

## Members' Briefing Written Ministerial Statement on 13 September 2023

### Background

On Wednesday 13 September 2023, the Defra Secretary of State tabled a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) setting out a package of measures to support nature recovery in Protected Landscapes. The plans were also announced in the Lords by Lord Benyon, which can be seen at Parliamentlive.tv [here](#). Defra also published a [press release](#).

The package included a commitment to new legislation through an amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill at Third Reading (21 September) which will **enhance National Park and AONB Management Plans** by placing a stronger requirement on partners to contribute to their delivery. At the Third Reading, Lord Howe set out how the amendment will enhance the Management Plans of Protected Landscapes - National Parks and AONBs - by bolstering the contribution of partners to help deliver them, ensuring better outcomes for people and nature. He stated that, as home to some of our most beautiful and iconic places, Protected Landscapes are crucial delivery partners who are at heart of work to unleash rural prosperity and create a network of beautiful, nature rich spaces that can be enjoyed by all parts of society.

Lord Howe explained that the government has amended individual acts to strengthen the duty on relevant authorities to contribute to delivery of the purposes of Protected Landscapes and creating a power to make regulations. He further explained that the Secretary of State now has the power to bring forward these regulations and said the government is committed to doing so in a timely manner.

The government will also shortly publish its response to the **Landscapes Review** consultation.

The statement also announces funding for the new **Protected Landscapes Partnership** involving the National Association for AONBs, National Parks England, National Trails UK and Natural England, which will deliver projects and programmes on nature recovery and widening access to nature.

The announcement also confirms an extension to the **Farming in Protected Landscapes** programme (FiPL), with funding for a fourth year to March 2025, and refers to the positive impact of Defra's **'Removing Barriers'** access for all programme, which is improving access to the countryside for people from all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

The Statement also confirmed the imminent publication of Defra's new **Outcomes Framework**, which will define the contribution that Protected Landscapes should make to national targets. These are intended to guide local decision-making and prioritisation and represent a step forward in achieving the government's global goal to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030.

The National Association for AONBs has issued an unqualified welcome to this news and encouraged AONB teams to do the same. Defra has indicated that positive responses to the news will support a narrative, building towards further positive announcements of opportunities for Protected Landscapes in the coming weeks.

## Roundtable

The Secretary of State convened a round table with AONB and National Park Chairs on Thursday 14 September 2023. Brendan McCarthy attended the meeting and captured the following six key points:

1. FiPL ending in 2025 is going to be an issue for everyone as there is nothing, yet, to replace it. The Minister said that they are trying to work the best bits of FiPL into ELM but she recognised that the key thing that everyone loves about FiPL is the fact that decisions were made locally and the bureaucracy was considerably less than other schemes. No promises were made about the ELM rollout but she is *'thinking about that important point'*. The Spending Review Cycle means no promises of further funding after 2025.
2. There was a lot of discussion on the fairer funding point. Smaller AONBs asked that they didn't lose out to the larger ones. The Minister commented that it was also about making use of private finance (no details on this).
3. The Minister was clear that statutory consultee status for AONBs wasn't going to happen. The key stumbling block, in her view was that apart from the two Conservation Boards, the remaining AONB Partnerships do not have the legal status to enable this. As local authorities are involved in the Partnerships, then the expectation is that the local government route would be used to address issues. We don't want to create a two tier AONB system, between the 32 Partnerships and the two Conservation Boards.
4. Everyone welcomed the strengthened Management Plans with enhanced powers (which will also help to address the above point as well).
5. The Minister made the strong point that she wanted Local Nature Recovery Strategies to *'fully take account of all our input'*.
6. Generally the mood was positive and clearly everyone welcomed the broad impact of the proposals.

OCTOBER 2023