



The countryside charity
Dorset

Dorset CPRE

8th April 2022

Government response to and Consultation on the Glover Review of Landscapes

Overview and National Perspective

Dorset CPRE welcomes the opportunity to input to the Government's consultation on its response to the Glover Review of Landscapes.

The Government consultation seeks views on how designated landscapes (National Parks and AONBs) can do even more to bring people closer to nature, enhance the environment and boost biodiversity, improve mental and physical wellbeing and support local communities and economies. We welcome these aims and the proposals to place greater emphasis on nature recovery and to require more action by all public bodies to enhance our National Parks and AONBs.

We want to see this new emphasis extended to the whole countryside including our Green Belts, which are under threat, and our historic market towns and smaller settlements which, like our countryside, are central to Dorset's natural and cultural heritage and "sense of place" but are at risk from inappropriate planning policies and development. We therefore urge the Government to develop a new approach to rural strategy, an approach which is coherent, sustainable and appropriate, and which reflects the key strengths, priorities and potential of particular areas, like Dorset, where the environment and heritage are also great economic assets and central to a thriving future.

We welcome the Government's proposal to establish a National Landscapes Partnership to work with designated landscapes and other partners to promote, support and monitor their work. We would want the proposed NLP to promote the interests of the wider countryside, to bring the benefits and opportunities that designated landscapes offer to the countryside and communities across England, and we would wish to see CPRE (the Countryside Charity,) and representatives of the farming community included in the Partnership.

We regret that the Government response to the Landscape Review does not go far enough to address the challenges facing our communities, including the climate and nature emergencies. Now is surely the time for strategic thinking and appropriate resources to support our countryside and communities. The farmers and land managers that are so

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The Campaign to Protect Rural England exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country.

important to shaping the natural and cultural environment of our National Parks, AONBs and wider countryside also need Government support to deliver high nature, low carbon, productive, beautiful and accessible landscapes.

We are concerned that some important recommendations of the Glover Review have not been addressed, including Glover's recommendation that a Dorset National Park be seriously evaluated by Natural England and the Government. The deterioration of Dorset's landscapes and biodiversity needs to be arrested and reversed. Our countryside is of vital importance for people, nature and our local economy, and offers great potential to help address the nature and climate emergencies as well as improve health and well-being for residents and visitors.

Dorset CPRE would be pleased to contribute to new thinking about a joined-up approach - coherent, sustainable and appropriate - to rural strategy and planning, an approach that recognises the value and potential of all our countryside.

Dorset's countryside is very important to local people and visitors.

Dorset's environment, wildlife and heritage – throughout rural Dorset - are of local, national and international importance. They are also Dorset's greatest economic asset, as independent studies have shown, worth £billions to the local and national economy. In response to surveys, over 95% of Dorset residents say they attach great importance to the countryside and the natural environment, and they want to see wildlife thrive throughout the countryside, not just in nature reserves or gardens. During the pandemic, public appreciation of the countryside and nature has grown, along with public understanding of their vital contribution to mental and physical health.

The climate and ecological emergencies, declared by the government nationally and by Dorset's two unitary councils, rural and urban, are a wake-up call. Dorset's countryside has a unique contribution to make in helping us to address effectively the serious challenges we face together. With appropriate policies and support, the countryside can play a key role in addressing climate change, restoring nature, and enhancing community health and wellbeing. Our countryside should also continue to provide healthy Dorset food and drink.

The Government consultation seeks views on how designated landscapes (National Parks and AONBs) can do even more to bring people closer to nature, enhance the environment and boost biodiversity, improve mental and physical wellbeing and support local communities and economies. We welcome these aims and the proposals for new legal protections that place greater emphasis on nature recovery and require greater action by all public bodies to enhance our National Parks and AONBs.

A focus on our designated landscapes alone, however, is insufficient. We want to see new thinking extended to the whole countryside including our green belts, which are under threat, and our historic market towns and villages which, with our countryside, are central to Dorset's natural and cultural heritage and "sense of place" but are at risk from inappropriate planning policies and development.

We therefore want to see the Government develop a new approach to rural strategy, an approach which is coherent, sustainable and appropriate, and which reflects the key strengths, priorities and potential of particular areas, like Dorset, where the environment

and heritage are great economic assets and central to a thriving future for nature and our local communities.

Dorset's countryside remains at risk.

