News Release

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Thursday 16 November

**Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Renamed National Landscapes**

**New name and brand underpin ambitious nature and climate targets**

Today, [Wednesday 22 November] all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales are becoming National Landscapes, including the Mendip Hills, Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills National Landscapes. The new name reflects their national importance; the vital contribution they make to protect the nation from the threats of climate change, nature depletion and the wellbeing crisis, whilst also creating greater understanding and awareness for the work that they do.

This is a significant milestone for the UK and the next step in fully realising the National Landscapes’ vision to be the leading exemplars of how thriving, diverse communities can work with and for nature in the UK: restoring ecosystems, providing food, storing carbon to mitigate the effects of climate change, safeguarding against drought and flooding, whilst also nurturing people’s health and wellbeing.

National Landscapes teams have been at the forefront of delivering natural solutions to the main challenges facing the nation for many years. The new brand underscores their commitment to redoubling their efforts and engaging with a wider audience. In 2019, teams set themselves the most ambitious targets for nature in the sector and continue to work to meet them.

By 2030, National Landscapes aim that, within their boundaries: at least 200,000 hectares of the most valuable natural areas (Sites of Special Scientific Interest or SSSIs), which equates to 1 ¼ times the size of London, will be in favourable condition; 100,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside of SSSIs will be created or restored, which is roughly nine times the size of Manchester; and 36,000 hectares of woodland, which is a little smaller than the Isle of Wight, will have been planted or allowed to regenerate. National Landscapes Partnerships will also focus on habitat restoration to ensure the protection of some of our most endangered species and increase their work to help more people to enjoy time spent in beautiful places.

Because of their size and scope, National Landscapes are ideally positioned to address the environmental issues the UK is facing. There are 46 National Landscapes in the UK, covering 14% of England, Wales and Northern Ireland including moorland, farmland, coast, forests, including UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves, a Geopark and International Dark Sky Reserves. They are the UK’s nearby countryside - 66% of people in England (44 million) live within 30 minutes of a National Landscape and at least 170 million people visit them every year.

Jim Hardcastle, **Mendip Hills** National Landscape Manager said,

*“We have a new name and logo that shows the national importance of the Mendip Hills, but this is still the same beautiful place where people live and work and come to breathe. The new name should grab people's attention and remind them how important the area is if they've lived in the area for years or if they know the place like the back of their hand. And if they've never visited, we look forward to welcoming them and sharing our love of Mendip. There's always more on Mendip!”*

Iain Porter, **Quantock Hills** National Landscape Manager said,

*“Since our designation in 1956 (England’s first) the Quantock Hills has inspired and enthralled our communities and visitors alike. Renaming to National Landscapes reflects the importance and value we place on these special areas and empower us all to deliver more for nature and climate, for our heritage and culture and for the people who live and work here.”*

Tim Youngs, **Blackdown Hills** National Landscape Manager said,

*“Becoming Blackdown Hills National Landscape reflects a step change in our work to protect and regenerate our landscape, with a focus on nature, climate, heritage, culture, and people.*

*It also reflects our collaborative approach. For example, the Somerset Nature Connections project involves the three Somerset National Landscapes working with Somerset Wildlife Trust to help individuals and groups in Somerset to connect with nature to benefit their physical and mental health.”*

**John Watkins, Chief Executive of the National Landscapes Association says:**

*“For decades, AONB teams have convened powerful partnerships which have placed them at the forefront of the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss, but since their initial designation, our country has changed immensely, as have the needs and pressures on the environment and communities. However, we have great ambition as well as the commitment and readiness to care for and protect these important places, whilst also extending a welcome to more people. Our ambitious aims build on AONB teams’ long track record of successful delivery for nature and people and we are confident that we will achieve them. National Landscapes are the landscape designation for the 21 Century and beyond.”*

**Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England says:**

*“For decades the AONBs have helped protect the beauty of our finest landscapes. Today though we need so much more from these wonderful places, helping us adapt to climate change, catching carbon, restoring depleted wildlife and encouraging more people outside, at the same time as producing food, sustaining local communities and enhancing historic environments.*

*“Modern challenges require new approaches and today marks the beginning of a new phase for our National Landscapes, as they strengthen their existing partnerships, and forge new ones that will secure in perpetuity the huge range of benefits that come from these special places. Big change has taken place during the past 75 years and bigger changes still can be expected during the decades ahead. Uniting the National Landscapes in this way is very welcome and spells immense opportunity and great hope for the future.”*

**-ENDS-**

***Issued on behalf of the Somerset National Landscapes*** *For more information please contact: Iain Porter,* *iain.porter@somerset.gov.uk* *07977 412077*

**Notes to editors:**

* The Somerset National Landscapes include Mendip Hills, Quantock Hills, Blackdown Hills
* The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 is the Act of the Parliament that provided the framework for the creation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales, and also addressed public rights of way and access to open land. In the immediate wake of the second world war, the nation had the forethought to designate Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as sisters to the NHS – one to look after the nation’s health, the other its nature and wellbeing.
* The first AONB to be designated in England was in 1956, Quantock Hills, and the last the most recent, designated in 1995, is the Tamar Valley AONB, which spans Devon and Cornwall.
* An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is an area of countryside in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland, that has been designated for conservation due to its significant landscape value. Areas are designated in recognition of their national importance by the relevant public body: Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency respectively. In place of AONB, Scotland uses the similar national scenic area (NSA) designation.
* National Landscapes offer a uniquely integrated perspective in decisions about land use: convening conversations, bringing people together, and enabling a sustainable balance of priorities for nature, climate, people and place.
* The National Landscapes Association is the membership organisation representing the UK’s National Landscapes.
* The work of small (average four members of staff), expert National Landscapes teams is guided by the democratically derived Management Plan, developed through consultation with partners and members of the public through an open process every five years. The Management Plan covers the entirety of the landscape, considering how to protect and regenerate its special features: geology, species, heritage, industry, culture; balancing the needs of the local community to keep pace with the latest infrastructure, through a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities of these distinct and special places.
* National Landscape Partnerships own no land, so their work is delivered by convening strong networks with landowners, farmers and partner organisations, working together to plan projects, and secure funding to deliver them.
* Since 2000 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnerships have:
* coordinated habitat restoration projects across many thousands of hectares,
* restored peatland twice the area of Birmingham,
* provided free educational opportunities for many thousands of children of all ages and needs,
* delivered many wellbeing programmes: from weekly walks for people with dementia and brain injuries and their carers to friendship cafes.