

17 December 2018

## Landscapes Review: Call for Evidence



This picture shows local school children planting the first of 660,000 trees in the new forest at Doddington North Moor, on the border of Northumberland National Park. This diverse, multi-purpose forest is already providing real benefits to the local economy on site, to local tree nurseries, and in future to the local sawmill to create low carbon housing and other timber products; environmental benefits including the restoration of a rare peat mire on the site and the extension of a buffer zone to protect red squirrels; and new mountain bike trails, improved access to a bouldering site and opportunities for forest education. This sums up for us a landscape-scale approach to the 'three-legged stool' of sustainable development for environment, economy and society which our National Parks should showcase.

You are welcome to use this photograph which is © Confor 2018

## Part 1 - Opening thoughts

*We would like any opening thoughts on the role played by National Parks and AONBs - you may want to make a more detailed suggestion further on.*

*7. What do you think works overall about the present system of National Parks and AONBs in England? Add any points that apply specifically to only National Parks or AONBs.*

No comment.

*8. What do you think does not work overall about the system and might be changed? Add any points that apply specifically to National Parks or AONBs.*

The cyclical management planning and local planning consultation process should provide the opportunity to guide the direction of the National Parks. In reality, despite repeated input from the forestry sector, the lack of reference to forestry and limited reference to woodlands in the majority of the National Parks plans demonstrate that they are not taking their duty to expand, protect and enhance their woodland resource, and the businesses that depend on it, seriously.

The balance has swung too far towards caution against change, for example from farmland to forest. The result is a trend towards slow degradation in landscapes, without the interventions necessary to halt decline in rural communities and economies, biodiversity or climate change resilience.

## Part 2 – Views. We'd like to hear views on particular issues.

*9. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in nature conservation and biodiversity?*

No comment.

*a) Could they do more to enhance our wildlife and support the recovery of our natural habitats?*

Yes, by encouraging a greater diversity of land management techniques: forestry as well as farming.

*10. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in shaping landscape and beauty, or protecting cultural heritage?*

National Parks and AONBs have a role in providing developed thinking on the balance to be struck between change and continuity in the context of a landscape and human history which is never static. They have a special responsibility in shaping people's tastes and understanding of what a beautiful

landscape looks like and pointing them to the parts of our rich cultural heritage most worthy of celebration in our present day.

*11. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in working with farmers and land managers and how might this change as the current system of farm payments is reformed?*

The imbalance between the attitude of National Parks and AONBs to farming and forestry should be addressed. Both combine the production of products for human use with management of land for biodiversity and natural capital. National Parks and AONBs should work equally with farmers and foresters to deliver the full range of benefits from the land.

All National Parks and AONBs should commit to supporting the woodland resource and employ a qualified and supportive Woodland Officer. As an example Exmoor National Park have two full time Woodland Officers and have piloted the Grown in Britain on Exmoor kite-mark to support woodland products from Exmoor – directly supporting the local economy, rural enterprise, character of landscape, carbon sequestering, and community identity.

*12. What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in supporting and managing access and recreation?*

Forests should be recognised for the part they play in helping National Parks and AONBs to deliver recreation and access opportunities, as follows:

- Forests are full of interest and variety for visitors of all ages and abilities at all seasons; they provide more pleasant and safer experiences when the weather is very hot, wet, cold or windy. There are numerous studies demonstrating the benefits of recreation in forests to physical and mental health. Many of Britain's most popular nature beauty spots incorporate 'surprise views' or woodland walks created by the planting or utilisation of trees by previous generations.
- Visitor infrastructure such as cafes, centres, car parks and adventure trails can be hidden in a forest, so even high concentrations of visitor numbers do not detract from the sense of solitude and naturalness either within the forest or from surrounding viewpoints.
- There is less potential for visitors to cause damage to commercial activities in a forest: there are no crops to trample or animals to be worried by dogs.

*13. What views do you have about the way National Park and AONB authorities affect people who live and work in their areas?*

*a) Are they properly supporting them and what could be done differently?*

A missing element from many National Park and AONB plans is serious consideration of how to develop the local economy for the benefit of its residents and businesses.

*14. What views do you have on the role National Park and AONB authorities play on housing and transport in their areas?*

Many of these areas face the need to increase or upgrade housing provision. For environmentally-friendly construction, wood is the only realistic option as other materials like brick, block and steel all have very high carbon and pollution impacts. The UK is the second biggest importer of timber in the world, second only to China.