Dorset's environment is exceptional. It deserves the highest recognition and protection. Dorset has the highest number of species anywhere in the UK. Some 52% of rural Dorset is designated as AONBs, while Green Belt represents about 9.6% of the Dorset Council area. But in reality, only around 8% has statutory protection for nature. Dorset's designated areas, along with the wider countryside, have suffered and remain under serious threats and pressures from excessive and inappropriate development for housing and infrastructure including large solar power installations on good farmland. The largest housing development in any AONB, some 800 houses, has been approved in the Dorset AONB, along with a further development of 5-600 houses and other developments. Moreover, grave and transformational loss of our Green Belt is threatened if the draft Local Plan proposed by the Dorset Council were to go ahead. Over 70% of respondents to Dorset Council's consultation on the Local Plan opposed its proposed strategy to build high housing numbers – considered inappropriate and unrealistically high - in line with central targets. Dorset CPRE welcomes recent proposals by both the Dorset Council and BCP Council that they be allowed to prepare Local Plans appropriate to their communities and wider environment, as local people clearly wish.

Despite the international importance and outstanding quality of Dorset's landscapes and wildlife, existing designations such as AONB, Green Belt, SSSI etc, have proved insufficient to prevent the degradation of our environment and loss of species. The quality of Dorset's water catchments, rivers and harbours, including Poole Harbour, the second largest natural harbour in the world and a vital habitat for thousands of migratory birds and other species, has deteriorated over a long period and requires urgent attention, as reports by the Environment Agency show. An independent scientific report by Bournemouth University showed all of Dorset's vital ecosystem services to be in continuing decline ("Tipping points in lowland agricultural landscapes", Bournemouth University, 2019).

Dorset CPRE works with and supports our AONBs and notes the government's readiness to consider some enhancement in their statutory role (recognising AONBs' de facto involvement in, for example, nature recovery, health and wellbeing) and in planning matters. Though we welcome the recent modest increase in AONB resources, we note, however, that AONBs' work and influence would, in practice, continue to be constrained by their governance and limited resources. Without adequate resources, expectations could be raised that cannot be delivered. For example, how would AONBs be able to deliver any enhanced responsibilities and a greater role in local planning if they did not have significantly more resources?

A National Park for Dorset

A Dorset National Park can work in partnership with all stakeholders to help reverse Dorset's ecological decline, and promote a thriving, prosperous, greener future for our communities, economy and countryside. A Dorset National Park would be a partner in a coherent, sustainable new strategy for rural Dorset at the heart of southern England.

We are therefore disappointed that the Government has not responded to the Glover recommendation that Dorset, the Chilterns and the Cotswolds, be seriously considered for

National Park designation. A Dorset National Park was, as DEFRA and Natural England will be aware, recommended in John Dower's 1945 official report on National Parks for England, and was then on the shortlist of areas with which the Hobhouse Committee began work to establish England's first generation of National Parks. The Dorset CPRE joins with many communities and local councils, societies, groups and individuals across Dorset and beyond, who support a Dorset National Park and wish to see the benefits and opportunities which this would bring for people and nature - our exceptional environment, wildlife and heritage, and our communities, businesses, farmers and visitors.

The proposed National Park for rural Dorset would make a significant contribution to the government's objective that 30% of the countryside be protected for nature by 2030 ("30 by 30"), enhance landscapes, biodiversity, recreational and economic opportunity, and increase nature connectivity and resilience. It would work in close and supportive partnership with councils, communities, land managers and other stakeholders across Dorset, including both Dorset Council and the adjacent Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole (BCP) conurbation.

Dorset CPRE considers that rural areas like Dorset have the potential to make a unique contribution to addressing the climate and ecological challenges. A Dorset National Park would work in close partnership with communities, councils, businesses, land managers and other stakeholders to help address these challenges and develop and deliver sustainable policies, eg for transport, tourism and energy. In this context, we welcome the proposal to enhance National Parks' ability to help manage tourism pressures, working in partnership with councils, communities, farmers and others. A Dorset National Park would work with farmers and landowners for a successful and sustainable economic future, including the production of quality Dorset food and drink; effective carbon capture in soils, hedges and woodland; health and wellbeing for local people and visitors; and opportunities for renewable energy, including in partnership with communities. A National Park would also help develop a successful green/blue economy, improve skills and life chances, and respond to local housing needs including for affordable homes, to the benefit of all Dorset communities including young people and families.

Dorset CPRE therefore wishes to see Natural England and the Government deliver Dorset's long overdue, well-deserved and much-needed National Park to include as much as possible of rural Dorset, to the benefit of our countryside, wildlife, communities and economy. The Government's response to Glover welcomes NE's designation programme and notes that this will enable a more collaborative approach to designating new National Parks and AONBs. We welcome this new approach and would wish to contribute evidence to such a process. An independent report by a respected Dorset planner sets out the strong case for the exceptional quality of rural Dorset's environment, wildlife, cultural heritage and recreational opportunities and potential: <https://www.dorsetnationalpark.com/post/the-case-for-rural-dorset>

We encourage the Government and Natural England to give serious consideration to a National Park that would benefit all rural Dorset.

Peter Bowyer, Chair of Trustees, Dorset CPRE