

Heritage Lottery Fund Transition Project

Cheshire Sandstone Ridge: Towards a Sustainable Future



Delivery Model Options Appraisal

Delivery model... *“the sum of all the things that enables an organisation to deliver goods or services”*

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Executive summary

This report follows on from the Insights Paper that presents an overview of the evidence base gathered by The Sandstone Ridge Trust during 2017. An understanding of the state of the Sandstone Ridge landscape, the issues facing it, and people's views and priorities has determined the "must have" requirements for any future delivery model for the Sandstone Ridge. These are identified as: Leadership, Focus, Co-ordination, Champions, Change behaviours, Win resources, Develop and deliver projects, Place making, Exerting influence, Governance, and Designation. An additional key consideration is the anticipated Timeframe involved in putting a new model into place.

A research of literature and web-based sources of large landscape-scale delivery models operating in the UK, identified seven models considered appropriate for evaluation: Living Landscapes, Nature Improvement Area, Community Forest, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Regional Park, Farm Cluster, Public-private-community Initiative. The Status Quo is included for comparison. Each of the delivery model options is taken in turn and assessed against the "must have" requirements. The level of opportunity or risk that is judged to be attached to that option meeting each requirement is rated, with a short commentary explaining the assumptions.

The assessment exercise concludes that all of the options offer opportunities over the Status Quo, and all have risks attached to them. To varying degrees most of the options could attract champions, change behaviours, win resources, develop and deliver projects, build a brand image and, exert influence. The emphases of four of the options (ie, Living Landscapes, Nature Improvement Area, Community Forest and Farm Cluster) is considered too narrow (biodiversity, farming, and trees/woodland) to offer the required leadership, focus and co-ordination across the full range of interests and issues affecting the entire Sandstone Ridge landscape.

The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) option is considered the most well suited to meet the requirements, and is the only one which offers a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area. Given its lengthy timeframe (5-10 years), however, and with no guarantee of success at the end of the process, it would be necessary to have running in parallel another option that is relatively easy and inexpensive to establish and run whilst the long-term ambition of AONB status is being pursued. A bespoke Public-private-community Initiative could fulfil this role.

The Regional Park option is considered less well suited to meeting the full range of requirements when compared with the AONB model. and furthermore, does not offer a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation. However, it may offer an alternative route if the AONB option was discounted for the Sandstone Ridge. Given the similarly lengthy timeframe likely to be involved, it would also require a hybrid arrangement with a bespoke Public-Private-Community Initiative running in parallel.