UK-grown conifers are suitable for timber frame homes and ideal for versatile and modern green building materials such as cross-laminated timber, glulam and particleboard. These also lend themselves to low-impact offsite timber construction techniques.

A sustainable vision for housing in our designated areas would be that within 30 years, houses would be built from timber grown, milled and manufactured in or near the area, as carbon-negative, energy-efficient homes.

The general attitude of National Park planners, is one of mistrust, suspicion, and an inappropriate use of the planning system to assert over-restrictive control on small-scale rural enterprise which limits the possibility of sustainable woodland management.

National Parks should be firmly and clearly supporting road and infrastructure improvements.

National Parks could draw inspiration from Pembrokeshire National Park One Planet guidance, and Scotland's 'Crofter' and 'Hutters' movement to support housing for agricultural, woodland and rural business workers. Supporting ancillary accommodation and requirements for seasonal workers.

### **Part 3 - Current ways of working**

*We'd like to ask some specific questions about the way National Parks and AONBs work at the moment.*

*15. What views do you have on the way they are governed individually at the moment? Is it effective or does it need to change, if so, how?*

The low populations and declining economies of many National Parks and AONBs means that it is difficult to find elected members from within the park, and as a result authorities may have an introverted or unambitious vision. There would be benefit to seeking board members from outwith the designated area who have

an interest in its future. A good example would be a sawmill which provides significant local employment on the basis of the supply of timber grown within the area.

*16. What views do you have on whether they work collectively at the moment, for instance to share goals, encourage interest and involvement by the public and other organisations?*

Generally the forestry and timber using sectors feel that the National Parks are not working with them or for them. There seems to be an overriding resistance and objection to woodland creation; and a restrictive and negative attitude to woodland restoration and management which leaves potential investors and those wishing to develop their businesses wary of engaging with the National Parks.

*17. What views do you have on their efforts to involve people from all parts of society, to encourage volunteering and improve health and well-being?*

Forestry and woodland provides all kinds of opportunities for involvement, volunteering and education. The important consideration is not to use volunteers, for example to plant trees or manage woodland, as an alternative to paid employment. The social profile of those who would be likely to volunteer versus those who would be employed should be considered.

*18. What views do you have on the way they are funded and how this might change?*

Currently National Parks are centrally funded and careful consideration must be given to whether they should be funded on the economic support/public good model we are seeing suggested for other land managers. There has long been a feeling amongst land owners that National Parks are well funded but do not put that money to good use.

This may force them to refocus their attitude to forests and forest operations, sustaining developments that promote local communities and making National Parks a more forward thinking and vibrant place.

*19. What views do you have on the process of designation - which means the way boundaries are defined and changed?*

It remains at odds to environmental policy that an arbitrary line can divide a field where one side is of great importance and the other is 'just' farm land or forestry. A more measured approach is needed in working around the edges of the National Parks and AONBs and any proposal should be measured not just on impact to the National Park but also the impact to the local community and economy.



*20. What views do you have on whether areas should be given new designations? For instance, the creation of new National Parks or AONBs, or new types of designations for marine areas, urban landscapes or those near built-up areas*

Rather than creating new designations, National Parks and AONBs should lead the way in developing a model for sustainable development which is relevant for the whole of England. We must not create a country where most people live in degraded landscapes and have to travel to a few preserved places. We should be creating working landscapes and green cities where people and nature work better together.

An important element of this will be the sequestration of carbon and the creation of habitat through the creation of new forests, which provide the material to build low-carbon homes and power a sustainable bioeconomy.

The regulatory baseline and funding support to protect natural and cultural benefits, or to restore degraded areas, should apply everywhere except to sites of such special national importance that they are held public ownership and management as National Nature Reserves.

Rather than increasing designated areas, the existing areas should be regarded as areas of policy focus to create policies which can work everywhere.

National Parks and AONBs could become demonstration areas for positive practice in establishing woodland culture, supporting woodland creation, restoration, management, enterprise, and the development of local woodland products and services that have the Grown in Britain kitemark.

*21. Are there lessons that might be learnt from the way designated landscapes work in other parts of the United Kingdom, or abroad?*

The requirement in Scotland for National Parks to include an economic development element is important for their long-term sustainability and ability to manage their natural assets.

#### **Part 4 - Closing thoughts**

*22. Do you think the terms currently used are the right ones? Would you suggest an alternative title for AONBs, for instance and if so what?*

No comment.

