

# News Release

For immediate release

Wednesday 29 November 2023

## National Landscapes Association urges caution for new National Park plans

The National Landscapes Association welcomes Government's recognition of the immense value of protected landscapes, and the announcement of the search for a new National Park. This, coupled with the slated boundary extensions to the already designated Surrey Hills and Chilterns, and the planned designation of two new National Landscapes: Cheshire Sandstone Ridge and the Yorkshire Wolds, is a powerful endorsement of the impact of protected landscapes in meeting the challenges ahead, as long as this means **the total extent of land area legally protected for natural beauty increases in the UK.**

If the UK is going to come close to delivering against the key international commitments it has made, such as the UN Leaders' Pledge that 30% of all land and sea will be effectively protected and managed for nature by 2030<sup>1</sup> (i.e., within the next Parliament), then the protected areas we have need to be expanded ambitiously, resourced to deliver and protected more effectively.

**John Watkins, Chief Executive of the National Landscapes Association says:**

*“Government's decision to protect more of the nation's landscapes is a welcome one. As the environmental challenges facing us continue to grow, work to protect and regenerate the nation's landscapes will become increasingly important. The search for a new National Park will only help this cause if it results in a net increase in the land protected for the nation. Substituting a National Landscape for a National Park will tie up resources for years in a designation process with no boost to delivery. I urge Government to increase investment to all protected places for the long-term – futureproofing the places that will futureproof our nation's livelihood for generations to come.”*

The commitment to invest an additional £15m into protected landscapes is also hugely welcome, however the UK's National Landscape Partnerships would urge government to also ensure that this extra money is used to level up. Despite England's 34 National Landscapes covering double the land area, welcoming double the number of visitors per year and being much closer to centres of urban population (within 30 minutes journey time for 66% of the population), the 10 National Parks still receive more than seven times the funding. National Landscapes play a vital role,

not just in protecting our precious wildlife and landscapes, but also for tourism, the regional economy and public access to natural places.

National Landscape teams work as a strong network both across National Landscapes and with partner organisations. This networked approach makes them a strong coordinating force for climate and nature. The work of National Landscapes Partnerships in recent years has seen peatland twice the size of Birmingham restored, just one aspect of their work that mitigates flood risk across the nation – a problem that costs the UK £1.3bn per year.

Investment in National Landscapes is a key way to ensure that more money goes directly to protecting nature and combating the effects of climate change. National Landscapes teams are small, minimally bureaucratic and rooted in local communities. They work with existing, local democratic structures and expertise to deliver national priorities.

**John Watkins continues:**

*“National Landscapes are living, working places. We have a vision to be the leading exemplars of how thriving, diverse communities can work with and for nature in the UK: restoring ecosystems, providing food, storing carbon to mitigate the effects of climate change, safeguarding against drought and flooding, whilst also nurturing people’s health and wellbeing. To realise this vision, business-as-usual is not enough – the UK needs to pivot to long-term sustainable funding for nature protection, and fund protected areas according to their real value to people and society.”*

The National Landscapes Association will be pleased to participate in the technical process for assessing landscape value in its next steps to expand the National Landscapes family in England.

**-ENDS-**

**Media contact:**

**Sabina Eberle, PR Manager**

**Tel. 07306 618 149**

**Email. [sabina.eberle@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:sabina.eberle@cornwall.gov.uk)**

**OR**

**Ruth Colbridge, Communications and Advocacy Manager**

**Mobile: 07398 743579**

**Email: [ruth.colbridge@landscapesforlife.org.uk](mailto:ruth.colbridge@landscapesforlife.org.uk)**

**Notes to editors:**

- On Wednesday 22 November 2023, all 46 designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) became National Landscapes. This was a significant milestone for the UK and the next step in fully realising the National Landscapes’ vision to be the leading exemplars of how thriving, diverse

communities can work with and for nature in the UK: restoring ecosystems, providing food, storing carbon to mitigate the effects of climate change, safeguarding against drought and flooding, whilst also nurturing people's health and wellbeing.

- A National Landscape is an area of countryside in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland, that has been designated for conservation due to its significant landscape value. Areas are designated in recognition of their national importance by the relevant public body: Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency respectively. In place of AONB, Scotland uses the similar national scenic area (NSA) designation.
- The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 is the Act of the Parliament that provided the framework for the creation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in England and Wales, and also addressed public rights of way and access to open land.
- National Landscapes teams have been at the forefront of delivering natural solutions to the main challenges facing the nation for many years. By 2030, National Landscapes aim that, within their boundaries: at least 200,000 hectares of the most valuable natural areas (Sites of Special Scientific Interest or SSSIs), which equates to 1 ¼ times the size of London, will be in favourable condition; 100,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside of SSSIs will be created or restored, which is roughly nine times the size of Manchester; and 36,000 hectares of woodland, which is a little smaller than the Isle of Wight, will have been planted or allowed to regenerate. National Landscapes Partnerships will also focus on habitat restoration to ensure the protection of some of our most endangered species and increase their work to help more people to enjoy time spent in beautiful places.
- National Landscapes offer a uniquely integrated perspective in decisions about land use: convening conversations, bringing people together, and enabling a sustainable balance of priorities for nature, climate, people and place.
- The National Landscapes Association is the non-profit membership organisation representing the UK's National Landscapes.
- The work of small expert AONB / National Landscapes teams is guided by democratically derived Management Plans, developed through consultation with partners and members of the public through an open process every five years. The Management Plan covers the entirety of the landscape, considering how to protect and regenerate its special features: geology, species, habitat heritage, industry, culture; balancing the needs of the local community to keep pace with the latest infrastructure, through a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities of these distinct and special places.
- AONB / National Landscape Partnerships own no land, so their work is delivered by convening strong networks with landowners, farmers and partner organisations, working together to plan projects, and secure funding to deliver them.
- Since 2000 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnerships have:
  - coordinated habitat restoration projects across many thousands of hectares,
  - restored peatland twice the area of Birmingham,

- provided free educational opportunities for tens of thousands of children of all ages and needs,
- delivered many wellbeing programmes: from weekly walks for people with dementia and brain injuries and their carers to friendship cafes, social prescribing programmes, opportunities for men with sight loss to spend time outdoors and rebuild confidence, and many more.