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# The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

## Draft Strategic Plan 2011 – 2014



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# Contents

1.0	Executive Summary .....	3
2.0	The National Association for AONBs Strategic Plan 2011-14.....	5
2.1	Background.....	5
2.2	Introduction .....	5
2.3	Purpose of this document.....	6
2.4	Achievements to date.....	6
3.0	Future Focus and Direction.....	8
3.1	AONB Family Objectives .....	9
3.2	NAAONB Objectives .....	9
4.0	Vision, Mission and Workstreams.....	10
4.1	Vision.....	10
4.2	Mission Statement.....	10
4.3	NAAONB Workstreams.....	10
5.0	Delivery .....	11

## 1.0 Executive Summary

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) is an unincorporated voluntary body formed in December 1998. The NAAONB has established itself as the voice of the AONB partnerships in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and, in doing so, represents those involved in the planning and management of 8000 square miles of the UK's finest landscapes.

This plan supersedes the current Business Plan (2008 – 2011) which looked to sustain the high profile and progress the NAAONB had achieved since its creation.

Whilst it could be argued that the financial environment is no more certain than it was then, the scientific and political environments have changed. The challenge faced by the NAAONB is to adapt to these changes and help position the AONB partnerships to ensure they are best placed to deliver on their purpose – to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

Without doubt, the main strength of the AONB partnerships lies in their collective voice – the voice of the AONB Family. It is the role of the NAAONB to help strengthen that voice, clarify its messages, and ensure that it is heard in the right places at the right time with the right effect.

Central to strengthening this voice has been our coming together around a set of national AONB Family objectives. The objectives of the NAAONB reflect our need to take action at the national level to ensure each AONB partnership can deliver its objectives locally.

Additionally the NAAONB must work hard to ensure that the risks associated with working collectively are managed effectively.

For the next four years we will work to the following objectives

### **NAAONB Objectives**

- Ensure adequate influence and respect
- Provide leadership and strategic direction
- Communicate effectively
- Co-operate effectively
- Provide support and training
- Secure adequate resources

We will deliver them through activity across four distinct workstreams. This activity will directly support the AONB Family in their delivery of the family objectives.

### **NAAONB Workstreams**

- Supporting policies for conserving natural beauty
- Developing understanding of AONB Partnerships and the issues they face
- Improving the way in which AONB Partnerships and the NAAONB work
- Securing and managing adequate resources

In addition to the strength of the AONB Family's collective voice is its strength as a network. Harnessing the wealth of collective experience, enthusiasm and skills that exist within each, and across all, AONB Unit and Partnership, is a key challenge for the NAAONB.

Without doubt the future presents us with opportunities. The NAAONB is closer to government than ever before. We have a clear opportunity to strengthen the influence of AONB partnerships in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland and sustain the high profile and progress the NAAONB has achieved since its creation in 1998. To achieve this, however, we must work closely as a true association of members.

Our programme of key actions, set out under distinct workstreams, to deliver specific national objectives outline exactly how we will help achieve our vision; that the natural beauty of our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is valued and secure, the communities within and adjacent to them are thriving, and the relationship between people and these nationally important places is understood and supported at all levels.

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## **2.0 The National Association for AONBs Strategic Plan 2011-14**

### **2.1 Background**

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) is a voluntary body whose membership includes all the AONB Partnerships in England and Wales, as well as many of the local authorities with statutory responsibility for AONBs, the Trust which manage AONBs in Northern Ireland, as well as a number of voluntary bodies and individuals with an interest in the future of these iconic landscapes.

It was formed as an unincorporated body in December 1998. Its creation was the result of efforts by officers responsible for a number of AONBs who believed it was essential to raise the public and political profile of designated AONBs if the long term objectives of designation were to be achieved.

The NAAONB has now established itself as the voice of the AONB partnerships in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and, in doing so, represents those involved in the planning and management of 8000 square miles of the UK's finest landscapes.

### **2.2 Introduction**

Since the current business plan (2007-11) was written there have been a number of significant changes to the scientific, political, and fiscal environments within which AONB Partnerships operate. These include

- Greater emphasis on delivering ecosystem services
- Wider interest in food and energy security
- Acceptance of the need factor climate change resilience into decision making
- Increased recognition of the value of a landscape approach
- Increased devolution for Wales and Northern Ireland
- Loss of regional structures in England
- A move towards increased localism in England
- A change in sponsorship arrangements
- Greater political profile for AONBs and the NAAONB
- Budgetary constraints

It is therefore a function of this plan to clearly identify the role that the NAAONB will play in supporting the AONB Family to achieve its purpose within this new context.

The activity of the NAAONB has historically covered 5 areas, each of which includes a national, regional, and local component:

- Governance, administration, and funding
- Advocacy, influencing, and leadership
- Learning, exchange, and technical support
- Communication
- Collaborative projects

These headings and, importantly, the spatial nature of their delivery have been reviewed as part of the strategic planning process.

