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Welsh Government

## Consultation Document

### Taking the Long View

Consultation on the draft Policy Statement  
for Protected Landscapes in Wales

Date of issue: **28 June 2013**

Responses by **20 September 2013**

## Overview

We are seeking your views and suggestions regarding a draft policy statement for protected landscapes in Wales. The purpose of this policy statement is to set out Welsh Governments' strategic policy framework for areas of outstanding natural beauty and national parks in Wales. It replaces "Policy Statement for the National Parks and National Park Authorities in Wales" (March 2007). This statement now includes the five AONBs as a comprehensive policy statement on the statutory designated landscapes in Wales.

Full Biodiversity, Climate change, Rights of Children and Young People, Equality and Welsh Language impact assessments will be exercised on the draft policy statement during the consultation period. These will be incorporated into the final policy statement.

## How to respond

The closing date for replies is 20 September 2013. You can reply in the following ways.

Address:

Protected Landscape Team  
Landscape and Outdoor Recreation Division  
Welsh Government  
Third Floor South Wing Pillar CO2  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff CF11 3NQ

email: [sportoutdoorrecreationandlandscapes@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sportoutdoorrecreationandlandscapes@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

Telephone: 02920 821529

online response form: This is available on our webpage [www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)

## Further information and related documents

**Large print, Braille and alternate language versions of this document are available on request.**

Please telephone us on 029 2082 1529 or e-mail: [sportoutdoorrecreationandlandscapes@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sportoutdoorrecreationandlandscapes@wales.gsi.gov.uk) to request your copy.

## Contact details

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## Data protection

### How the views and information you give us will be used

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document.

We may also publish responses in full.

Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response.

This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government.

This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances.

If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

## **Ministerial Foreword**

In November 2011, sixty years after the designation of Snowdonia National Park in 1951, as the then Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development I confirmed the designation of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This demonstrated clear recognition from Welsh Ministers that distinctive landscapes, the biodiversity, cultural heritage and historic environment they contain, remain vital and vibrant elements of the environmental, economic and social fabric of Wales.

In April the First Minister outlined his commitment to establish an independent Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery which will provide an opportunity to examine how public services are governed. The Commission will consider arrangements for the governance and delivery of all devolved services. It is encouraged to reflect the contribution made to integrated delivery by non-devolved services and to report any conclusions relevant to the current considerations of the Silk Commission. However, this is not a reason to pause on other work to improve services. This is a coherent approach - legislating and working to improve services and looking ahead through the Commission at how to improve further and continue to do so over a longer term.

This policy statement sets out how I currently wish to see the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks in Wales playing a central role in taking forward our vision for a sustainable Wales. They are well positioned to provide the catalyst and focus for partnerships and innovation that can help tackle the environmental and economic challenges that we face in rural Wales. They are areas which should be in the vanguard of demonstrating how Wales can secure healthy, biologically diverse and productive environments that are managed sustainably, with communities that are safe and sustainable, and where people choose to live and work. Whilst the criteria for their establishment is primarily focused around scenic protection, the importance of the link to maintaining the economic life of the community was recognised in the debate over the founding legislation sixty years ago, and these designated areas have increasingly evolved into areas that are now greatly valued for their economic and cultural benefits. Designation should secure positive benefits for the natural and historic environment of the AONBs and parks, and for their local communities in terms of sustainable socio-economic development. They are wonderful assets for the whole of Wales and must increasingly ensure their work reaches and benefits our most deprived communities, playing an effective role in supporting Welsh Government's tackling poverty agenda

The aim of this statement is to take the long view – to set out the vision for these designated landscapes so as to focus effort on addressing the long term challenges facing people and the environment.