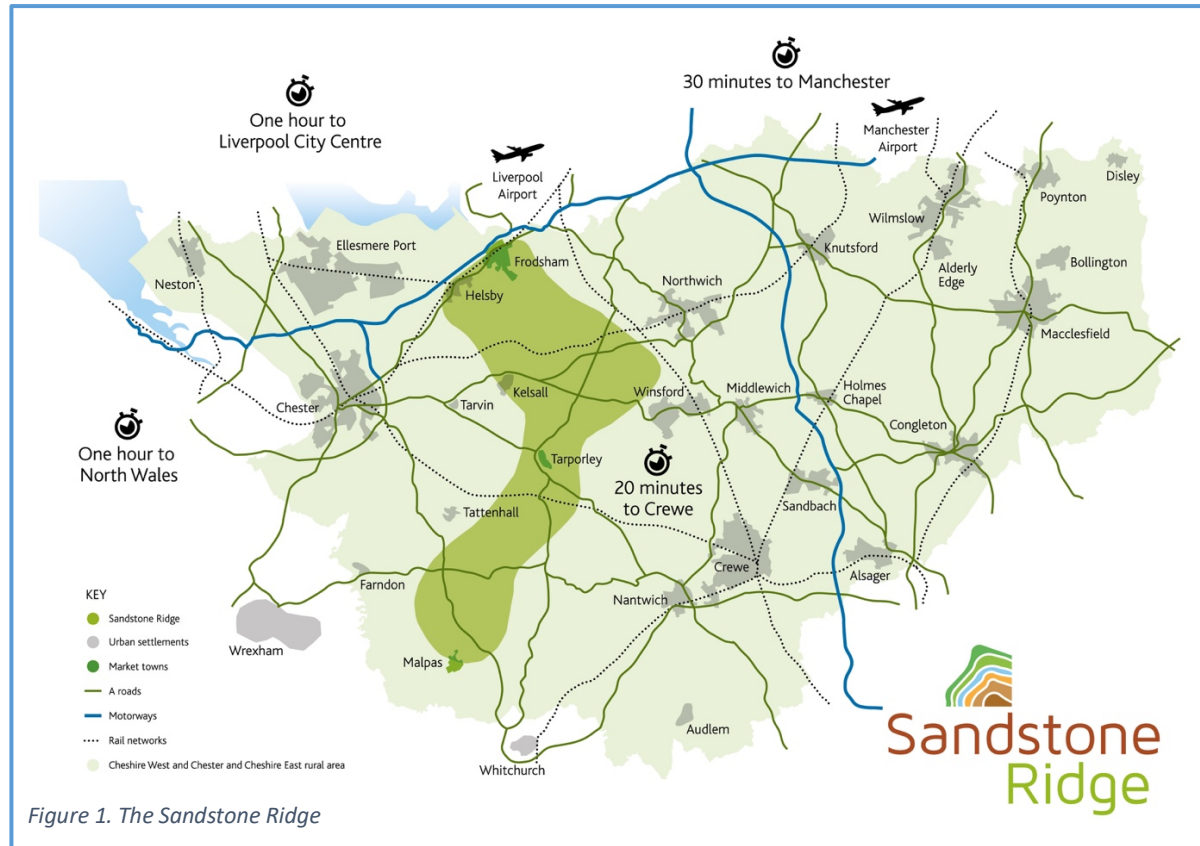
Introduction

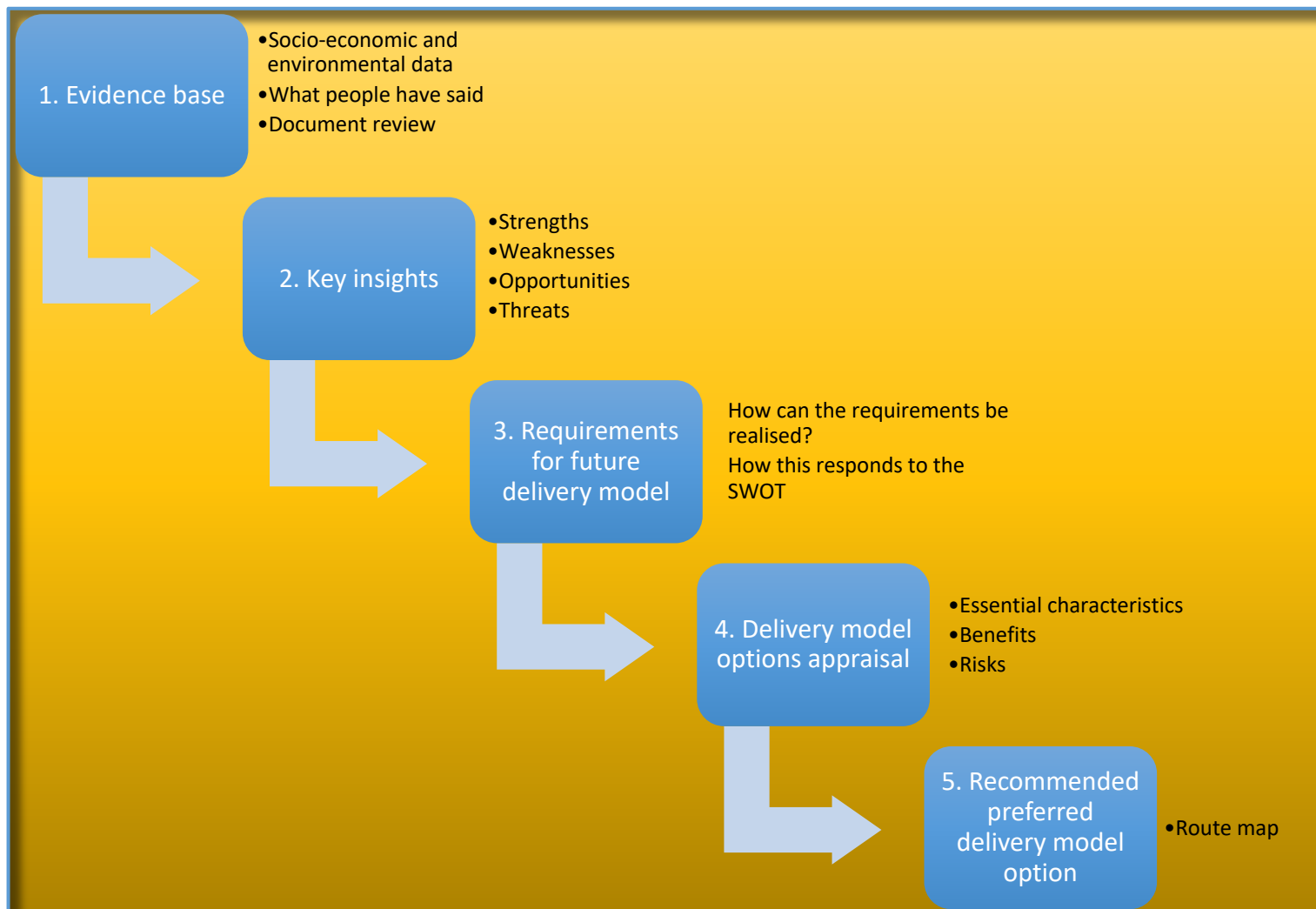
The Sandstone Ridge is one of Cheshire's most distinctive landscapes, covering 230 sq kms (88 sq miles) of rolling hills and escarpments down the spine of the county. This is rural Cheshire at its finest, linked by the popular Sandstone Trail.

