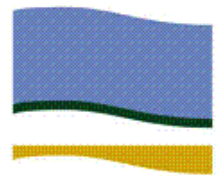


AONB Unit  
Isle of Wight AONB Partnership  
Seaclose Offices  
Fairlee Road  
Newport  
Isle of Wight  
PO30 2QS

Tel: 01983 823855  
Fax: 01983 823850  
Email: [unit@wightaonb.org.uk](mailto:unit@wightaonb.org.uk)



Isle of Wight  
area of outstanding  
natural beauty

*The Isle of Wight AONB Partnership is jointly supported by Natural England and the Isle of Wight Council*

[www.wightaonb.org.uk](http://www.wightaonb.org.uk)

Natural Environment White Paper Team  
Area 3D  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London  
SW1P 3JR

29 October 2010

Dear Sirs

**Re: An invitation to shape the Nature of England Discussion Document : Joint response by Isle of Wight AONB Partnership and Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership.**

The Isle of Wight AONB Partnership is an independent organisation, funded by Natural England and the Isle of Wight Council, to oversee the conservation and enhancement of the land covered by the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation. Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 increased the profile, protection and management of AONBs. Additionally it placed a 'duty of regard' on all local authorities and public bodies, such as utility companies, to consider the impact of their policies and activities on the purposes of the designation.

The Isle of Wight AONB Partnership aims to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the Isle of Wight AONB, in line with the statutory purpose of the designation, guided by the AONB Management Plan. We also work to increase the awareness and enjoyment of the many educational and health benefits that the Islands landscape and seascape provide, in addition to the valuable contribution that the landscape makes to our rural social and economic environment.

The Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership is an independent forum comprising, representatives of conservation bodies, statutory agencies, local government, landowners and local groups. The principal aim of the Isle of Wight Biodiversity partnership, in line with national guidance, is to promote and facilitate the maintenance, restoration and, where feasible, re-creation of nationally and locally important priority habitats and the species which depend upon them, through partnership working.

The Isle of Wight AONB Partnership (Wight AONB) and Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership (IW BAP) welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Natural Environment White Paper. Prompted by the current discussion document, the two organisations invited their members to a joint workshop held on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2010. This response is guided by comments received at that consultation event. We have attached a separate list of the organisations represented by the two partnerships.

## **General Comments**

It is perhaps a reflection of modern society's disconnection with nature that economic prosperity is given priority, before other concerns such as health, education or securing the provision of basic natural resources. We strongly support the Government's aspiration to take bold steps to stop the piecemeal degradation of our natural environment and seek opportunities to put the importance of the natural environment at the heart of Government policy-making.

The natural environment provides cost effective solutions to growing problems like flood and coastal defence, carbon emissions and the preservation of soil, water and air quality. Investments that destroy or undermine the natural environment risk our future economic wellbeing. The ecosystem services framework ensures all services are included and accounted for in decision-making, and provides a framework for assessing trade-offs, risks and uncertainties. This ensures the true worth of our natural resources is embedded in decision-making and emphasises the importance of natural scientific knowledge.

A landscape-scale and ecosystem-based approach is required for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, and this should be clearly reflected in the White Paper.

The landscape is a useful framework for decision making because it connects socio-economic systems with the natural environment and uses a language accessible to all sectors of the community. Along with other AONB Partnerships we promote the term 'landscape services' as this acknowledges that landscapes are expected to fulfill many functions at the same time.

There is extensive public support for the conservation of the natural environment, and effective communication and partnership working in all forms will be a key to success. As part of the Big Society, non-statutory environmental bodies working with local communities have a major role to play. However, Government action and support remains essential.

An immense amount is already achieved for the countryside and its biodiversity by community groups working in partnership with agencies. Their good work should be recognised and built upon but this can only happen if sufficient funding is available and government continues to provide support and guidance. We strongly support the findings of Lawton Review and we encourage Government to embrace the challenges presented in this document.

### **Question 1 – What do we need to do to embed the true value of our natural resources in decision making at all levels?**

The development of an ecosystem services framework ensures all services are included and accounted for in decision-making and provides a framework for assessing trade-offs, risks and uncertainties. This approach will ensure the true value of our natural resources is embedded in decision-making and emphasises the importance of natural scientific knowledge

However, there is an urgent need for societal change and acceptance of the value of the natural environment and the consequences of its continued degradation. This will need a strong lead from Government with an understanding and acknowledgement that this is a shared responsibility across all departments within Government. This should be supported through initiatives that enable greater connections and collaboration between all agencies, organisations and individuals involved in land management.