## **Minister for Culture and Sport**

# Taking the Long View

## A Policy Statement for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks

Welsh Government

### 1. Purpose of the Policy Statement

1. The purpose of this policy statement is to set out Welsh Governments' strategic policy framework for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Parks in Wales. It replaces "Policy Statement for the National Parks and National Park Authorities in Wales" (March 2007). This statement now includes the five AONBs as a comprehensive policy statement on the statutory designated landscapes in Wales.
2. The intention is to provide a shared framework but retain flexibility on delivery and the way of managing each area, so that each AONB and National Park statutory management plan can take a different form depending on local context and priorities. Whilst it seeks to provide the policy and operational framework for designated landscapes in order to deliver the shared vision and outcomes, this statement does not stand alone. It should be read in conjunction with the designated area management plans, the development plans, and the 'state of the AONB/park' reports, which over time will be reviewed to meet the aspirations of this statement but in a local context.
3. The outcomes identify the contribution that Welsh Government requires designated landscapes to make in addressing the challenges of sustainable development through the delivery of their statutory purposes.
4. The attainment of this vision and outcomes set out here cannot be achieved by the public sector alone. Of the 25% of Wales that is designated for its natural beauty the majority is not in public ownership and therefore working in partnership with landowners and managers as well as a wide range of other organisations is crucial.
5. As Welsh Government's statutory advisor on landscape and natural beauty, Natural Resources Wales is expected to forge effective liaison and collaborative working practices with those authorities responsible for the designated landscapes and to continue to provide advice and evidence across the breadth of their remit.
6. Public bodies and those who have a duty to have regard for the statutory purposes of AONBs and National Parks are to give appropriate consideration to supporting the delivery of the outcomes set out here. Natural Resources Wales will lead on promoting and monitoring the extent to which organisations subject to this duty do so.

## **2. Context**

### **What are designated landscapes?**

7. AONBs and National Parks contain some of the most beautiful, spectacular and dramatic areas of countryside in Wales. These are landscapes of national importance with designation conferring the highest status for the conservation of landscape. Millions of visitors enjoy these qualities every year.
8. The first purpose of National Parks is 'to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of these areas' and AONBs have a similar statutory purpose. These designated landscapes are currently recognised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Category V protected areas: as places where people live and work, and for their high biodiversity value. National Parks also have a second purpose to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the parks. They also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of their local communities.
9. These special places provide exceptional opportunities to experience the natural environment including National Trails, the Wales Coast Path and open access areas. They also provide opportunities to enjoy a variety of recreational activities such as mountain biking, mountaineering, canoeing and coastering by taking advantage of these stunning landscapes.
10. These areas of great natural beauty also provide less tangible benefits including health, spiritual refreshment, well-being and the delivery of important cultural services for communities and visitors. Designated landscapes are also increasingly appreciated in that they provide areas of tranquillity and night skies free from light pollution.

### **3. A vision for the future management of Wales' designated landscapes**

11. These living, working landscapes will be exemplars of sustainable development, with vibrant rural communities, extensive recreational opportunities, thriving ecosystems and a rich biodiversity.

People will be passionate about the natural environment, the contribution it makes to the rural economy and the effect it has on the health and quality of life of the people who live and visit it. They will participate in the decision-making and sustainable management of these designated landscapes.

12. The designated landscapes will be areas where new solutions to environmental and rural issues are tried, tested and shared. Consideration

of the challenges for rural areas will drive innovation. Action for the environment and rural communities will exemplify true collaboration, reducing regulation and targeting investment appropriately.

13. Confident strides in managing positive landscape change for the benefit of people and the landscape will be evident in all plans, activities, and communication.

#### **4. Guiding Principles**

14. There is a direct link between the purpose and ambition for the AONBs and National Parks and Welsh Government's commitment to sustainability, the alleviation of poverty, addressing the root causes of inequality and supporting civil society. Their designation exists to protect many of Wales' most important landscapes and heritage assets, and in doing so facilitates sustainable development. Management authorities must provide an integrated approach at an appropriate scale for the planning and management of the area to deliver multiple outcomes.
15. The acceptance of sustainable development as the central organising principle of AONBs and National Parks recognises the competing pressures on landscape and environment management. Landscape conservation has increasingly become better integrated with other policy sectors and the wider countryside but greater recognition is required that it performs multiple functions rather than narrow scenic ones.
16. An 'ecosystem approach' to landscape management will mean considering and regulating the environment and its health as a whole rather than dealing with individual aspects separately. It will mean weighing up and setting priorities for the many competing demands on our natural resources to provide different services to society. These range from the value of the environment in itself, to food production and economic development. An 'ecosystem approach' will result in taking steps at both local and national level that will help to maximise the environmental, economic and social opportunities available to us as a nation.

Overall this approach will:

- ⤴ Improve the resilience and diversity of the environment and its supporting biodiversity.
  - ⤴ Provide simpler and more cost-effective regulation.
  - ⤴ Offer greater certainty for decision-makers.
17. This is an important part of establishing a positive climate for sustainable long-term investment and job creation in urban and rural communities. Multifunctional protected areas, specifically those like AONBs and National Parks which contain a socio-economic dimension, have the potential to be

the means of reconciling tensions around the competing demands for natural resource use and services.