The Ridge is home for 36,000 people; the location for 1,000 businesses; and is visited by more than 1 million people each year. It provides food, water, timber and minerals, and for many is an important place to exercise, relax, and enjoy its views, landscape, wildlife and heritage.

Yet, the Ridge does not have a national accolade such as a statutory landscape designation, nor any overarching vision, management structure or plan that pulls all strands together and focuses everyone's interests and efforts.

The Sandstone Ridge Trust was established in 2012 to sustain previous landscape-scale investments in the area, and champion the protection, conservation and enjoyment of its special qualities. It currently has Heritage Lottery transition funding to explore how best to look after the Ridge in the long-term for the enjoyment of present and succeeding generations, and the continuation of the multiple economic, health and environmental benefits this special area provides.





A five step process is being carried out to (1) gather evidence, (2) identify the key insights, (3) understand the requirements for the Sandstone Ridge, (4) identify and appraise those landscape-scale delivery models that have potential to meet these requirements, and (5) recommend a preferred delivery model for the area, setting out a route map for its implementation.

Figure 2. Five step process of reaching a preferred delivery model option

Step 1. Evidence base

During 2017 an evidence base about the Sandstone Ridge has been collected from the following sources:

- **Environmental and socio-economic profile**, based on Natural England's profile of National Character Area 62 published in 2014, updated and expanded with statistics gathered by Cheshire Shared Services in 2017
- **Visitor survey**, comprising face to face interviews at seven countryside locations, and completed by 207 people
- **Community consultation**, comprising an online questionnaire, completed by 294 respondents
- **Town and Parish Council workshop** held on 12 September 2017 and attended by 9 councils
- **Face-to-face interviews** with nearly 40 key organisations and stakeholders
- **Document review** of key policy documents that are relevant to the future of the Sandstone Ridge landscape.



Figure 3. Evidence base

Step 2. Key insights – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

A separate Insights Paper has identified 59 key insights drawn from the evidence base, from which a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats have been identified.

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National and public recognition of its special qualities ▪ Diversity and quality of landscape, scenery and views are the area’s greatest strengths ▪ The area supports a concentration, diversity and abundance of natural/heritage assets ▪ Track record of landscape-scale investments ▪ There is a reservoir of interest and enthusiasm to look after the Ridge ▪ Accessibility – four million people live within 20 miles ▪ Policy framework, including local protection for the landscape character 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of clear and strong identity of the Sandstone Ridge as a place ▪ No overarching vision for the area’s conservation, enhancement and enjoyment ▪ Lack of a national accolade, such as, a landscape designation ▪ Absence of management and governance to champion, lead and co-ordinate ▪ Cinderella landscape, not widely known outside Cheshire ▪ Lack of appreciation and understanding of full range of multiple benefits of natural assets ▪ Negative attitudes to change in some local communities
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A wide range of special qualities that may broaden its appeal ▪ Significant investment potential – social and financial capital ▪ c.70 community-led new project opportunities ▪ Tourism and visitor potential to enjoy the area’s qualities and support the local economy ▪ Opportunities for health improvements through increased access / participation ▪ Recreation and arts – increasing and improving opportunities for walking, cycling, horse-riding and the visual and performing arts ▪ Conservation – landscape scale improvements of key features, such as, walls and hedgerows, waterbodies, woodlands, grasslands and heathlands, and historic features ▪ Development of markets – local food and drink / eco-tourism ▪ Outdoor education – increasing contact with nature 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substantial and wide range of potential forces for change, such as, farming and forestry practices, inappropriate development, mineral extraction, water abstraction, visitor pressures, declining public purse, economic and market trends, climate change, emerging policy, and changing values, behaviours and lifestyles ▪ Fragmented political cohesion / structures ▪ Divergent organisations and ways of working ▪ Habitat quality (68% SSSI in unfavourable condition) ▪ Lack of awareness of value of local heritage assets ▪ Local access infrastructure unable to cope at peak demands ▪ Water supply and quality concerns