Additionally, there is the need to move away from perceptions that care and responsibility for the natural environment is solely the preserve of experts. Collaborative, community engagement and educational programmes should be advocated and enabled at national and local levels.

For example, locally, both partnerships support and attend community events, such as the Annual Hedge Laying Competition, Fort Victoria Foray and Bio-Blitz. By going out into the community and highlighting the importance of the need to protect our natural assets, we hope to convey the need to conserve them for future generations. Similarly, our partnerships work with many schools: ranging from primary to high school; encompassing the curriculum in a multi disciplinary approach; and

teaching outdoors within the natural environment. By engaging with young people, the message of the importance of caring for our natural resources permeates through families, communities and society. Education is the most powerful instrument of change we have.

There is a need to influence consumer behaviour, encourage households to take an interest in local products. Financial incentives to increase the competitiveness of local food, timber and other goods would encourage the use of local products and materials. This would not only support the local economy, but also encourage sustainable environmental management while reducing carbon emissions, but it would also raise consumer awareness.

In addition to fiscal motivation, being able to access green space can also reconnect society with our natural resources, for example on our Island there is a high demand for allotments. Green spaces can also provide heat sinks within built up areas to tackle increasing temperature caused by climate change, these could be managed by local community groups.

## **Question 2: Have we identified the right overarching challenges for the white paper to consider?**

There is a need to ensure that all drivers for change are identified. Through the development of AONB Management plans, collectively protected landscapes have identified the following key drivers for change: Climate Change; Globalised – market driven forces; Increasing demands from population growth and development; Policy Shifts; Social Changes; Recreation & Tourism; Continued loss of wildlife sites/assets; Continued neglect of historic assets; Cumulative impacts of small scale changes and the suburbanisation of rural development.

The on-going decline in biodiversity across the countryside is a matter of very great concern and a key challenge for the future. We welcome the recent decision by Government to increase spending on Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) next year. However, the next Common Agricultural Policy review will be key in the encouragement and deliverability of sustainable and environmentally responsible land management practices.

## **How should we approach these challenges?**

Mechanisms for delivery include agricultural policy and incentives such as continuing and expanding upon the Stewardship Scheme, maintaining funding for delivery of local Biodiversity Action Plans and enabling innovation through continuation of AONB and National Park Sustainable Development Funds.

Strengthening and expanding upon the law; such as extending section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to all land owners within the protected landscape and not just the Local Authority or utility companies. Also introducing new laws, such as making major developments within protected landscapes and designated habitats illegal and not just unlawful or contrary to planning policy.

Protection from development can be provided through the Planning System, by requiring all Local Development Framework Core Strategies to have dedicated policies for Landscape, Wildlife Habitat and Biodiversity, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and EU habitat designations.

The recently published Lawton Review is a significant and helpful contribution to this question. It provides some solutions which appear to have the potential to reform the framework for wildlife and landscape protection in a positive way.

## **Question 3: What are the existing policies and practices aimed at protecting England's natural assets (Including but not limited to those set out above on our biodiversity, seas, water bodies, air and soil) that currently work most effectively?**

National and international statutory designations such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserves

(NNR) make an essential contribution in safeguarding and enhancing our natural environment assets. These designations have helped maintain the natural value identified in the discussion document and as we seek to develop more resilient and joined up natural habitats, these designations will provide the essential building blocks of the landscape-scale approach to managing and creating natural habitats which the Government is seeking to promote.

As previously mentioned, Agri-environment schemes, particularly HLS make a vital contribution and are a key vehicle for delivering conservation objectives within a landscape scale approach. The continuation of HLS or similar Agri-environment schemes should be fundamental mechanism in the delivery of government's ambitions for enhancing the natural environment.

Partnership working and collaborative approaches needs to be encouraged and enabled. AONB and Biodiversity Partnerships have a good record for bringing together various stakeholders and communities and facilitating successful local approaches and sustainable solutions to land management. Landscape Partnership schemes operated through the Heritage Lottery Fund have been hugely successful around the country; including the West Wight Landscape Partnership on the Island. As well as providing practical conservation benefits, for example directly through its heathland restoration scheme, and indirectly by funding many small works jointly with private landowners; this partnership offers educational community exploration activities and schools learning programmes to increase awareness on environmental issues. Importantly the success of these programmes highlights the inter reliance between the natural and historic environments and are both are essential to an integrated and effective landscape approach.

We need to strengthen the network of partners delivering landscape and biodiversity gains and protection through local partnerships. It is important that we build upon existing processes rather than creating new structures.