18. The value of the designated landscapes in Wales stems not from the separation of nature from human activity, but from continued and careful environmental modification. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) signed and ratified by the UK, defines landscapes as '*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*'. The Convention recognises the importance of all landscapes but also supports international systems of planning, management, conservation and protection for nationally important landscapes.
19. Welsh legislation and Welsh Government policy, operating within the framework of UK and European legislation, provides the strategic context within which designated landscapes deliver their statutory duties and promote sustainable development.
20. As extensive landscape designations they provide a vehicle through which an integrated ecosystems approach to landscape, marine conservation and socio-economic issues can be used to further organisational planning and decision-making. Thus they provide the basis of the critical relationship between maintaining the values and integrity of these important places and the wellbeing of those who live in or use them.
21. The approach described in the preceding paragraphs will demand greater cooperation and collaboration between the authorities and their partners (including local communities), in order to find solutions, share good practice, and to innovate on the back of the enthusiasm and goodwill they generate. The partnerships and authorities responsible for the designated landscapes must collaborate more effectively across broad networks, and show positive leadership in taking forward sustainable development. To stay relevant the managing authorities of these areas need to remain in touch with changing values and in tune with societal choice, and seek to positively influence these values and choices.
22. The Environment Act 1995 s62 (1) (2) states that where there is 'conflict' between the conservation and promotion of enjoyment purposes in National Parks priority is given to the conservation purpose. This is known as the Sandford Principle and remains a relevant principle and is also applied in AONBs. The principle recognises the environment as an entity that needs management and protection, and also assists with taking long term decisions.

## **5. Outcomes**

## **The National Parks and AONBs are places where people can and want to live and work, now and in the future**

*People enjoy good health and access to services. Welsh heritage is respected and supported with an inclusive and cohesive community, social justice and equality of opportunity at its core. Affordable good quality, & eco friendly homes are available so that local people can continue to live in their chosen community. Population is representative of the demographic structure of Wales.*

23. Welsh culture in particular is rooted in its landscape. The Welsh people often express their identity through their connection with places that are important to them. Increased community empowerment and the promotion of co-management should underpin community participation in the management of the designated landscapes and the natural resources and architectural heritage they contain.
24. A key part of Welsh culture is the Welsh language. These designated landscapes provide a picture of the varied competency with which the Welsh language is spoken, written and understood. These areas will be key in increasing people's awareness of the value of the Welsh language, both as part of our national heritage and useful skill in modern life. They will do this through strengthening the position of the Welsh language in our communities and by increasing people's confidence and fluency in the language.
25. The activities of the AONB teams, Park authorities, and their partners should aim to encompass all sectors of society. This includes provision of facilities, access to the natural environment, sustainable transport and community links both inside and outside the designated landscapes.
26. The emergence of sustainable development as a central organising principle for AONB and national park management should boost development plan policies. Further improving management decisions while giving weight to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of these areas. This will also enable progress to encourage jobs and a sustainable economy.
27. Adherence to conservative principles may not always be desirable, perhaps especially during a period of transition to low-carbon buildings. National Parks and AONBs should review their design guide lines to support this transition in a way that is sympathetic to landscape quality and natural beauty.
28. This also has relevance to the priority for increasing affordable housing. AONBs and National Parks can be the mechanism for collaboration and networking. Small focussed groups can draw on a network of partnerships to get the right people together to innovate and work through solutions.

**A strong local economy enables business to innovate and provides the skills, expertise and support to create sustainable jobs**

*Encourage new businesses. Boost sustainability and growth of existing businesses through new technologies. Identification of required skills and qualifications is regularly refreshed to ensure the right knowledge is available and accessible. Sharing of effective business practices to ensure a sustainable economy.*

29. In fulfilling their remit National Park authorities have a duty to ‘foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within their national park’ and AONB and local authorities also have a similar responsibility across the whole of their authority areas.
30. The AONB teams and Park authorities should articulate visions of rural development which could provide models that are not merely specific to their area but could be of broader use to others involved in the development and implementation of rural policy in Wales and beyond.
31. AONBs and National Parks are of equal status in landscape terms. To reflect their national importance the planning system must continue to afford them the highest possible protection from inappropriate development. Greater opportunities to work with private enterprise in developing a sustainable local economy should be sought, where the designation can play a key role in guiding the positive management of change to facilitate appropriate developments whilst maintaining the integrity of landscape quality.
32. Welsh Government guidance to planning authorities sets out that there should be a continued presumption against major developments in AONBs and National Parks as these are very likely to have unacceptable impacts on the natural beauty of the area. There are certain circumstances where proposals are of more national significance or character where special dispensation may be given if the tests, known as the ‘Silkin Principle’, are met. Such proposals require rigorous examination, and must demonstrate an overriding public need where refusal would be severely detrimental to the national economy and that there is no potential for locating the development elsewhere or meeting the need in some other way. It is right also that any construction and restoration must be carried out to high environmental standards.

