

**Report to:** **Strategic Planning Committee**

**Date of Meeting:** 22 October 2019

**Public Document:** Yes

**Exemption:** None

**Review date for release** None



**Subject:** **Glover review of protected landscapes in England**

**Purpose of report:** To inform members of the Glover review of protected landscapes in England and the key findings arising from this report.

**Recommendation:**

- 1. That members endorse all of the recommendations of the Glover report on protected landscapes in England.**
- 2. Resolve to await the Governments response to the recommendations; and note that the Chilterns, the Cotswolds and the Dorset and East Devon AONBs are potential candidates for future designation as National Parks.**

**Reason for recommendation:** To inform members of the Glover report.

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**Financial implications:** No specific financial implications at this stage.

**Legal implications:** There are no legal implications from this information report at this time, pending the Government publishing their response to the Glover Review.

**Equalities impact:** Low Impact

**Climate change:** Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk

**Links to background information:**

- The Glover review and supporting documents can be viewed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-national-parks-and-aonbs-2018-review>

**Link to Council Plan:** Delivering and promoting our outstanding environment

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 In May 2018 the government asked Julian Glover to undertake an independent review into whether the protections afforded to National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England are still fit for purpose. The Glover report was published on 21 September 2019 and it considers designated landscape areas in England looking at their future role, management and operation.
- 1.2 Members of this Council will be aware that around 2/3rds of East Devon falls in designated AONBs; the Glover report therefore has a specific and direct relevance to our District and its outstanding landscape qualities. This summary report to committee majors on elements of the Glover report that may be specifically relevant to East Devon, though the Glover report does cover a very broad range of landscape considerations. It is a very interesting report and should be read in full to gain a complete picture. It is highlighted that the Glover report notes potential for a new National Park to be formed from the combination of the Dorset AONB and the East Devon AONB (see page 121 of the report).
- 1.3 It is stressed that the Glover report is a report to Government and is not a consultation document. It is expected that the government will formally respond to the Glover report outlining any actions it may wish to take forward.

## **2 Format of Glover report**

- 2.1 The Glover report considers the protected landscapes of England to be of fundamental importance to the country and to its people, noting that enhancement and improvements to current operations and practices are appropriate. The Glover report focusses on five key areas under each of which are a number of proposals, the key area headings in the report are:
  1. Landscapes Alive for Nature and Beauty
  2. Landscapes for Everyone
  3. Living in Landscapes
  4. More Special Places
  5. New Ways of Workingand the Glover report advises: *“They are not separate but part of one ambition: to strengthen the natural beauty of England’s landscapes in order to serve the country better by improving their biodiversity, and the lives of people who work in them, live in them and enjoy them.”*
- 2.2 The Glover report is, therefore, ambitious in its aspirations and recommendations.

## **3 Overview of key proposals and implications for AONBs**

3.1 Drawing from the Glover report there are a number of recommendations, in the form of proposals, that could have specific implications for AONBs (and also for other designated areas). These therefore have a potential direct bearing on East Devon, key numbered proposals in the report, include:

- a) **Proposal 3:** Strengthened Management Plans should set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery including, but not limited to, wilder areas and responses to climate change (notably through tree planting and peatland restoration). Management Plans should set out (a) an overall vision and (b) detailed and specific ambitions.
- b) **Proposal 5:** A central place for national landscapes in new Environmental Land Management Schemes.
  - Individual Management Plans should be the guiding framework for setting landscape-scale priorities for future payments for public goods which support and enhance the value of nature and natural beauty in all its forms.
  - All national landscapes should have dedicated farm advisers that land managers can trust. Where these are in place now, farmers often work well with them.
- c) **Proposal 6:** A strengthened place for national landscapes in the planning system with AONBs given statutory consultee status along with encouragement to develop local plans and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework. This would be a step change in the role of AONB bodies in respect of plan making, with plan making potentially being most relevant to cases where an AONB crosses local planning authority boundaries (such as in the Blackdown Hills AONB), and in so doing avoiding having differing planning policies (from different local planning authority plans) in different parts of a single AONB. By being a statutory consultee on planning applications there would be a legal obligation on consulting the AONB body under specifically defined circumstances with any comments made would have enhanced weight. A strengthened NPPF would elevate the importance of AONB designations in decision making around planning matters.
- d) **Proposal 13:** A 1,000-strong professional nationwide ranger service across the 44 national designated landscapes. Whilst AONBs and National Parks would retain many functions and staffs this would be a national service and provision.
- e) **Proposal 20:** Further new designated landscapes and a new National Forest. The Glover review considers potential for further designations and also extensions to existing designated areas.
- f) **Proposal 23:** Stronger purposes in law for national landscapes, with new purposes to:
  - Recover, conserve and enhance natural beauty, biodiversity and natural capital, and cultural heritage.
  - Actively connect all parts of society with these special places to support understanding, enjoyment and the nation's health and wellbeing.

