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Natural England announces proposed Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in Cheshire

- Cheshire Sandstone Ridge to be considered for status as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 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 Cheshire Sandstone Ridge is to be considered for status as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. 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 Cheshire Sandstone Ridge, a diverse, distinctive, and celebrated landscape located in the heart of Cheshire. Covering 230 sq km, the Sandstone Ridge is less than one hour from Liverpool and Manchester, and is rich in heritage, archaeology, wildlife and culture.

Three other areas, Yorkshire Wolds, Surrey Hills and the Chilterns will be considered for greater protections, with potential to deliver over 40% of the additional 4,000km² required to meet the UK's commitment to protect 30% of our land by 2030.

Ginny Hinton, Area Director for Natural England in Cheshire said,

"The announcement that the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge may become one of our newest Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is fantastic news for the whole of North West.

" If successful, the Ridge will be Cheshire's first AONB and an opportunity to celebrate and enhance this beautiful landscape, helping to bring nature and people closer together."

Andrew Hull, Chair of the Sandstone Ridge Trust, expressed his absolute delight with the news that Cheshire Sandstone Ridge has been shortlisted for AONB designation.

“This is a watershed moment in seeking to ‘Conserve, Connect and Inspire’ current and future generations in understanding and caring for this unique landscape and its diverse habitats.”

Councillor Louise Gittins, Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council and Cabinet Member for Poverty and Wellbeing, said:

“The Sandstone Ridge is an iconic feature in the Cheshire landscape and brings so much joy to our residents and visitors who enjoy the area throughout the year. We’re thrilled that it is being considered as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.”

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.”

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Notes:

- More detail about the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge can be found www.sandstoneridge.org.uk
- Further details about today’s announcement can be found by visiting 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 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, areas being considered for designation include;
 - **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.
 - **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.
 - **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.
- 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.