

**Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural
Beauty - Response**

Final Decision-Maker	Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	Rob Jarman, Head of Planning and Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Deanne Cunningham, Team Leader (Heritage, Landscape and Design)
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

SPS&T Committee has resolved to make a representation to the 2018 Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in relation to the proposal to create an AONB protecting the Greensand Ridge and for an enhanced level of protection for its Landscapes of Local Value (LLVs). In the meantime the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is drafting a strategic response to the Review and welcomes the intention of this Council to submit its own response. This report outlines the matters for inclusion in the Council's corporate response using the approach of the JAC. The key points raised relate to the purposes of National Parks and AONBs, financial and governance arrangements, extending AONBs and boundary reviews, the National Parks 8 point plan, the role of the AONB Management Plan and branding and the AONB name.

**This report makes the following recommendations to Strategic Planning,
sustainability and Transportation Committee**

That:

1. The JAC's approach to the 2018 Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) be endorsed.
2. That the proposed response to the Review be approved

Timetable	
<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
SPS&T Committee	4 December 2018

Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - Response

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In January 2018 the Government published a 25 year plan for the environment, 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment'. It sets out an approach to protect landscapes and habitats in England and commits to an independent review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), known as the 'Designated landscapes (national parks and AONBs): 2018 review'.
- 1.2 The Review is now under way and the current call for evidence expires on 18 December 2018. The findings are due to be published towards the end of 2019.
- 1.3 At the meeting of SPS&T Committee on 6 November 2018 Members considered a report on the issues relating to the proposal to promote the Greensand Ridge as a candidate for designation as an AONB. The Committee resolved that:
 - A representation is made to the Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) to seek to secure AONB protection for the Greensand Ridge and an additional tier of protection for the borough's Landscapes of Local Value areas (LLVs).
 - Officers liaise with neighbouring authorities and other stakeholders to assess the collective interest in making a joint application on a larger basis.
- 1.4 Subsequently, on 15 November 2018, the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty JAC met to discuss the Review call for evidence and agreed to:
 - Provide a strategic level response from the JAC
 - Urge individual responses from JAC partner Local Authorities and other organisation which reflect local issues and views
- 1.5 As a result of this, Councillor Patrik Garten, JAC Member, requested that SPS&T Committee consider the JAC's response with a view to following that approach in its own representation to the Review.
- 1.6 The AONB Unit has circulated its draft response to the Review and asked for comments by 30 November 2018; a copy of which is included in this report. The final version should be available for consideration at the meeting on 4 December 2018.

Proposed draft response by the JAC

1.7 The AONB JAC considered the context of the Kent Downs AONB and took a very positive approach to the Review by not taking a defensive position. It aims to recognise the opportunities and challenges and seeks to enable a positive response in the interest of local and national communities. The response follows the framework generated by the terms of reference of the Review as well as the specific questions asked in the call for evidence. This response raises the key points detailed below.

Purposes

1.8 There should be parity between AONBs and National parks. The JAC does not propose that this AONB should become a National Park but should be recognised and valued equally. There should be common purposes between all designated landscapes given the fact that the landscapes offer equivalence of benefit to society. Additionally, supporting health and well-being should be specifically included in the purposes of designated landscapes.

Financial and governance arrangements

1.9 The JAC was keen for the AONB not to become a National Park as it is unlikely to be welcomed locally and would be overly bureaucratic. It was felt the AONB should not be a planning authority but that the advisory role should be strengthened in land use planning matters. 'Conserve and enhance' guidelines are considered to include the built environment and development should be accepted in the designated landscape and its setting where the scale and quality of design seeks to recognise and enhance the qualities of the place.

1.10 The resources provided to the AONB partnership should be sufficient to meet and deliver its purposes and that should new purposes be agreed then new resources would be needed to deliver them.

1.11 Should greater resources be afforded to achieve the purposes of the designated landscape, then an effective way to use these would be through developing partnerships with local businesses, local authorities and charities. This should be cost effective, widen the 'ownership' of ways to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape and potentially bring matched resources and expertise. This approach is informed by the Danish National Park model.

Extending AONBs and boundary reviews

1.12 The JAC had considered potential extensions to the boundary of the Kent Downs AONB in the past but had decided against promoting them because the process was too costly, time consuming and presented other risks which meant it would not be a good use of public resources.