- Foster the economic and community vitality of their area in support of the first two purposes.
- g) **Proposal 24:** AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources – with proposals:
- Giving them the same reformed statutory purposes as National Parks (proposal 23). This is highlighted as reflecting the realities that AONBs deliver the same purposes as National Parks.
  - Increasing their funding (proposal 27).
  - Giving them statutory consultee status to strengthen their role in the planning system (proposal 6).
  - Renaming AONBs as ‘National Landscapes’ which is seen as a less wieldy name that elevates them to sit alongside National Parks.
- h) **Proposal 25:** A new National Landscape Service bringing the 44 national landscapes together to achieve more than the sum of their parts. With the service setting out vision and strategy to then be translated into individual management plans for each area and the service driving collaboration across and between designated areas, overseeing a new professional ranger service, representing and promoting the interests of the designated areas and establishing partnerships with other bodies and interests.
- i) **Proposal 26:** Reformed governance to inspire and secure ambition in the national landscapes with the main task of each board being to prepare and drive ambitious delivery of Management Plans, delivering for nature, people and communities.
- j) **Proposal 27:** A new financial model with more money for AONBs - doubling from the current national £6.7 million to £13.4 million, with the uplift in funding from a revised funding formula implemented over a longer period. The local authority funding element for AONBs should continue.

#### 4 Potential for a new National Park covering the Dorset and East Devon AONBs

- 4.1 The Glover report, under Proposal 20, reviews the potential for new National Parks to be designated and advises that “*we think three of the larger AONBs should be considered for National Park status.*” The three AONBs that the report explicitly comments on are:
- a) The Chilterns;
  - b) The Cotswolds; and
  - c) Dorset (though the text advises of ‘Dorset’ being a National Park covering the combined area of Dorset AONB and East Devon AONB).

The Glover report advises of the first of these, the Chilterns, as “*an obvious choice for National Park status*”.

- 4.2 In respect of potential new National Parks the report continues by advising:

***“The Cotswolds and Dorset***

*We received submissions on the case for several other AONBs to become National Parks too.*

*The two that stand out as leading candidates are the Cotswolds AONB and the combined Dorset and East Devon AONBs.*

*The Cotswolds suffers the same challenges of the Conservation Board model as the Chilterns, including a lack of a single strategic local plan with statutory status.*

*The area is world-famous for its natural beauty, hugely popular with visitors from around the world and its landscape and villages are one of the emblems of England. It is a big contributor to the national economy.*

*These things would be better supported by National Park status.*

*Dorset has some of the greatest concentrations of biodiversity in Britain and opportunities for enjoyment. It includes the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site as well as farmed areas inland where development pressures are less strong and support for a change in status may be less established. We heard from opponents as well as supporters of a new status.*

*Both the Cotswolds and the Dorset proposals are strong candidates, alongside the Chilterns, to be considered for National Park status.*

*We suggest Natural England and ministers consider the case for each.”*

- 4.3 National Park authorities attract considerably more funding than AONBs and National Parks and they have far greater public recognition, as important landscape, than AONBs. In governing body operational terms the fundamental difference between National Parks and AONBs is that a National Park Authority is the statutory planning authority for the designated area, this is not the case in AONBs where this role and decision making falls to the relevant local authority or authorities – in the East Devon AONB that is East Devon District Council and Devon County Council, the latter for waste and mineral planning. If a new National Park were created, assuming any relevant legislation and powers follow the pattern elsewhere in the country, a new park authority would be responsible for producing a local plan and planning policy documents and also for determining planning application and allied tasks.
- 4.4 Both AONB bodies and National Park authorities undertake a lot of work around promoting nature conservation interests as well as protecting and enhancing landscape quality and promoting quiet enjoyment of the countryside. National park authorities, however, typically have much more money to do these tasks and they are areas that any new park authority might be expected to be actively involved in. Park authorities also typically promote education opportunities and broader initiatives around supporting community wellbeing. However, in designated National Parks the bulk of local Government services and functions, such as education, transport and highways, housing, environmental health and waste collection are undertaken by the local authority or local authorities that cover the park area.

- 4.5 Whilst there may be seen to be direct and indirect benefits (for example potentially including greater tourism activity) in designation of a new National Park there could be cost implications, which may fall nationally and/or locally, there may also be concerns around loss of power by this authority to another body.
- 4.6 It should be noted that reference is made to the potential for a new National Park to include the East Devon AONB, but not the Blackdown Hills AONB. However, if proposals for a new National Park were progressed it could be expected that there would be a lengthy period of assessment, including in respect of boundaries, along with public consultation before any proposal led to formal designation. If created there could be expected to be transition and longer term arrangements put in place to establish the new park authority, establish decision making and governance arrangements, find premises, appoint staff and undertake a host of allied tasks and activities.