



Date 4th March 2015

Written Statement - Update on the Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales

By: Carl Sargeant Minister for Natural Resources

On 25 September 2014 I announced an independent review into the purpose and governance of the designated landscapes in Wales, the three National Parks and five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This two stage review would firstly examine the designations themselves looking at their purposes and the merits of classifying Wales' designated landscapes under one type of designation, before then considering the associated governance arrangements.

When I launched this Review I set out my own commitment to the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. These areas are highly valued. They are integral to Wales' national identity and are recognised internationally as part of a global family of protected areas. I am proud that a quarter of Wales is recognised in this way. They are assets that we should celebrate and protect, but also continue to harness to tackle the environmental and economic challenges that we face. They have a valuable contribution to make to the green growth and natural resource management agenda.

I want to see our designated landscapes become international exemplars of sustainability. They should be living landscapes with vibrant, resilient communities, with extensive outdoor recreation opportunities, thriving ecosystems and rich biodiversity. With the right leadership they have the potential to be areas where new innovative solutions to the challenges of sustainability in fragile rural areas are tried and tested, understood and publicised.

The purpose of the Review is to gather and analyse evidence in support of a comprehensive set of recommendations which should ensure that our designated landscapes are best equipped to realise their ambition, while building upon their internationally recognised status and brand.

As we move forward in Wales to develop our own ways of delivering public services associated with planning, regulating land use and managing our natural resources, it's vital that the National Parks and AONBs are not left behind. Reform will be necessary to ensure that these areas prosper through their continued protection while maximizing the benefits they provide to the people of Wales.

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So far the Review has considered whether the purpose and identity of the designated landscapes should be changed. Between late September and late November 2014 the Panel involved a wide range of designated landscape interests including constituent local authorities, community councils and the WLGA; the farming unions; the Federation of Small Businesses and Wales Tourism Alliance; The Welsh Language Commissioner; Natural Resources Wales and RTPI Cymru. Eight workshops (geographically within or near each designated area) were held with members of the public. Finally, meetings were held with officials from the Welsh Government and the Sustainable Futures Commissioner, Peter Davies.

The Panel has made six recommendations which are a modest package of amendments to the designations, see Annex 1. I expect that as the Panel expands its evidence base it will need to reflect on and amend these initial recommendations.

The report of Stage one will now provide the basis for proceeding to Stage two of the review as set out in the original terms of reference. This includes:

- i. Review the governance and management arrangements of the designated landscapes;

- ii. Review and examine how any governing body/bodies would best promote collaboration and joint working while avoiding duplication;

- and

- iii. Review and examine the best way for any future governing body to reinforce local accountability and decision making.

Both designations currently have different governance arrangements.

The Environment Act 1995 led to the creation of independent National Park Authorities for each of the National Parks in Wales. Each Park is governed by a board comprising two thirds local councillors appointed by constituent local authorities, and one third appointed by The Welsh Ministers. Their approved revenue expenditure is set each year by The Welsh Ministers, and the authorities levy their constituent authorities for the

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balance of their operational budget. National Park Authorities are the planning authorities for their areas.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are overseen by a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), with any services embedded within constituent local authorities. There is no central funding. The JAC is a statutory consultee on planning applications for the area. I look forward to the second phase of the review, and to working with the Parks and AONBs to develop their ambition and to secure for them a future which builds on the special nature of these areas. I will respond to the Panel's recommendations when the review is completed.

The Panel's first stage report is available online.
The final report will be available in July.

Annex 1: Recommendations from the first report of the Review of Designated Landscapes in Wales

Recommendation 1

We recommend that there should not be a single designation.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that there is ONE set of statutory Purposes and an associated single statutory Duty for both designations.

Recommendation 3

We recommend changing the name of "Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty" (AONBs) to "National Landscapes of Wales"

Recommendation 4

We recommend the establishment of a consistent and resilient nomenclature as well as structure, including:

"The National Designated Landscapes of Wales"

"National Parks" and "National Landscapes" which are "The Equivalent Designations"

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The Equivalent Designations would possess Identical Statutory Purposes & Duties

Recommendation 5

We recommend there should be THREE interlocking statutory purposes for both the National Parks and National Landscapes.

These are:

“To conserve and enhance the distinctive landscape and seascape qualities of the area,”

(the Conservation Purpose)

“To promote physical and mental well-being through the enjoyment and understanding of the landscape of the area,”

(the Human Well-being Purpose)

“To promote sustainable forms of natural resource management and economic and community development which support the cultural heritage of the area.”
(the Sustainable Resource Management Purpose)

Recommendation 6

We recommend a new single Statutory Duty that removes the weak “have regard to” prefixes in the current duties on relevant public bodies, and replaces them with a single and clear duty:

“To contribute to the delivery of the three Purposes of the National Designated Landscapes.”

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