## **2.3 Purpose of this document**

This plan sets the direction for the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Beauty (NAAONB) over the next four years. More specifically it

- Reflects on past achievements
- Outlines our future activities within the context of the needs of our membership
- Gives clarity to partners
- Provides the basis for our annual work plan
- Provides a platform for dialogue with funders

## **2.4 Achievements to date**

Since establishment, the NAAONB and its forerunner, the AAONB have

- Represented the AONB family at
  - Meetings with DEFRA ministers
  - Meetings with Welsh Assembly Ministers
  - Meetings with NI Legislative Assembly Ministers,
  - Over 30 APPGs (All Party Parliamentary Group) meetings
- Lobbied successfully for inclusion of AONBs in the CRoW Act 2000, resulting in the first new legislation for AONBs in 50 years leading to more financial stability for AONB partnerships,
- Created and maintained close working relationships with the Countryside Agency/Natural England and the Countryside Council for resulting in 75% core funding settlements in England and Wales in 2001, and a rolling 3 year single pot funding arrangement in 2008
- Lobbied successfully for SDF to be extended to AONBs resulting in funding of £19.2m for AONB projects
- Created and maintained a close working relationship with Defra playing a key role in developing the NAAONB / NE / DEFRA tripartite relationship including direct AONB sponsorship
- Held 10 national annual conferences (including AGMs) attended by over 1600 delegates
- Responded to over 107 national policy consultations on behalf of the AONB Family
- Organised 74 training days, attended by over 2190 staff and elected members
- Produced a bilingual AONB Partnership Member and Staff Induction Pack in conjunction with the Countryside Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales

- Developed and improved communications between organisations such as CADW/English Heritage, the Forestry Commission, the Mobile Operators Association, Ofgem with regular meetings leading to formal accords or influencing of Protected Areas policy
- Developed and improved a close working relationship with CNP, ENPAA, EAI and UKANPA, especially jointly working with UKANPA on the Countryside Agency's Protected Areas Awareness Campaign (2002) and with CNP, ENPAA and UKANPA on the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to Countryside Act (2009).
- Developed and improved communications between the staff and members of AONB Family with 44 editions of e-news - AONB News, Briefing Notes (CRoW Act 2000, Rural White Paper, post-election), [www.aonb.org.uk](http://www.aonb.org.uk), Position Statements, producing a PR strategy and leading on the Family celebrations for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first AONB designation and its associated website [www.visitaonb.org.uk](http://www.visitaonb.org.uk)
- Initiated, developed and implemented a new AONB Family in close consultation with members, lead officers and communications officers
- Developed and improved communication with external audiences with biannual production of publications Explore your Natural Beauty, Outstanding, AONB E-News; attendance at events Game Fair, Outdoors Show, LGA conferences
- Advised the IUCN UK Committee on behalf of the AONB Family on the Cat V definition debate

This has been augmented by the collaborative work of the Regional Co-ordinators in the South East and South West which

- Represented the SE and SW protected landscapes on various regional fora, and raised the profile of AONB Partnerships through direct contact, in the South East, with parliamentarians.
- Established landscape management as a core priority for the south west region and helped place protected landscapes at the heart of delivering large scale and integrated environmental and cultural programmes including <http://www.southwestlandscapes.org.uk>, The Protected Landscapes Prospectus (2004), RSS policy frame (2007) SW Management Plan database (2006, update 2009) SWPL Commitments document and launch (2009) and SW Environment Network priorities (2010).
- Developed a framework and culture that supports and encourages joint working across protected landscapes.
- Demonstrated the efficiency and effectiveness of large scale co-operation including Woodfuel Initiative with RDA/FC and Centre for Alternative Energy, 1SW Off Road Cycling initiative with FC/RDPE, Equestrian guidance with FWAG/BHS, Co-ordination groups for Planning, Communication and data as well as a £3.5m bid for INTERREG IVa funding to develop knowledge exchange to 2013.

- Secured funding for delivery of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of Sustainable Tourism in the South East's Finest Landscapes securing over £1 million from RDPE funds a.
- Ensured protected landscapes are engaged with and communicate with the key national agencies and regional players including Natural England, engaging protected landscapes with regional groupings including Biodiversity SW, Forestry Commission, Forestry Implementation Group, GOSE, SW Environment Network, Outdoors for All Network, SW Landscapes Partnership, SEEDA, SEFS, English Heritage Conservation Officers Group, SW Tourism Groups.
- Collation and development of a joint action plans. South East Regional Briefings. Development of regional training days covering a range of subjects.
- Development of a GIS database for the SEPL that draws together datasets for each of the AONBs and National Parks.

In summary the work of the NAAONB and Regional Protected Landscape fora has been effective and significant. The intention of this strategic plan is to move the NAAONB on, building on past successes, and delivering more for the AONB Family.

### **3.0 Focus and Future Direction**

The challenges and opportunities for the NAAONB are distinctly different, but connected, to those facing the wider AONB Family. It is the role of the NAAONB is to develop a work programme that will enable the AONB partnerships to deliver on their objectives.

