs, complemented by roles for the National Trails and National Parks Partnerships) and a new national landscape strategy which will inform the development and delivery of management plans.
- 2.7 Given that National Parks and AONBs are seen as equally important parts of the government's vision, their statutory purposes are to be more closely aligned in order to bring greater consistency in how these areas are protected and managed.

Nature and climate

- 2.8 The Glover Review highlighted that nature has been in long-term decline in the protected landscapes and that more can and should be done to restore nature and respond to climate change within these areas, with an emphasis on action to make these special places bigger, better and more joined up spaces for nature, and to help tackle climate change and adapt to its impacts.
- 2.9 Given their spatial scale, the government identifies protected landscapes as having an important role to play in delivering landscape-scale schemes, such as the Nature Recovery Network and the associated Local Nature Recovery Strategies. All protected landscapes are to have clear visions for nature recovery.
- 2.10 The current statutory purpose to 'conserve and enhance' is identified as needing to be strengthened. It is proposed to amend the statutory purpose so that:
- a core function of protected landscapes is to drive nature recovery
 - it is more specific with regards to nature outcomes and explicitly mention biodiversity. and
 - the principle of natural capital is included to capture the societal value of nature and encompass a broader range of ecosystem services.
- 2.11 The government highlights a number of options for how the special status of protected landscapes can be reflected in environmental land management schemes' design and delivery, as part of the 'agricultural transition' and in recognition that farmers in these areas are well-placed to deliver on environmental priorities.

People and place

- 2.12 Glover highlighted the opportunities for protected landscapes to deliver for everyone so that the benefits for health and wellbeing are available to all parts of society, especially considering the need to reduce health inequalities. The government's response sets out a number of ideas on how to achieve 'landscapes for all', including recognising the important role played by rangers and volunteers, saying they will 'seek ways to increase the number of rangers engaging with people in protected landscapes.'
- 2.13 The Government accepts the need to have a stronger mission for connecting people and places and proposes to amend the current statutory purpose to:
- highlight the need to improve opportunities and remove barriers to access for all parts of society
 - clearly reference public health and wellbeing as an outcome, and
 - take a more active role in supporting access than just promoting opportunities
- 2.14 While accepting the need to amend the current statutory purposes in relation to nature recovery, access and health and wellbeing, the government does not agree with the introduction of a new statutory purpose to foster the economic and community vitality of the area, arguing that the existing statutory duty, related to the economic and social well-being of local communities and consideration of the rural economy, is sufficient.
- 2.15 It is worth noting that the current purposes for the Cotswolds Conservation Board are already more comprehensive than that for other AONBs (other than the Chilterns). The two key purposes of the Cotswolds Conservation Board are to:
- conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB
 - increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB, ensuring that these complement the conservation and enhancement of the area
- In fulfilling these roles, the Board seeks to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the AONB.
- 2.16 The government's response to Glover has an extensive section on sustainable tourism, with much of the emphasis on managing visitor pressures as a result of increased visitor numbers and an increase in anti-social and hostile behaviour.
- 2.17 In terms of planning, the Glover Review identified the valuable contribution AONB teams can make in helping to deliver good quality development through the use of a range of tools, including evidence gathering and issuing of planning and design advice to inform plan-making and planning applications. The Review proposed that the role of AONB teams in the planning system should be strengthened but also highlighted that these teams do not always have the resources to meaningfully engage. While the government response does seek views on how the teams' role can be strengthened,

it mainly focuses on explaining that the current planning reforms will need to consider the special role of protected landscapes.

- 2.18 Glover highlighted how certain permitted development rights may impact landscape quality and proposed that the existing rights are reviewed. The Government's response is: 'We recognise that permitted development rights can play an important role in delivering new homes, particularly in rural areas. This benefits householders and businesses. We will continue to monitor the use of permitted development rights in protected landscapes, and identify future opportunities to review their use.'
- 2.19 The review set out their concerns regarding the availability of affordable homes to support sustainable communities in protected landscapes. The government's response explains that this is not just an issue for the protected landscapes and puts forward examples for the delivery of suitable housing in rural areas:
- 'Rural Exception Sites deliver affordable housing in perpetuity to meet local needs in rural areas. When used effectively, these sites can provide vital affordable housing for local communities. We have recently published planning practice guidance to help those involved in the process to bring forward more of these sites in the future
 - Homes England's funding prospectus for the new 2021-26 Affordable Homes Programme continues to support the delivery of rural housing'

Supporting local delivery

- 2.20 While the Review praised the excellent work and commitment of the lead partners, it also identified the need to improve local delivery, highlighting that the boards do not always function as well as they could. The government's response is to propose, in consultation with board members, a flexible package of statutory and non-statutory measures to achieve positive reforms through, for example: setting clear performance standards; strengthening local partnerships; developing skilled, diverse and representative boards; and improving efficiency.
- 2.21 Glover called for strengthened management plans with the setting of clear priorities and actions for nature recovery and the response to climate change. The government wishes to see an alignment of local management plans with relevant national policies and targets, such as the 25 Year Environment Plan and net zero. Natural England are to be given to role of publishing guidance on management plans, reviewing plans and producing and monitoring outcomes.
- 2.22 Given the influence that public bodies can have on the protection and management of protected landscapes, the Review highlighted the 'vagueness' of the need for them to 'have regard' to the statutory purposes of these areas. Similarly, the expectation on the contribution of public bodies in the delivery of management plans is not clear. The government commits to produce clear guidance for public bodies.
- 2.23 Glover emphasised the need for additional resources, particularly in AONB teams. The government sets out an ambitious new vision for the protected landscapes and recognises that this ambition must be matched by equivalent resources. They

support a new funding model to deliver increased and more diverse sources of funding, giving as examples, 'private and blended financing', such as through the sale or trade via environmental markets of the various benefits nature provides – from carbon sequestration to improved water quality.

Consultation feedback

- 2.24 The government is calling for feedback on their proposals to implement the Glover Review. A draft consultation response is provided at Annex A. As many of the government's responses align with West Oxfordshire District Council's corporate priorities such as addressing the climate and ecological emergencies, supporting strong local communities, and improving health and well-being, overall there is general support and agreement with the government's approach to enhancing protected landscapes.
- 2.25 However, there are two particular observations to make. Firstly, the government's response is to the Glover Review of protected landscapes. What is clear, however, is that much of the response is equally applicable to areas without such status. For West Oxfordshire, in many cases, the issues outside of the Cotswolds AONB are similar or the same as those inside the designation, as are the potential solutions. Consideration should therefore also be given to the relationship of the AONB in its wider context, looking at networks and interactions, such as the Evenlode Catchment and the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Network.
- 2.26 Given that many AONBs and National Parks lie within more isolated parts of the country, it could be argued that landscapes closest to urban areas are the ones that need the greatest investment and management in order to maximise, for example, their health and wellbeing benefits.
- 2.27 Secondly, the government's response is silent on the issue of whether the Cotswolds should become a National Park or not. There is no specific mention in the report of the Cotswolds AONB. The suggested consultation response attached at Annex A therefore asks the government to provide clarity that this issue is no longer being pursued.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications at this stage.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications at this stage.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

There are no risks associated with this report.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

Given that this report is to approve a consultation response there are no equalities impacts.

7. ECOLOGICAL AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS

The consultation raises issues related to the ecological and climate emergencies and these are included within the responses to the government's questions.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The only alternative is not to respond to this consultation.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.