Figure 4. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Step 3. Requirements for a future delivery model

Eleven “must have” requirements for any future delivery model have been identified from the specific character and circumstances of the Sandstone Ridge (Step 1), and the needs, challenges, opportunities and priorities highlighted in the Insights Paper (Step 2).

Requirement	How this would be realised	How this responds to the needs, challenges, opportunities and priorities facing the Sandstone Ridge
1.Leadership	Establishing and communicating a shared strategic vision, sense of purpose and direction for the sustainable management of the landscape and natural assets of the Sandstone Ridge.	A unified and single voice will champion the area, what it is for, its needs and people, thereby ensuring the continuation of the multiple environmental, social and economic benefits the area provides.
2.Focus	Focusing on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) a locally distinctive and nationally recognised landscape (Cheshire Sandstone Ridge - NCA62) (2) addressing local concerns and forces for landscape change, and; (3) delivering the core purposes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, landscape and cultural heritage of the Sandstone Ridge • facilitating awareness, understanding, enjoyment and wellbeing through education, access, and volunteering • strengthening the Sandstone Ridge as a place brand and identity for both local communities and visitors • supporting the appropriate and sustainable use of the area’s natural assets for rural regeneration, economic development, and the visitor economy 	Avoids dilution into geographic areas that do not resonate locally. Focuses on the local issues and forces for change which affect the special character of the Sandstone Ridge area. Optimising the use of the environmental assets within the area will help to deliver social, health and economic benefits.

3.Co-ordination	Creating a strong local partnership representative of the main stakeholder groups who have an interest in or major influence on the landscape of the Sandstone Ridge, including farmers and landowners, local businesses, agencies, environmental, cultural and access groups, local communities, NGOs, parishes and unitary councils among others.	<p>A multi-sectoral partnership prepared to cede / pool power, will consider varied perspectives and provide a range of skillsets and resources.</p> <p>Cohesion and joined-up working will generate better outcomes for the effort and money invested (avoiding duplication of effort, and improving knowledge transfer).</p> <p>A joined-up approach that sees multiple partners working together across different sectors helps to maximise funding opportunities.</p>
4.Champions	Finding ambassadors for the Sandstone Ridge with strong political, local business or community connections.	Charismatic individuals who have influence, enthusiasm and can inspire others, will help drive forward the vision.
5.Change behaviours	Actively and positively engaging with the wider Sandstone Ridge “family” beyond the core partnership through regular communication, discussion fora, events, the formulation of a “Friends Group”, volunteering opportunities, and project delivery.	<p>Wins hearts and minds and establishes confidence and trust in the benefits and opportunities the area offers.</p> <p>Improves understanding of what is special about the Sandstone Ridge and why it needs looking after.</p> <p>Creates opportunities for allowing people to voice their concerns and be listened to.</p>
6.Win resources	<p>Establishing a broad resource base for core and project activities, drawing on contributions (in cash and in kind) from local government, businesses, local residents, visitors, and funding providers.</p> <p>Ideas for increasing the funding base include local government contributions, parish council precepts, levying planning charges for developments in the area, voluntary</p>	<p>The ability to access a variety of different sources of funding and establish a broad funding base is essential to secure the financial sustainability of a new partnership going forward and ensure the delivery of the core purposes.</p> <p>In the face of a declining public purse and increasing pressures on traditional grant funding providers, income generation needs to diversify and include new ways of attracting funding.</p>

