

A Potential Cotswolds National Park

Frequently Asked Questions, FAQs

1. National Parks compared to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Q: So what is the difference between a National Park and AONB status?

A: The focus for both is protected landscape. National Parks and AONBs come from the same legislation, and share the same landscape status. The purpose of designating National Parks is:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the park.
- To promote opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities.

The purpose of designating AONBs is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.

Note: The national Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs 2018 is underway and due to report in 2019. National Park and AONB criteria may be updated as a result of the review.

2. Investment in the Environment

Q: Is investment in the environment a priority for Government?

A: In January 2018 the Prime Minister launched the government's 25 Year Environment Plan. It highlighted the priority of the environment and that the natural environment was our most precious inheritance. It emphasised the government's plan for our generation to become the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it and pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future. It recognised that farming and forestry land uses are vital industries and that they shape our landscape.

The plan identified the designation of National Parks and AONBs as among the outstanding environmental achievements of the past 100 years.

3. Boundaries of any National Park

Q: Is there any intention to undertake a boundary review?

A: The legislation at present would require a complete review of any new Park boundary. However, there is an alternative idea within the Cotswolds that a new Park might adopt the existing successful AONB boundary (dating from 1990) and operate for a period of time to that boundary. There could be a review of the boundary after 5 – 7 years of the Park operating, enabling discussions for any boundary changes to be based on the day to day experience of a Park Authority operating.

The current Cotswolds AONB boundary is based upon an assessment of landscape qualities dating from 1988 - 1990. It is a natural historic landscape based boundary and does not adopt county, unitary, district, borough or parish administrative boundaries.

The Glover Review may well recommend changes to the lengthy current arrangements for reviewing boundaries of National Parks and AONBs.

4. The difference a National Park would make

Q: What differences would there be after 5 - 10 years if the Cotswolds were to become a National Park?

A: In summary;

- A single Local Plan leading consistent planning policy formulation based on the needs of the Cotswolds and implemented for the area as a whole;
- A more effective and influential landscape led Management Plan for the Park, linked to the single Local Plan;
- Management of the landscape as a whole, resulting in improved enhancement of the landscape and a reduction in the erosion of landscape quality;
- Application of Natural Capital and Cultural Capital to resource management across a whole landscape;
- Design and consistent local delivery of a single integrated rural development and agri-environment scheme;
- Ensure quality design and use of materials appropriate to the area;
- Join up of multiple advisory services and funding streams;
- Enable and lead effective networks for collaboration, co-ordination and delivery with landowners, farmers, businesses and communities across the Park as a whole;
- Experiment and trial new, innovative and entrepreneurial initiatives;
- Enhanced and consistent sustainable tourism, recreation and quiet enjoyment policy development and implementation across the area;
- Co-ordination and delivery of sustainable tourism for the whole area;
- Improved and consistent approach to the management of the rights of way network, including design and use of materials appropriate to the Cotswolds;
- Stronger local, national and international brand for the area and the businesses that operate within the area and depend on the brand;
- Clearer identity for the area and the communities living within it, inspiring even greater pride and value in the quality of the landscape and environment;
- More appropriate resourcing and financing settlement for the size and scale of the protected landscape;
- Improved ability of urban communities in the West Midlands, Avon and outer London to access, explore and enjoy their nearest National Park, delivering in parallel significant health and well-being benefits to those diverse populations.

5. Local involvement

Q: What plans are there for public consultation?

A: Natural England as the national adviser on landscape and protected landscape designations would review the case for a new National Park, make any recommendations to Government and there would be a full round of consultations as they deemed necessary. However, the Cotswolds Conservation Board already has an extensive programme of engagement with stakeholders and communities which is in train, and which will continue.

6. Democratic representation on a National Park

Q: What model of governance is likely to be adopted?

A: Traditionally a Park Authority comprises no less than 40% Local Authority appointees, at least 20% Parish appointees and up to 40% Secretary of State appointees. This is the same model as the current Cotswold AONB Conservation Board.

However, the opportunity could be taken to explore alternative arrangements e.g. including appointees resulting from direct elections onto the National Park

7. A Precept or Levy

Q: Would there be an intention to precept or 100% fund from central Government grant and other miscellaneous sources?

A: National Parks are currently funded 100% via Defra. The Park Authorities have retained their earlier precept or levying powers although these are never used. The precept power enables them to meet the criteria that mean they can reclaim Vat.

A National Park would look to add to its main Defra settlement by seeking and applying for other grants. Parks have been successful in securing investment from the Heritage Lottery Fund, government departments e.g, DCLG, government agencies e.g. Natural England and private sector companies. Additional funding programmes include historic building restoration grants, cycle access infrastructure grants – working as individual Parks, groups of Parks or in partnership with other organisations.

The Park family has recently been working to secure private sector sponsorship, with the most recent example of success being their national programme with the Columbia outdoor clothing company – leading to a saving the Parks' operational costs.

The Cotswold AONB already works in this way

8. Additional red tape

Q: Won't a National Park simply lead to more red tape and become a blocker on development and innovation?

