

**EFRA Committee
Rural Tourism in England Inquiry**

Additional evidence from the Cotswolds Conservation Board

National Trails

Recommendations for consideration:

1. Defra to fund the National Trails via the National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) financial settlements, rather than through Natural England, given the high degrees of coincidence between Parks / AONBs and trails.

Or

2. Defra to fund the National Trails direct rather than through Natural England.

1. The family of National Trails, AONBs and National Parks all emerged from the 1949 National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act. The trails were created to explore our finest landscapes, for which largely read our AONBs and National Parks. Since 1949 the three strands have to varying degrees operated in silos.
2. We believe that there is an opportunity to make more of the whole protected landscapes and trails family. We would like to offer the following alternative funding arrangement suggestion, which would improve efficiency and effectiveness.
3. The AONBs and Parks are funded through Defra and this system works extremely well, the AONBs having transferred from Natural England for the start of 2011/12.
4. It is possible to identify a lead Protected Landscape per National Trail, as detailed in the table below. At present the Park and AONB main budgets are supported by Defra, with some Parks or AONBs receiving a separate grant for a trail from Natural England. The grants could be offered, accepted and accounted for in one rather than two processes; passporting money to the front line through the least number of hands.
5. Some may consider that the above option could be suitable for the long established trails but would not work for the emerging England Coast Path (ECP). We think it could work for ECP as well: it should be possible to identify a lead protected landscape for specific lengths of the ECP, even if some protected landscapes are not directly linked to the coast or route of the ECP.

English National Trail	Suggested Lead Protected Landscape	Current Employing Authority
Pennine Way	Yorkshire Dales NP	Yorkshire Dales NPA

Pennine Bridleway	Yorkshire Dales NP	Yorkshire Dales NPA
Hadrian's Wall	Northumberland NP	Northumberland NPA
Cleveland Way	North York Moors NP	North York Moors NPA
Yorkshire Wolds Way	North York Moors NP	North York Moors NPA
Norfolk Coast Path	Norfolk Coast AONB	Norfolk County Council
Peddars Way	Norfolk Coast AONB	Norfolk County Council
Cotswold Way	Cotswolds AONB	Cotswolds Conservation Board
Ridgeway	Chilterns AONB	Oxon County Council
Thames Path	North Wessex Downs AONB	Oxon County Council
North Downs Way	Kent Downs AONB	Kent County Council
South Downs Way	South Downs NP	South Downs NPA
South West Coast Path	South Devon AONB	Devon County Council

Post Brexit agricultural / environmental subsidy system

How could the post Brexit agricultural/environmental subsidy system be made simpler than the current CAP/agri-environment schemes, particularly so as to allow small businesses to access funds more easily ?

Recommendations for consideration:

- 3. Develop locally derived scheme menus delivered locally.**
- 4. Improve the simplicity of the application process and view the process from the customers' perspective.**
- 5. Develop clear guidance on the criteria for eligibility.**
- 6. Agri-environment schemes to be outcome based and less prescriptive.**
- 7. Advice and assistance from advisory staff, guiding and supporting applicants.**
- 8. Review, combine and simplify the suite of Regulations.**

6. Small businesses already have access to funding streams under the CAP. LEADER in the Cotswolds has a minimum grant level of £5,000. The barrier is often the level of bureaucracy, overlap/ confusion between schemes and the customer or applicant being all too easily overlooked in the process. To apply for £5,000 involves the same level of form filling and information as an application for £50,000. There is scope to have a simpler form and process for smaller sums of money. The Countryside Productivity fund has two forms, one for large grants and one for small grants.
7. More effective and suitably targeted new agri-environment schemes should be introduced to conserve and enhance outstanding landscapes in targeted areas such as the Cotswolds.
8. As bodies legally responsible for drafting and publishing statutory landscape scale management plans, the AONB Conservation Boards and National Parks should be trusted to deliver the agri-environment schemes that help implement those plans and achieve a local menu of schemes at a genuine landscape scale.
9. There is the opportunity to develop more local administration for agri-environment schemes, which will reduce administrative overlap, whilst retaining a national framework.
10. Although the targeting of Countryside Stewardship is based on National Character Areas (NCAs), the prescriptions accompanying the options do not always apply to a particular area of the country or allow for seasonal variability. An applicant also has to wade through a long list of options not relevant to their area. For example moorland and heathland options are not relevant for the Cotswolds.
11. The scheme can be simplified by offering a menu based on the special qualities, characteristics and priorities of an area; AONB, National Park and where these don't exist, NCA. How the options are presented can also be improved, making it easier to find the options relevant to the area. For the Cotswolds presentation can be improved by collating options under headings for grassland, woodland, farmland birds and nectar, water management etc.
12. However the agri-environment schemes are administered their focus must be on attaining and increasing additionality over and above expected regulatory requirements.
13. Any new scheme should ensure adequate reward for managing land and environmental assets, providing public goods and services. The scheme should be less prescriptive and be focussed more on achieving outcomes.
14. Looking back over the past 25 years, the best agri-environment agreements, (including LEADER and the Productivity Fund), and their optimum delivery on the ground have been with support of advisers. Where high quality and trusted advice is provided free at the point of delivery, good relationships between the provider and participant are evident and results can be more effective. In parallel

with any increased targeting of agri-environment schemes will be the need to target associated advice and monitoring arrangements.

