

Should the statutory purposes of AONB and National Parks be aligned with the sustainable management of natural resources?

We do not think that aligning the statutory purposes of designated landscapes solely with the sustainable management of natural resources is the right way forward. In 2014 the Minister for Natural Resources commissioned an independent panel to conduct a review of designated landscapes in Wales, chaired by Professor Terry Marsden of Cardiff University. The Marsden report was the product of wide consultation, systematic evaluation and structured, logical reporting, it was widely supported.

Marsden recommended (1) there should be THREE INTERLOCKING statutory purposes for both the National Parks and AONBs. These are:

“To conserve and enhance the distinctive landscape and seascape qualities of the area.” (the Conservation Purpose)

“To promote physical and mental well-being through the enjoyment and understanding of the landscape of the area.” (the Human Well-being Purpose)

“To promote sustainable forms of economic and community development based on the management of natural resources and the cultural heritage of the area.” (the Sustainable Resource Management Purpose).

Marsden also recommended that these purposes, which may sometimes be conflicting, fall under the Sandford Principle, confirming the primacy of the conservation purpose.

This would mean an extension of the Sandford principle to cover the new 3rd purpose, Marsden describes this as Sandford Plus. The roll which the Sandford principle would have in these new circumstances and the importance given by Marsden to its retention in any new legislation has been seriously misrepresented in both the Future Landscapes Wales report and this SMNR consultation document.

We believe the recommendations of Marsden, as stated above, are the best way forward for the protection of these special places. They would allow them to be both protected and to provide for our future. This would meet both the requirements of the “The Well-being of Future Generations Act” and the Environment (Wales) Act.

Aligning the statutory purposes of designated landscapes solely with the sustainable management of natural resources, without the safeguard of the Sandford Principle, would result in moving from a coherent framework to a weak and ill-defined system of management. “Sustainable management of natural resources” is open to multiple interpretations and the proposals in Future Landscapes Wales report are so vague they offer little clarity. The IUCN has stated that such a change would make it impossible for the panel to continue to accord international recognition to Wales’s National Parks and AONBs as protected areas.

National Parks contribute more to the Welsh economy than agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, and quarrying combined(2), for them to lose their IUCN Category V status could be extremely damaging to the prosperity of Wales.

Where the special qualities of each designated area are identified, should this be given greater weight in decision making? In considering this, how should it be done in order to most effectively add value to the governance of those areas and the connection to local communities and businesses?

The Marsden report recommends: (1)

There should be a new single Statutory Duty that removes the weak “have regard to” prefixes in the current duties on relevant public bodies, and replaces them with a single and clear duty: “To contribute to the delivery of the three purposes of the National Landscapes.”

Again it is important to reiterate that these purposes should fall under the protection of the Sandford Principle.

This strengthened duty would afford the “special qualities” of each area greater weight in decision making. In implementation some form of central monitoring of how NPAs and other relevant authorities perform on this could be of benefit.

Should legislation be introduced to recognise a wider range of areas and partnerships involved in driving the sustainable management of natural resources? What approach should be considered?

Any new legislation regarding recognising the special qualities of a wider range of areas is to be welcomed. However it should only be in addition to the current system of National Parks already in place and held as extremely important by the Welsh people. 95% of people in Wales feel National Parks are important to them and 73% of the Welsh population visited a National in the last 12 months(2). Again any new partnerships involved in driving the sustainable management of natural resources should be in addition to the existing NPAs. We agree very strongly with the recommendation of the Marsden report that the single purpose local authority model for National Park management should be retained and the FLW report offers no up-to-date evidence that it is not performing.

Are there any other aspects of the Future Landscapes: Delivering for Wales report where you believe a legislative provision is necessary? If so, please explain which and why.

We believe that the FLW report is not sufficiently clear or evidenced to be the basis for any new legislation. The FLW has cherry picked recommendations from Marsden and misrepresented its findings in regards to environmental protections. In doing so the Welsh Government has lost the faith of many conservation bodies and the population at large. The Welsh Government should revisit the Marsden report. Its recommendations were the product of wide consultation, systematic evaluation and structured, logical reporting. We believe they offer a clear way forward on the governance of designated landscapes.

(1)<http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/151020-review-designated-landscapes-report-en.pdf>

(2)http://npw.nationalparks.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/389727/Valuing-Wales-National-Parks-.pdf