#### **What works less well – what could we stop doing or do differently?**

It would be useful if further clear guidance from Government could be given on the weight that should be given to environmental considerations. Decision makers, regulators and consumers, when faced with a choice, often do not give adequate weight to environmental considerations. This will need to be challenged by strong political leadership on the environment over time as well as by new legislation. Courts have already dismissed the duty on public authorities to have regard to biodiversity established by the NERC Act 2006 as 'a weak one'. Similarly, many local planning decisions taken in the interests of the environment are over-ruled at Planning Inquiries by Planning Inspectors acting on behalf of the Secretary of State.

#### **Question 4: What mechanisms should we focus on to ensure we manage our natural systems more effectively in future?**

Education, changing social behaviour and empowering consumer choice are key market forces. Protecting through the law and continuing to encourage good practice by expanding upon current systems, such as farm stewardship schemes and Sustainable Development Funding, which have proven to deliver local projects.

While national bodies like DEFRA deal with national strategic issues, it is local organisations such as AONB Partnerships and BAP Partnerships who have hands on experience. Given they share many similar common objectives, it would be logical to create greater connectivity between organisations by promoting the benefits of sharing knowledge and experience through protected landscapes networking.

The spatial planning system has a key role to play in enhancing natural value. It is vital that the starting point in the Government's proposed reforms of this should be the maintenance of healthy environment as pre-requisite for thriving communities and sustainable economy. A system review should reference the approach being taken for the Marine Spatial Plans which are based on marine eco-systems and terrestrial planning should be informed more fundamentally by the natural processes and systems which support communities and the economy. Additionally, existing

mechanisms within the planning system, such as Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy require developers to contribute to infrastructure to support their developments. However, currently priority tends to be given to elements such as new access roads which make new development more tolerable but do not improve their sustainability. Government needs to give a strong steer to local authorities and developers to give a higher priority to the provision of green infrastructure, sustainable drainage systems, energy and water saving measures and biodiversity enhancements as an integral part of development.

#### **a. How should we define success?**

Success will ultimately occur when we start living in a truly sustainable manner. When changes to our patterns of production and consumption are such that natural resources including biodiversity, are not being diminished, and where possible are subject to a net gain over time. This is clearly a long-term goal and stepping stones towards it will be required to ensure that the challenge does not appear too daunting or 'unrealistic'. Appropriate, robust means of quantifying and monitoring this will be required, however there is scope for local community involvement in goal setting and monitoring.

Not only should the provision and protection of water, food, fuel and materials be an indicator, but a rolling bank of resources to meet future demand is just as important as meeting current demand. While the document identifies the need to deliver these basic ecosystems, there is no indication of any research into current and future demand, capacity and gap analysis.

#### **b. How can we agree on common goals and assess our progress towards them?**

AONB Management Plans and Biodiversity Action Plans can offer a useful starting point to engage a wide range of stakeholders, community groups and other partners in agreeing common goals on the natural environment.

Academics who study global warming, botany, marine biology, etc together with town and country planners and ecologists etc who work in practice can, working together, provide key indicators

#### **Question 5: How best can we reduce our footprint on the natural environment abroad, through the goods, services and product we use?**

Again this relies on a shift in government policy and public attitudes to encourage greater take up of local goods and services. Whilst not undermining the role of international trade and commerce there needs to be recognition of the benefits to communities and the natural environment that can be efficiently achieved through the development of more localised production, distribution and supply chains with an emphasis on local self sufficiency, particularly in food and energy production.

#### **Question 6: What best practice and innovative approaches to protecting and enhancing our natural environment do you think should be considered as we develop a white paper?**

It is essential that we engage a wide range of partners. As previously stated there can be the perception that the environment falls within a single government department and expert 'environmentalists'. Additionally it is crucial that the interdependency of the natural and historic environments is properly facilitated for the benefit of both.

It is necessary both to inspire the interest and involvement of communities at a local level and deliver at a landscape scale. The Wildlife Trusts' *Living Landscapes* programme is an example of landscape scale thinking, successful throughout England including on the Isle of Wight and this type of approach should be supported in the White Paper. Another example of landscape-scale thinking is the mapping of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) identified by the local biodiversity partnerships in the SE region. The Island's 10 BOAs cover 43% of the Island and could help us

analyse the gaps and identify opportunities on where to prioritise work and develop landscape buffers, stepping stones and wildlife corridors in the future.

In seeking innovative approaches we need to ensure that we do not abandon things that have been proven to work. There are many examples of best practice across the country. Having an annual national and regional award or conference for sharing best practice in both business and public service would encourage good practice. Alternatively a website of project ideas, in a similar manner to a clearing house could encourage the sharing support, experience and best practice.