15. It is likely that to increase biodiversity benefits there will be a need for greater targeting of resources at ecological networks and at the landscape scale. Field boundaries, pollinator conservation measures and water quality measures are recognisably both widespread and of importance. Such measures could be accommodated within a standalone capital works programme analogous to that now operating as part of the new Countryside Stewardship scheme.
16. Whilst there is the need to target schemes, future agri-environment schemes should not be too narrowly focussed and offer a wide suite of options based on the local area including the historic and cultural landscape. The current Countryside Stewardship scheme has become more focussed than its predecessor, resulting in landowners/businesses being excluded.
17. One of the main risks of any change is undoing what has been achieved by successive agri-environment schemes. For example, we have seen the loss of arable reversion in the Cotswolds after 20 years of public investment as a result of holdings no longer being eligible to enter the new Countryside Stewardship scheme. Consequently an element of continuity between schemes is important.
18. Language and definition of terms in any new scheme taking a natural capital, ecosystem services and public benefit approach will be vital. Many farmers assume public benefit means access which is not the case. Many farmers and landowners are not clear what natural capital and ecosystem services are and this will need some explanation.
19. Taking a wider view, the whole spectrum of regulation would benefit from review in terms of simplification, not just agri-environment. The complication is in part due to different regulations covering areas such as water, soils etc being introduced at different times as separate regulations. There is scope to combine related regulations. For example the regulations from the Groundwater Directive, Water Framework Directive and Nitrates Directive could be collated into one single regulation removing duplication without diminishing their impact.

Rural Skills Programmes and Rural Tourism

20. The Cotswolds rural skills programme delivers training in a range of traditional skills including dry-stone walling, hedgelaying, thatching and blacksmithing. Courses are held at different locations across the Cotswolds AONB, ensuring that local residents and visitors to the area have an equal opportunity to learn about and experience first-hand the skills which are integral to the Cotswolds landscape. In 2015-16 the Cotswolds Rural Skills programme delivered training for 400 people and provided work for 18 rural skills professionals as instructors.

21. The programme runs under two main objectives;

- to create awareness and understanding of traditional rural skills and their relevance to the local landscape
- to ensure the knowledge and techniques of these skills are maintained and passed to the next generation of tradesmen

22. The Board addresses the first objective of the programme by delivering a set of informal training courses which are suitable for beginners with no experience of these skills. These hands-on, practical courses take place outdoors and in most incidences assist with the repair of landscape features, e.g. dry-stone walls and hedgerows. Enabling trainees to leave a personal legacy in the landscape is a unique selling point of this element of the programme.

23. The second objective is achieved by delivering industry recognised, accredited training courses through the Cotswolds Dry-stone Walling Academy. Launched in 2014, the Academy provides those looking to enter the dry-stone walling trade with a clear career pathway into the profession. The Board is exploring the opportunities to expand the academy to include other rural skills.

24. Interest in rural skills has positively impacted upon the rural tourism sector. Analysis of the 2015/16 Cotswolds Rural Skills programme showed that nearly a quarter of all trainees came from counties outside of the AONB. The home counties accounted for the highest proportion of these trainees (41%), followed by Wales (14%). Most of the beginners courses provided as part of the rural skills programme are two days in duration. Due to the travel distance required it is fair to assume that a significant proportion of the trainees travelling from outside the AONB would have booked local accommodation.

25. There is an opportunity to expand the impact of traditional skills training on the rural tourism sector. This could be done by providing a package of training, accommodation and transport for those looking to spend time in the Cotswolds.

26. Feedback has told us that people attend our rural skills courses for a diverse range of reasons. The table below outlines the motivations of trainees attending courses, taken from a sample of participants, (trainees were able to select more than one reason for attending a course).

Trainee Category	% of attendees	Motivation
<i>Just have a go</i>	56%	People that are intrigued about the skill, but have no intention of developing their skills further after the course
<i>DIY Enthusiast</i>	53%	Usually have their own landscape feature at home and want to know how to carry out simple repairs/works when needed

<i>Business development</i>	7%	Landscape gardeners, land managers or builders looking to widen the portfolio of skills that they can offer through their business
<i>Career Progression</i>	9%	Courses seen as the first step towards a potential career in a rural skill

27. Over 80% of trainees are aged 40 years+ which suggests rural skills training is not appealing or accessible to younger age groups. This may be due to course costs, location or work/time commitments. The Board works with local schools to provide interactive rural skills demonstrations for students. In doing so it is hoped that students will consider rural skills trades as viable and realistic professions for them to enter when leaving full-time education. The Board also offers a 25% discount on course fees to members of Young Farmers in order to encourage engagement with the 18-25 year demographic.

28. The Cotswolds rural skills programme has seen a rapid increase in activity over the past 5 years with trainee numbers growing by over 300% since 2011. This increase can in part be attributed to the Board's pro-active decision to invest resources in its rural skills programme. The heightened profile of rural skills through the prominence of popular television programmes such as the BBC 2 'Mastercrafts' is also likely to have had an impact on the revival of the public interest in traditional skills.