33. National Parks in particular are icons for tourism and their status provides a strong brand image which extends beyond their boundaries. This brand must be nurtured and its value realised to support local enterprise. The AONBs are also popular visitor destinations and there is opportunity here to work collectively across the family of designated landscapes to respond to greater public awareness of farming welfare standards, interest in local produce and work more closely with land managers and food producers. Local produce provides good opportunities to promote regional character and support producers and suppliers.

**A clean and green environment which enhances the life experiences of people, who in turn conserve the resource for future generations**

*Using an ecosystem approach for integrated management of land and living resources. Promotion of sustainable land use in an equitable way. Biological diversity is supported. Carbon emissions and pollution are minimised. The environment meets the needs of people living, working or visiting and those people then protect and enhance it for the future.*

34. The AONBs and National Parks contain some of Wales' most stunning landscapes, rich in geological and biological diversity. Each designated landscape is distinctive in its own way. Each faces significant challenges from the impact of climate change and increasing pressures on the landscape to deliver food, energy, water and to accommodate carbon storage. There has never been a more critical time to rise to the challenge of developing landscape resilience and managing these changes to minimise their impacts on landscapes and communities.

35. These landscapes can potentially provide a large amount of renewable energy and with it contribute to achieving a sustainable low carbon economy for Wales. Through careful management and a range of technologies these landscapes will play a key role in meeting the challenges of climate change, achieving energy security and supporting communities and the environment.

36. Natural beauty and nature conservation are mutually supportive and have therefore always been a component of landscape conservation. Designated landscapes must therefore continue their role in conserving biodiversity as an integral part of sustainable land management and the delivery of ecosystem services.

37. Designated landscapes often contain or adjoin designations including Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, National Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and other non-statutory

designations like Heritage Coasts. Such protected sites are widely regarded as being central to local, regional and global strategies for the conservation of biodiversity. The health of protected sites will be inextricably linked with the development of surrounding landscapes. The extensive nature of landscape designation provides a mechanism to secure healthy, resilient and productive ecosystems that are managed sustainably.

### **People, businesses and communities are well connected within and beyond the boundaries**

*Transport links are usable, affordable and low carbon. Active travel is the norm. There is good broadband and mobile connectivity for communities, business & visitors.*

38. Welsh Government is committed to technological advancements that improve business competitiveness and the quality of life in rural areas. As more of business and every day life rely on digital connections, AONB and national park authorities must continue to work closely with public bodies, telecommunications infrastructure operators and regulators to seek creative solutions to improve communication in rural areas whilst managing the impact of infrastructure in these areas.
39. AONBs and national park authorities should seek to improve travel planning for visitor attractions and increase the use of demand responsive transport. In addition, the effective planning of recreation experiences, including the location of gateways into AONBs and National Parks can tempt many visitors to leave their car in preference to a more sustainable mode of transport, which results in reduced traffic flow within an area.

### **Residents, tourists and visitors enjoy and appreciate the special qualities of the National Parks and AONBs**

*Buildings, facilities and activities respect the park and its communities. Local jobs are supported and created. Welsh residents and tourists enjoy and appreciate the special qualities of the AONBs and National Parks. A creative and innovative approach delivers high quality visitor experiences maximising stay and spend. Opportunities for outdoor recreation are maximised for all.*

40. Wales' dramatic scenery is cited as one of the main reasons that visitors choose to visit Wales, providing an economic boost to the rural economy, which helps in turn helps to sustain local services.
41. In practice AONBs and National Parks differ from other protected sites in that they are not solely focussed on their natural assets. People are integral to their designation with landscapes that have evolved over time and that have been significantly shaped by their cultural heritage. They are

increasingly viewed as places where many millions choose to spend their leisure time. The National Parks' second statutory purpose 'promoting opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas by the public' is significant.