1.13 It is proposed that, where there is a shared local wish to extend the AONB, this should be simpler to achieve and not require a complete boundary review. Several members of the JAC could identify areas where it would be

beneficial to extend the boundary of the Kent Downs AONB. This Council's resolution to seek either a new AONB for the Greensand Ridge or a wider landscape area, potentially including consideration of an extension to the Kent Downs AONB, was raised.

- 1.14 The JAC also considered that there could be merits in taking forward other levels of formal protection of landscapes of local value as identified by this Council in its resolution.

The National Parks 8 point plan

- 1.15 Many of the activities in this Plan, published in March 2016, are taken forward in the Kent Downs and should be recognised and adequately resourced but the important work on the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty should not be diminished in any way. It is recognised that there are many challenges faced by countryside recreation sites. This approach should help support the ambition for parity between National Parks and AONBs.

The role of the AONB Management Plan

- 1.16 The JAC's view is that the AONB Management Plan's role in influencing Environmental Land Management Schemes as well as rural development funding (and other activity which affects the AONB) should be an important and enhanced one. The Plan is a locally developed, accountable articulation of how to conserve and enhance a national and international asset.
- 1.17 It is recognised that new payments will be for public good and that the landscapes of the Kent Downs offer considerable public good.
- 1.18 The JAC was concerned about the loss of LEADER programmes and recognised that each Kent LEADER scheme supported the purposes of the AONB and was influenced by the Management Plan.
- 1.19 There was also concern raised about the current administration and penalty regimes for agri-environment schemes and that farmers/landowners were at risk of exiting schemes. New schemes should be easy to engage with and reflect the local understanding of landscape and be for the public good.

Branding and the AONB name

- 1.20 Generally it was felt that the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty name was appropriate but some representatives felt that the brand was not a strong one and not recognised from a visitor and tourism perspective. It was suggested that the community's views on the brand should be sought with a particular emphasis on engaging the youth.
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2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Option 1- The Committee decides not to endorse the response of the Kent Downs AONB and agrees to make its own detailed response to the Review. However, this is likely to weaken the weight of the JAC's response.
- 2.2 Option 2- The Committee decides to endorse the response of the Kent Downs AONB and follow the same approach as the JAC in its representation but amends the section on extending AONBs and boundary reviews to reflect the Committee's resolution to seek to secure AONB protection for the Greensand Ridge and an additional tier of protection for the borough's Landscapes of Local Value areas. This joint approach also helps towards meeting the further objective of SPS&T Committee's decision for liaison with neighbouring authorities and other stakeholders to assess the collective interest in making a joint application on a larger basis.
- 2.3 Option 3- The Committee decides to endorse the response of the Kent Downs AONB but wishes to express its views through a different approach. However, this Council is part of the JAC and has already provided a resolution on its ambitions for the creation of a Greensand Ridge AONB and additional protection for its Landscapes of Local Value (LLVs), which has been put forward to the JAC and been considered in the drafting of its response.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The preferred option is Option 2 above as this will provide the response with the greatest weight but still ensure the Council's specific views on the protection of its important locally designated landscapes is fully considered.

4. RISK

- 4.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 There are no additional issues other than those raised in the main body of this report.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 Subject to agreement by Committee, the Council's consultation response will be submitted before the deadline of 18 December 2018 and a final draft of the Review is due to be published towards the end of 2019.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keeping Maidstone an attractive place for all; and - Respecting the character and heritage of the Borough 	Head of Planning and Development
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No direct risk management implications arise from this report 	Head of Planning and Development
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No direct financial implications arise from this report 	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No direct staffing implications arise from this report 	Head of Planning and Development
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No direct legal implications arise from this report 	Cheryl Parks Mid Kent Legal Services (Planning)
Privacy and Data Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No implications have been identified 	Cheryl Parks Mid Kent Legal

		Services (Planning)
Equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment 	Team Leader (Heritage, Landscape and Design)
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals. . 	Head of Planning and Development
Crime and Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No implications have been identified 	Head of Planning and Development
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No implications have been identified. 	Team Leader (Heritage, Landscape and Design)

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

8-Point Plan for England's National Parks

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-parks-8-point-plan-for-england-2016-to-2020>

Designated landscapes (national parks and AONBs): 2018 review

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-parks-review-launched>