**Question 7: How best can we harness and build on public enthusiasms for the natural environment so people can help improve it through local action, as informed consumers or by shaping policy.**

People need to have the chance to experience, engage with and be inspired by the natural environment. It is essential that there is the provision of as diverse a range of opportunities for people to connect with the natural environment as possible. This should incorporate: the provision of high quality green spaces both within existing settlements any new developments; green corridors, as appropriate linking these spaces and enhancing greater connectivity between settlements and the wider countryside; and environmental education encouraging a reconnection between modern living and the natural world.

Encouraging sustainable consumers and producers of fresh, healthy, local food with clear traceable origins (community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprises have an important role to play in supporting activities that promote healthy eating and more sustainable production and consumption).

**Question 8: What should be our vision for the role of Civil Society in managing and enhancing the natural environment and for engaging individuals, businesses and communities in setting the agenda for that work?**

The vision needs to encourage a better understanding by individuals, businesses and communities of the relationship between the economy, the environment and society. The loss of a healthy, functioning environment threatens our survival. The natural environment is a natural health service with the potential to make a major contribution to the mental and physical health and well being of everyone. It is free for everyone to use, enjoy, enriches our knowledge, develops skills, supports cultural activities and is crucial for sustainable living.

Businesses should be motivated by having green awards, which could be used to promote their business. This could be to set criteria, such as using electricity from a renewable source, recycling 95% of all waste, or purchasing at least 30% of its food from local businesses. Businesses could also sponsor landscape or habitat projects as an advertisement and marketing tool.

Parish Councils could become a key link between Local Authorities, local communities and civil society. Local organisations and community groups should be encouraged by their local Parish Councils to develop stronger links and to feed in and share their knowledge of the natural environment.

**Question 9: How best can Government incentivise innovative and effective action on the natural environment, across England, at the local level?**

**a. How best can Local Government and other local partners work together to improve local outcomes on the natural environment, and pursue a more integrated approach linking a health natural environment to economic prosperity, sustainable development and a better quality of life health and wellbeing?**

Clear guidance needs to be provided by Government to local authorities on the importance of the natural environment in delivering multiple objectives, including economic ones. This should be set

within the provision of a flexible framework and seed funding for localities to develop partnerships and local delivery programmes.

Provide access to local facilities and amenities, such as recycling centres or allotments within local villages, so a person can physically go and do something as an individual.

Have national and local awards, such as garden village awards can also encourage communities to take an interest in the local environment.

Local 'Green Business' awards can also encourage local businesses to act responsibly while providing a valuable marketing tool.

**b. What are the most effective mechanisms for managing the natural environment where cross-boundary issues are involved, and making the link to other mechanisms for economic growth, transport and planning?**

As an Island, we do not have cross boundary issues; we do however have transport issues with regards to connectivity to the mainland, as unlike some British Islands we do not currently have a fixed link and rely on ferry services. There are 136 permanently inhabited Islands that form the British Isles, which highlights the need for mechanisms and policies specifically for Islands.

**c. How best can the value of the natural environment be considered within local planning?**

The forthcoming review of planning legislation should seek to remove the current ambiguity of sustainable development definitions and put the maintenance of healthy eco-systems at the heart of the planning process.

Giving the environment and our natural resources greater protection in law would assist local planning officers in the conservation of our resources.

**Question 10: How best could the economy reflect the true value of nature's services in the way business is done, to drive smarter, greener growth?**

The economy of the UK is a complicated and multifaceted and often conflicting amalgamation of demand and supply, labour, capital & technology; each one of these parts of the economy is dependant on our natural resources. If the full external costs of natural resource use were reflected in the price of commodities, goods and services, the market would prove reasonably effective in allocating scarce resources.

Reflecting the true cost of impacts on the landscape of business, investment and consumer decisions is fraught with difficulties but through AONB Partnerships and their Management plans there is a mechanism for resolving issues. In taking a landscape approach we can ensure that new major infrastructure choices do not detract from the beauty of our designated landscapes and thereby undermine its value.

**Question 11: Responsible businesses are already looking for ways to reduce their impact on the environment. How can we encourage more action like this?**

There is clearly a need for the public sector to lead by example and to stimulate green business and environmentally sustainable business activity through its procurement policies.

**Question 12: What are the barriers to joining up and seeking multiple benefits from our natural assets?**

While National Parks, AONB Partnerships and Biodiversity Partnerships work together and share common goals. Local Authorities often have conflicting or competing goals, for example the need for highway improvements with ecological management.