A: Whether an area is designated as a National Park or as an AONB, the same issues of development control and strategic planning need to be undertaken. Arguably, having these determined through a single local plan will create significant opportunity to reduce bureaucracy.

National Parks are living, working landscapes that support rural communities. Farming and planning systems have both led to the recognition, designation and celebration of our National Parks.

The Park Authorities have a formal duty to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the National Park.

Both National Parks and AONBs are afforded the highest status of protection and government policy is that major development should only take place in exceptional circumstances.

The Cotswold AONB Conservation Board has already demonstrated its ability to be innovative and manage bureaucracy.

9. Planning powers

Q: What are the preferred arrangements for dealing with planning applications in a National Park area?

A: Traditionally a National Park Authority is the planning authority for the Park area and delivers planning services direct. The most recent South Downs National Park model (2010/11) provides another option, whereby there is a single strategic Park wide Local Plan and Park wide Management Plan. Planning delivery can be delegated to local authorities, with an annual rolling contract between the Park Authority and individual planning authorities. How this might work efficiently in the Cotswolds is the subject of discussions between the Conservation Board, Defra, DCLG, Natural England and the constituent Local Authorities.

Within the South Downs National Park the Authority:

- compiles the Local Plan and Management Plan for the National Park;
- works with the County and Unitary Councils to agree joint Waste & Minerals Plans;
- determines all waste and minerals applications;
- compiles design guidance for application when determining planning applications;
- informs and substantiates the housing needs of the Park and its communities;
- delegates the delivery of development control to 5 district, (Section 101, Local Government Act 1972);
- monitors the delegation of the delivery of development control and can decide to call in an application for determination by the Park Authority.

In general the larger authorities have opted to deliver planning services under a delegated arrangement whilst those authorities with only a small part of the Park or very few planning applications have opted for the planning function to be delivered by the Park Authority.

A Park Authority would seek to achieve consistent high level planning policy and implementation for the area as a whole.

10. Development plan

Q: With the requirement that a National Park prepares its own local plan what will be the relationship between the adjoining local authorities and any such local plan? Will the local plan have due regard to the policies in the adjoining local authorities?

A: A “duty to cooperate” already exists between National Parks and neighbouring Authorities. The Park Authority would compile the Local Plan for the National Park, and work with the County and Unitary Councils to agree joint Waste & Minerals Plans. It would in addition compile design guidance, mindful of the differing elements applicable to the different areas within the park, for the use of applicants and for use when determining planning applications.

It would clearly set out Park specific policies for the use of applicants and for use when determining planning applications.

In respect of the local authority local plans and core development plans with their partners outside the National Park it would work in partnership with local authorities to understand their needs and duties to co- operate bringing to the table their own housing needs. Such joint working should reduce tensions in terms of numbers.

11. Housing growth implications

Q: Will there be any implications of National Park status on housing growth? For example, as district councils have area wide housing growth requirements, will the part in the National Park within the district be expected to make a commensurate contribution?

A: The Park Authority would inform and substantiate the housing needs of the Park and its communities and reflect these in the Park's Local Plan.

Government policy means that National Parks are not subject to top down housing allocations or the proposed standard methodology of assessing housing need. Their purposes require them to consider the economic and housing needs of the community living in the Park with particular emphasis on affordable housing.

However, the existing practice of the Cotswolds Conservation Board over a number of years has been to support the proportionate organic growth of its communities with support for both housing and employment where they do not conflict with the core purposes of the Board.

12. Property values and housing affordability

Q: What consideration is being given to housing affordability issues in a new National Park?

A: The National Planning Policy Guidance under Natural Environment/Landscape refers to the English National Parks and Broads UK Government Vision 2010 for information on National Parks. It states: "The Government recognises that the Parks are not suitable locations for unrestricted housing and does not therefore provide general housing targets for them. The expectation is that new housing will be focused on meeting affordable housing requirements, supporting local employment opportunities and key services."

The Cotswolds are already well known both nationally and internationally and the area has good access to London, Bristol and Birmingham. As a result the area is extremely popular, market housing prices are relatively high and there are significant numbers of second homes. It is not envisaged that National Park designation would therefore lead to any significant increase in house prices.

13. Balance between recreation and quiet enjoyment

Q: While it is recognised that the Cotswolds already is a major visitor destination which helps support the rural economy, a National Park could attract more visitors. Therefore what balances are being sought between retaining the character of the area and balancing increased demand for visitors?

A: National Park Authorities in England have the following two purposes and a socio economic duty:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park;
- to promote opportunities for understanding and enjoyment of the National Park's special qualities.
- and a duty to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the National Park.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board's purposes are modelled on the Park's purposes. If there is a conflict between the two purposes the conserving and enhancing purpose takes priority, known as the Sandford Principle. The ongoing National Parks and AONB Review may consider experience from Scotland, where the socio economic duty is elevated to a purpose. They also have a fourth purpose: to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area. A Cotswolds National Park might aspire to a bespoke model for the Cotswolds, it could:

- achieve greater co-ordination and delivery of sustainable tourism for the Park area as whole area,
- improve co-ordination of recreation and a quiet enjoyment policy development and provision of services.
- improve and lead a consistent approach to the management of the rights of way network, including the design and use of materials appropriate to the Cotswolds.