The challenge for the NAAONB is to therefore fully understand the issues facing the AONB Family, identify where it is most appropriate and effective to intervene, define this intervention and, in common with any other third sector organisation, plan, resource and implement its delivery in a way that makes sound business sense.

In addition, the NAAONB has to act as a catalyst for change. In order to better achieve our purpose we have to promote the AONB Family as one organisational system, essentially a landscape movement, and in doing so make best use of the opportunities afforded by a set of clear family objectives and a cohesive brand identity.

In addition to providing a degree of national leadership and direction the NAAONB must maintain a wide strategic overview. This will ensure we are well positioned to influence the future for the AONB Family.

### **3.1 AONB Family Objectives**

The AONB Family have agreed a set of four headline objectives.

1. Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, ensuring they can meet the challenges of the future
2. Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty
3. Promote public understanding and enjoyment of the nature and culture of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and encourage people to take action for their conservation
4. Value, sustain, and promote the benefits that the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty provide for society, including clean air and water, food, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation's health and well-being

These outward facing objectives define clearly what the AONB Family do. The delivery of these objectives, however, is dependent upon achieving a number of more inward facing objectives all of which have a national component. These are the objectives of the NAAONB. These objectives also have a local component.

### **3.2 NAAONB Objectives**

5. Ensure adequate influence and respect
6. Provide leadership and strategic direction
7. Communicate effectively
8. Co-operate effectively
9. Provide support and training
10. Secure adequate resources

The role of the NAAONB is to deliver on the national component of objectives 5 to 8 with the sole intention of supporting the AONBs to deliver on objectives 1 to 4. This intention is reflected in our Vision and Mission Statement.

These objectives will be delivered through activity across four workstreams.

## 4.0 Vision, Mission and Workstreams

### 4.1 Vision

*The natural beauty of our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is valued and secure, the communities within and adjacent to them are thriving, and the relationship between people and these nationally important places is understood and supported at all levels.*

#### We will achieve this by being

- An influential, trusted organisation that is seen as the mouthpiece for the AONB Family
- An organisation that harnesses the collective experience, enthusiasm and goodwill of the AONB Family and uses it to further our collective cause
- An organisation that brings the AONB Family together as a cohesive entity
- An organisation that celebrates the unique identity of its individual members
- An organisation that works with others to achieve shared objectives

### 4.2 Mission Statement

*Everything we do is inspired by our mission to support the AONB Family in the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty*

### 4.3 NAAONB Workstreams

#### 1. Supporting policies for conserving natural beauty

This workstream encompasses our advocacy work, the action we take to influence decision makers and the work we carry out to provide national leadership

#### 2. Developing understanding of AONB Partnerships and the issues they face

This workstream includes the planning and delivery of a national training programme, our work to facilitate learning and the exchange of good practice, the provision of technical support and advice, and all of our communications work.

#### 3. Improving the way in which AONB Partnerships and the NAAONB work

This workstream includes our work to develop collaborative projects both within the AONB Family and across the protected landscape network, our work to improve governance within the NAAONB, and our work to maintain cohesion between the AONB Family and the NAAONB.

#### **4. Securing and managing adequate resources**

This workstream includes raising funds to facilitate the work of the NAAONB, the administration and management of the resources available to the NAAONB including its people, and taking a national lead on promoting innovative approaches to future resourcing.

### **5.0 Delivery**

The NAAONB is a small corporate body with two part-time members of staff. It has recently started to draw on the support of the two regional protected landscape officers working in the South East and the South West, and historically Board members have been active in operational delivery, focussing on delivering discrete pieces of work associated with their particular portfolio.

It is not the intention of this plan to initiate an expansion of the NAAONB as a corporate body. Our intention is to maintain minimum resource requirements at the centre and strengthen the framework that facilitates member involvement in national delivery. This way the cost to the membership of supporting the NAAONB is kept to a minimum.

This plan recognises, however, that the delivery of past business plans has been under resourced, often only succeeding on account of goodwill and voluntary effort by staff. We now recognise that this is unsustainable. This plan has sought to prioritise activity through a series of logical steps, at all times directly relating the work of the NAAONB to the needs of its membership.

It is important that each of the AONB Family and NAAONB objectives is assigned a lead. This lead officer will develop a programme of national work to further the objective. Lead Officers will be supported by a NAAONB Board member whose portfolio will reflect the delivery of an objective, or objectives. This will ensure that the Board of the NAAONB is directly engaged with a national programme of work designed to deliver a set of national objectives that will ensure the natural beauty of our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is valued and secure, the communities within and adjacent to them are thriving, and the relationship between people and these nationally important places is understood and supported at all levels.

This plan sets out the framework within which we will deliver our key actions. It also highlights the mechanisms by which they will be delivered. It is complimented by the NAAONB Business Plan (2011 – 2014) which defines the key actions, the resources required for their delivery, the source of these resources, and those responsible for their delivery.