42. Even though these are environmentally sensitive areas, careful forward planning and management, together with the provision of relevant information and facilities, can ensure they cater for a wide range of activities. These include nationally important centres for canoeing, caving, mountain biking, walking and horse riding. Whilst walking and sight-seeing remain the most frequent activities there are opportunities to increase participation rates across the full spectrum of activities. It is therefore necessary to positively encourage, provide for and manage outdoor recreation opportunities. Efforts need to focus on working towards the provision of fit for purpose places and facilities. Programmes will encourage participation and strong links across the sector to ensure harmonious use of the areas and their special qualities. The potential for damage should dictate decisions to discourage or exclude certain activities from certain areas at certain times.
43. There are further opportunities to enhance people's enjoyment and appreciation of the special qualities of the area. This includes the provision of information such as education packs for teachers, digital media and information on nature conservation, geology, culture and providing opportunities for volunteering and lifelong learning. The AONB teams and national park authorities should seek to reach out so that people from all walks of life are encouraged to use and value these landscapes and made to feel welcome.
44. While it is important for all sectors of society to experience these designated landscapes particular focus should be given to children and young families from deprived areas. This can be a key solution in reducing the inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes for the poorest in society.
45. By adopting a cross-cutting theme across all National Park and AONB activities recognise the complex and multidimensional nature of social exclusion and seek to promote social inclusion in all work. The National Park Authorities and AONB teams should seek to foster the economic and social well being of local communities and seek to reduce social exclusion in all its forms.
46. National Park and AONBs have a key role to play in
  - Strengthening advice, information and advocacy services to help people with protected characteristics understand and exercise their rights and make informed choices.

- Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training.
- Tackling barriers and support disabled people so that they can exercise choice and control in their daily lives.
- Putting the needs of service users at the heart of delivery in key public services.
- Improving the engagement and participation of under-represented groups in public appointments.

47. These special areas are icons for tourism and provide strong branding opportunities that add value to Welsh products. The tourism and business sectors should be encouraged and supported to further develop sustainable tourism opportunities and promote the responsible use of the countryside. These activities should be consistent with the unique features of the relevant area.

## **6. Delivering – effective leadership and co-management**

48. These designated landscapes can become the key delivery vehicle for achieving a more sustainable way of living in rural Wales.

49. Designated landscapes are national designations operating at a local level and must be accountable both to the local communities and the national audience with transparency of advice and decision-making.

50. The AONB teams and park authorities should be the mechanism for the collaboration and networking that is necessary to both identify the key problems in relation to the environment, society and the rural economy and then innovate and work through solutions to the issues in hand. To function effectively they must adapt, be flexible and strive to link together to meet national priorities, statutory purposes, local authorities, and local community interests. To this end, the importance of learning across networks and partnerships must not be underestimated.

51. In these complex environments it is necessary to develop innovative and adaptive approaches towards planning and management. Boards and advisory committees must be encouraged to look beyond the physical boundaries, to work with other authorities and take calculated risks. This can support shared identification of problems, joint decision making and multi-stakeholder participation in clarifying sustainable development and in identifying the interactions needed between stakeholders to ensure more sustainable outcomes.

52. Structures within the AONBs and parks must evolve towards a more empowered role for communities and voluntary bodies. Authorities and AONB teams are encouraged to actively involve local communities in the planning, management and governance of their areas in order to allow

innovation and a sense of local relevance. This should go beyond involvement in the statutory management plan process or through their elected representation on National Park or AONB committees.

53. To this end, Welsh Government is keen to encourage a more simplified method of strategic planning and the emergence of more experimental approaches to national park management. This might, for example, include the joint production of one strategic plan for all protected landscapes in Wales which sets national outcomes, with a set of local delivery plans that provide local outputs in support of those outcomes. Irrespective of the process chosen, these evidence based plans must consider the full range of conditions which contribute towards the outcomes noted within this policy statement.
54. This should enhance the democratic opportunity for local and wider stakeholders to shape and share in the vision and priorities for each area. Relevant authorities should participate fully in the process of developing the plans and subsequently consider the plan when conducting their business and undertaking operations in designated areas.
55. Working towards tangible outcomes which can be reported at the formal monitoring and review stages is essential to foster broader support from the community. This way of working should assist the development of initiatives that go beyond Welsh Government imposed requirements, potentially leading to genuinely novel, locally appropriate action for sustainable development.