14. Rural diversification

Q: What would be the implications on farm diversification, reuse of farm buildings to other businesses, and renewable energy projects?

A: National Park Authorities have a range of relevant and positive case studies. They also have a clear duty to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the National Park.

The Park Authority would inevitably look to join up the multiple advisory services and funding streams; enable and lead effective networks for collaboration, co-ordination and delivery with landowners, farmers, businesses and communities across the Park as a whole; and experiment and trial new, innovative and entrepreneurial initiatives in order to aid and support appropriate rural diversification.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is the only protected landscape organisation in England to be operating as an Accountable Body for a LEADER programme, an approach a National Park would look to develop.

15. Environmental payments for farmers

Q: How might a National Park impact on environmental payments to farmers?

A: Clearly, future Agri-Environment support policies are still being developed by Government. There should be no change. Dating back to the Cotswolds Hills ESA, farmers

have been strong participants in various agri-environment schemes and the current Cotswolds LEADER (economic growth and jobs creation) programme. The operation of future schemes will be dependent on there being sufficient funding available and if not, whether some landscapes are prioritised.

The current National Park family have regularly been prioritised for various programmes and pilot projects e.g the current Payment by Results agri-environment trials in the Yorkshire Dales.

The Cotswold AONB has already proposed that it is a pilot area for any new agri-Environment scheme in view of its understanding of landscape, agriculture and communities in its protected landscape.

16. Rural economy adjacent to the National Park

Q: The Vale of Evesham is a working landscape dominated by the horticultural sector which is vital for the economy of the sub region. Are there any implications for such areas as a result of National Park status? What would be the implication of any designation in economic development terms for adjacent areas if growth is restricted because of the impact on the National Park?

A: Any National Park would be a living, working landscape – as it is now for the Cotswolds AONB. It should not adversely impact on the economy of neighbouring areas.

A National Park could well provide a stronger local, national and international brand for the area and the businesses that operate within the area or adjacent to it.

17. National Park branding

Q: How might a National Park brand help the Cotswolds?

A: National Park is a title used across the world. It is generally acknowledged that the term is better understood and appreciated than England and Wales specific designations such as AONB, even if a Park in one part of the world is significantly different from another part of the world.

Given this greater recognition it is envisaged that the National Park brand would be of greater value and interest to a variety of public, private and charitable sector companies and organisations – even for an area as well known as the Cotswolds. Local products and produce from the National Park in particular might benefit from a Park brand.

18. Pressure on local infrastructure

Q: Whilst the Cotswolds is a popular tourist destination at present, what would increased visitor numbers look like, and what additional strain would this put on travel infrastructure – particularly the Cotswold rail line and major roads e.g. A46/A44? Would National Park status reinforce lobbying for the doubling of the Cotswold line? Would National Park status lend additional support for the much needed improvements to the A46(T) and also improvements to the A44, i.e. upgrading the link from the M5 to the M40? Is there a risk that designation might see withdrawal of much needed infrastructure on the basis of impact on the National Park?

A: Cotswold AONB is in a fortunate position of already having good rail and road infrastructure linking its protected landscape to communities and urban populations.

A National Park would seek to positively influence the delivery of appropriate infrastructure improvements. Given that the Park would be designated for the quality of its landscape, the Park Authority would seek a landscape-led approach to any infrastructure improvements – in simple terms the right improvements in the right place.

National policy e.g the National Planning and Policy Framework and associated Guidance would also apply to any such infrastructure schemes.

19. Evidence base

Q: What is the evidence from elsewhere of the benefits of National Park status?

A: Consideration of the arguments for and against a Cotswolds National Park must be underpinned by evidence. The gathering of specific evidence is on going. Lessons are being learnt and evidence requested from Defra, Natural England, existing National Parks and other organisations with experience of National Parks.

There are 15 local authorities spread across the South West, South East and West Midlands English Regions with territory in the Cotswolds AONB. This does make aspects of consistent planning, data collection and interrogation for the whole area more challenging.

20. Why not simply retain the Cotswolds AONB

Q: Why designate a Cotswolds National Park to replace a Cotswolds AONB?

A: Whilst the AONB has the same landscape status as a National Park it is a poor cousin from a policy, practical delivery and resourcing perspective. Research has also identified the Cotswolds as one of the AONBs under the greatest development pressures nationally.

It is envisaged that a National Park would achieve:

- Consistent high level planning policy and implementation for the area as a whole;
- Joining up of multiple funding streams and the delivery of rural development and agri-environment schemes;
- Management of the landscape as a whole and reduced erosion of landscape quality;
- Stronger local, national and international brand;
- Co-ordination and delivery of sustainable tourism for the whole area;
- Enhanced recreation and quiet enjoyment policy development and provision of services;
- More appropriate resourcing and financing settlement for the size and scale of protected landscape.