We need to re connect people to the places in which they live, work and take recreation. AONB Partnerships offer a model for building local support and the delivery of infrastructure required to make a real difference to the management of our landscapes.

**Question 13: What are the barriers to thinking big and taking a landscape scale approach to managing our natural resources?**

Our AONB Partnership has promoted the landscape scale approach to managing natural resources for almost five decades. One of the problems is the fragmented ownership of the landscape. It is divided up into individual farms and individual fields, forests copses and woodlands all under different ownerships. While Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a duty of regard on Local Authorities, it does not place any such requirement on landowners.

**Question 14: What should be the priorities for the UK's role in the EU and international action, to protect and enhance the natural environment at home and abroad?**

The UK contains a wide range of areas of European and international importance for biodiversity (SPAs, SACs, Ramsar sites), with many important sites in South East England. It is essential that we conserve and, where necessary, enhance these sites for their own inherent value and as exemplars in an international context. Better integration of the management of these sites with other, large protected areas (notably AONBs and National Parks) is required. The latter provide an opportunity, not yet fully realised, for the delivery of biodiversity as part of the suite of wider public benefits, and similar considerations are likely to be relevant at the European and global levels.

As mentioned previously the objective of increasing public involvement in the natural environment should include greater awareness of the significance of nationally and internationally important natural assets, and the role that they also play locally.

**Question 15: If you could choose just one priority action for the Natural Environment White Paper to drive forward locally, nationally or internationally – what would it be?**

To promote the role and use of Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnerships in the landscape scale management of our natural resources. To encourage Defra to make better use and expand upon the existing capabilities and experience of AONB Partnerships, to deliver local environmental management. We would like to work closer with Defra to deliver some of our shared common goals at the local level.

We hope that DEFRA find our comments useful. If we may be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

**Fiona Hanna**  
**AONB Lead Officer**  
**Isle of Wight AONB Partnership**

**Matthew Chatfield**  
**IW Council, Parks & Countryside Manager**  
**Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership**



**Isle of Wight AONB Partnership and Isle of Wight Biodiversity Partnership  
Member Organisations**

Isle of Wight Council	Local Access Forum
Natural England	Local Agenda 21
	Medina Housing
British Association for Shooting & Conservation	NAAONB Executive Committee
Bembridge Heritage Society	National Federation of Sea Anglers
Brading Green Group	National Trust
British Horse Society	Newtown Residents Association
British Telecom	National Farmers Union
Campaign to Protect Rural England	Office for Andrew Turner
Christopher Scott Chartered Surveyors	Oglander Roman Trust
Country, Land and Business Association	Peoples Trust for Endangered Species
Clifford J Matthews	Quality Transport Partnership
Cycle Wight	Ramblers Association
Dept of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	Royal Institute of British Architects (IW Branch)
Diocesan Board of Education	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
East Wight History Group	Rural Community Council
English Heritage	SE England Development Agency
Environment Agency	SE Protected Landscapes
Footprint Trust	SE Reserves Forces Cadets Association
Forest Enterprise	Scottish and Southern Power
Forestry Commission	Solent Forum
Freshwater Lifeboat	Southern Electric
Friends of the Earth	Southern Water
Government Office for the South East	SteePhill Forestry & Arboriculture
Green Island Awards	The Undercliff Society
Greenpeace	The Undercliff Defence Committee
Hants & IW Wildlife Trust	The Wight Against Rural Turbines
Historical Association IW Branch	Tourism South East
Island History Forum	Trail Riders Fellowship
Island Strategic Partnership	Vectis Searcher
Island 2000 Trust	Weavers, Spinners & Dyers Guild
Island Waste Services	Wight Cable Limited
IW Association of Local Councils	Wight Nature Fund
IW Badger Group	Wight Orienteers
IW Bat Group	Wight Squirrel Project
IW BAP Partnership Steering Committee	Wightlink Ferries Limited
IW Buildings Preservation Trust	Woodland Forum
IW County Federation of Womens' Institutes	Woodland Trust
IW Economic Partnership	Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners
IW Estuaries Project	Yarmouth Society
IW Farmers Market	
IW Foot Beagles	
IW Foxhounds	
IW Gardens Trust	
IW Grain Storage	
IW Hangliding & Paragliding Club	
IW Metal Detecting Club	
IW Natural History & Archaeological Society	
IW Pond Wardens	
IW Self Catering Association	
IW Society	
IW Tourism	
Julia Margaret Cameron Trust	
Kitbridge Enterprises Trust	