

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021

## Natural England announces proposed expansion of Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- Chilterns Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) extension to be considered.
- Natural England will take forward the Prime Minister's commitment in his 10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution to designate more national landscapes.
- Renewed commitment to boost nature recovery and help more people access Britain's most beautiful landscapes as we build back greener from the pandemic.

Natural England is today (Thursday 24 June) announcing that the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is to be considered for boundary expansion. Securing this designation would allow the area to benefit from greater protections, so that more of England's beautiful landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

The Chilterns is home to many vibrant and growing communities. An extension to the Chilterns AONB would provide direct access to high-quality natural environments from many urban areas such as Luton, Hemel Hempstead and Slough. This newly designated land would provide people living in these areas with greater opportunities to access to the countryside, benefit from the tranquillity it provides, and get away from the pressures of everyday life.

Today's announcement is equally important for Chilterns' wildlife and habitats. With its globally rare chalk streams, wildflower-rich chalk grassland and prehistoric settlements – including Bronze and Iron Age hillforts – extending the boundaries of the AONB provides opportunities for a more strategic approach to caring for future generations' assets currently outside the protected area.

Three other areas – the Surrey Hills, Cheshire Sandstone Ridge and Yorkshire Wolds, - will be considered for greater protections, with potential to deliver over 40% of the additional 4,000km<sup>2</sup> required to meet the UK's commitment to protect 30% of our land by 2030.

### **Allison Potts, Area Manager for Natural England said:**

“The Chilterns represent some of the finest and most accessible landscapes in South East England. Designated to conserve and enhance natural beauty, the area is enjoyed by millions of people from across the region.

“We are delighted to confirm that we'll be exploring an extension to the Chilterns AONB and hope that, as a result of this exciting collaborative approach, we can bring people closer to nature-rich landscapes, contributing to a green recovery from the impact of coronavirus and protecting more of this beautiful and biodiverse landscape.

### **Dr Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer at the Chilterns Conservation Board, said:**

“We are delighted that Natural England has chosen to consider our proposal for the Chilterns AONB to be increased in size. This is an exciting chapter in our history, which

will help bring more people closer to nature and increase opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of this special landscape.

“We are also excited at the opportunity to explore new and innovative approaches by which we can tackle the impacts of climate change, reverse declines in nature, support our local businesses and improve people’s wellbeing and access to our special landscapes. This is even more important as we all work to recover from the impacts of the Covid pandemic.”

The proposals follow the [independent review](#) led by Julian Glover which called for action to make our protected landscapes greener, more beautiful and open to everyone. Natural England welcomed the Review which set out a compelling vision for more beautiful, biodiverse and accessible National Parks and AONBs.

**Chair of Natural England Tony Juniper said:**

“Today’s announcement signals an ambitious step forward in growing our family of precious national landscapes, as well as protecting and improving the ones we have.

“One thing that has become very apparent recently, and especially during the pandemic, is the enormous benefit people get from having access to beautiful nature-rich landscapes. These can, however, be hard for many people to access, thereby raising the question of how more can be done to bring nature and people closer together. On this, we see huge opportunities arising from the establishment of the England Nature Recovery Network, of which wilder national landscapes will be a vital part.

“As government’s statutory landscape adviser, we look forward to continuing to work closely with Government, designated landscape bodies and stakeholders to deliver more for and through England’s diverse landscapes.”

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors:**

- More detail about the Chilterns can be found here: [www.chilternsaonb.org](http://www.chilternsaonb.org).
- Further details about today’s announcement can be found by visiting [GOV.UK](http://GOV.UK) (link live from 00:01 Thursday 24 June)
- Please use this link for images of the AONBs being considered for designation - <https://we.tl/t-G9UnFOZO5ee>
- Natural England is the government’s statutory advisor on landscapes in England, with duties and powers to conserve and enhance landscapes that include the designation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- The designation process is likely to take several years and will be a collaborative process including local stakeholders at every step.
- These new areas of landscape designation have been selected through an evidence-based assessment from proposals that have been made to Natural England over the last 10 years.
- Spread across the country, the four areas being considered for designation are:

- **An extension to the Chilterns AONB** – to consider many special features including chalk streams, magnificent beechwoods, native woodland and wildflower-rich hills, bringing nature closer to populations in North London.
  - **An extension to the Surrey Hills AONB** – to consider including areas of high scenic quality including chalk grassland, parkland and historic features adjacent to the existing AONB.
  - **Cheshire Sandstone Ridge AONB** – a diverse, distinctive, and celebrated landscape located in the heart of Cheshire, in close proximity to the large populations of NW England, rich in heritage, archaeology, wildlife, and culture.
  - **Yorkshire Wolds AONB** – a tranquil landscape of rolling hills, valleys and open plateaux interspersed with ancient woodland, chalk streams, farm holdings and historic villages, extending north from the River Humber.
- Today, the Environment Secretary will set out the government's support for improved nature recovery and public access in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty ahead of a consultation on draft proposals later this year. The statement will also outline a new 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' programme to support farmers and other land managers to improve their landscapes and create thriving destinations for communities to enjoy. As Government's statutory landscape adviser, the proposals for new designations will be delivered by Natural England, who will also be supporting the new programme for farmers in protected landscapes.

**Contacts:**

**Natural England (Defra group) South East Press Office:** [Communications\\_SE@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Communications_SE@environment-agency.gov.uk) / 0800 141 2743

**Chilterns Conservation Board:** Vicki Pearce, Communications Officer:–  
[vpearce@chilternsaonb.org](mailto:vpearce@chilternsaonb.org) / 01844 355521