*23. The review has been asked to consider how designated landscapes work with other designations such as National Trails, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs)*

*and Special Protected Areas (SPAs). Do you have any thoughts on how these relationships work and whether they could be improved?*

More focused designations such as SSSIs seem more useful, as they clearly state what features are important in what location. This can form the basis of a management plan and costing to ensure their maintenance or restoration. This also applies to important archaeological and heritage features. A broad, general designation of large areas becomes increasingly less focused and it becomes difficult to distinguish from un-designated areas.

*24. Do you have any other points you would like to make that are not covered above?*

Multi-purpose forestry could make a major contribution to almost every challenge faced by National Parks: green infrastructure; jobs and economy; connectivity; new housing; renewable energy and fuel poverty; carbon reduction; landscape tranquillity and dark skies; cultural heritage; wildlife; climate resilience; tourism, etc.

Green infrastructure and opportunities for wildlife are intrinsic to a forestry development, maximised by the provisions in the UK Forestry Standard. The majority of timber from the UK's productive forests carry independent sustainability certification, and promoting these within National Parks and AONBs will ensure that the entire area of the forest is audited to an internationally-recognised standard endorsed by WWF, RSPB, and the National Trust.<sup>1</sup>

The *Roots to Prosperity* report estimated that 1,000 jobs could be created in Northern England by adopting its proposals for woodland expansion. These benefits could be replicated across England.

Forestry provides a strong economic case for infrastructure upgrades, and a powerful business lobby to source funding. It can conceal infrastructure such as roads and communications masts which would blight an open landscape.

Fuel poverty and low-carbon heating is often an issue for housing in National Parks and AONBs off the gas grid. The National Energy Foundation estimates that one hectare of woodland will produce enough wood to heat a home every year.<sup>2</sup> Taking Northumberland National Park as an example, creating 5,700ha multi-purpose forest under the UK Forestry Standard would include the creation of a minimum of 285ha of native broadleaf woodland to be managed for biodiversity. This can be combined with the production of wood fuel to heat 285 homes, while the main softwood crop is used for high-value timber products such as upgraded housing. Firewood can be certified as sustainably and locally produced through the Woodsure Assurance Scheme<sup>3</sup>. Being locally grown it will have none of the biosecurity or sustainability issues associated with imported firewood.

<sup>1</sup> <http://ukwas.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nef.org.uk/knowledge-hub/wood-fuel-equipment/wood-fuel-frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>3</sup> <https://woodsuresure.co.uk/#>

Productive conifers sequester carbon extremely efficiently, around three times as fast as broadleaf trees. When harvested, the timber products such as houses locks up carbon for many decades, while fast-growing new trees grow in their place. The Committee on Climate Change calculates this extra benefit as 'Harvested Wood Products'. A study by Confor calculated that one hectare of productive forest under the UK Forestry Standard provides carbon benefit of 7.3 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per hectare per year – slightly more than the UK per capita emissions of 7.1 tonnes.<sup>4</sup>

For heritage sites such as earthworks, ruins, historic buildings, industrial archaeology, military sites, and boundaries, a surrounding forest is one of the best ways to preserve it from disturbance from extreme weather, grazing animals, erosion or development. A forest can also be the means to turn a neglected site into a tourist destination: parking, paths and interpretation can be incorporated into (and hidden sensitively within) the design of the forest, and the visit to the site is enhanced by the 'adventure' factor of being in a forest, for example creating a sense of remoteness and timelessness in a clearing deep in the woods, or a surprise view from a hilltop whose lower slopes are wooded.

As with historic sites, the protection of ancient woodland by new woodland is one of the best ways to secure its long-term future. A modern forestry design could work with local conservation groups to ensure that the area around an ancient woodland was enhanced by native planting, for example using local seed or encouraging natural regeneration through the elimination of grazing animals. Beyond this, the conifer crop would provide a managed buffer for the ancient woodland, providing it with a clear economic value which protects it from other development, and restoring it to a substantial woodland ecosystem rather than an unsustainable, degrading fragment. As with historic sites, there are greater opportunities to incorporate the ancient woodland into forest walks, with parking, paths and interpretation hidden within the conifers without damaging the ancient woodland.

The careful design and active management that characterises all modern multi-purpose forests ensures that they can make important contributions to climate resilience by reducing flooding and wildfires, especially in areas where agriculture is in decline and there is a risk of land abandonment.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.confor.org.uk/news/latest-news/eskdalemuir-carbon-report/>