	<p>donation schemes, a “bed tax” on those staying in the area, commercial sponsorship and external grants.</p> <p>A substantial pool of talent, skills, knowledge and expertise exists in the area that can be drawn on to invest in its future through partnership arrangements, staff volunteer schemes, and corporate team building days.</p>	<p>Harnessing and involving the multiple skills and talents from within the partnership and wider Sandstone Ridge “family” builds capacity, ensures that others can contribute effectively, increases the sense of ownership of the Ridge as a community resource, and generates commitment to the vision.</p>
7. Develop and deliver projects	<p>Developing and delivering projects and activities that will realise the core purposes, including encouraging biodiversity, enhancing heritage and culture, and by using the environment for education and social development, recreation, rural tourism, healthy living, and rural regeneration.</p>	<p>Practical projects will achieve the vision “on the ground”, engage communities, and sustain natural capital.</p>
8. Place making	<p>Building a brand image for the Sandstone Ridge that celebrates one of our finest landscapes and reinforces its local distinctiveness.</p>	<p>Raising the profile of the Sandstone Ridge will improve people’s understanding and appreciation of it, which in turn increases their willingness to look after it.</p> <p>Linking people with place will foster community identity.</p> <p>Go-to-place for information about the Sandstone Ridge.</p>
9. Exerting influence	<p>Advocating and supporting social, economic and environmental policies and measures that promote, protect and enhance the landscape, built and natural resources, and cultural heritage of the area.</p>	<p>Exerting influence and increasing awareness of the values of the area will ensure that the natural capital, natural beauty and special qualities of the Sandstone Ridge remain for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations.</p> <p>Reinforces the links between quality of place and the social and economic wellbeing of the community of the area.</p>

<p>10. Governance</p>	<p>Setting in place the management structure, principles, rules and procedures to align the interests of the partners and other stakeholders, take responsibility for promoting and championing the area, and direct, control and monitor activities, resources and performance.</p> <p>Establishing a versatile local unit of expertise able to present the area in a consistent, strong and positive manner, win resources, and take direct action.</p>	<p>Ensures that the appropriate systems and processes are in place for coherent direction, efficient administration and collaborative management to look after the area.</p> <p>Provides stability, accountability, transparency, the basis for decision-making, and avoids conflicts of interest.</p> <p>Provides the capacity necessary to deliver the core purpose, and manage expectations.</p>
<p>11. Designation</p>	<p>By pursuing a statutory landscape designation for the area.</p>	<p>To recognise the value of the landscape and manage the future forces for landscape change. Designation would not prevent change, but would ensure that proposals for change were given greater scrutiny so that they retained the special qualities of the area.</p> <p>A national accolade of a statutory landscape designation would raise the profile of the area, attract inward investment, increase grant-funding opportunities, and increase its visitor appeal.</p>

An additional key consideration for any future delivery model is the anticipated **Timeframe** involved in putting a new model into place.

Step 4. Delivery model options appraisal

Research of literature and web-based sources has identified a large number of landscape-scale delivery models operating in the UK. These have been reviewed by Natural England and other parties in the 2017 publication “A review of large-scale conservation in England, Scotland and Wales”. The 800 separate conservation initiatives or projects identified during that review were amalgamated into 14 main programmes, which are hugely varied in their objectives, land tenure arrangements, community engagement, and spatial area they cover.

Most of these can be dismissed from consideration as part of the Sandstone Ridge Transition Fund study due to their geographic or thematic focus not being relevant to the particular circumstances of the Sandstone Ridge. Those that are considered appropriate to evaluate, however, because of their context that they are initiatives already taking place in the vicinity of the Sandstone Ridge area are:

1. **Living Landscapes** (two Living Landscape initiatives lie within the Sandstone Ridge area – Delamere Living Landscape, and the Meres and Mosses Living Landscape)
2. **Nature Improvement Area** (given that the Meres and Mosses Nature Improvement Area overlapped with the south-eastern corner of the Sandstone Ridge around Bickerton)
3. **Community Forest** (the northern half of the Sandstone Ridge area down as far as Tarporley is part of the wider Mersey Community Forest)

With the character and needs of the study area in mind, other models added to this examination are:

4. **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**
5. **Regional Park**

Table 1.1 Summary of the fourteen programmes with the largest number of recorded initiatives, the number of initiatives they contain and average area of initiatives within each programme

Programme	Number of Initiatives	Lead agency	Launch date	Total area (km ²)
Living Landscapes	120	Wildlife Trusts	2006	24,669
HLS target areas	110	Natural England	2005	48,268
Butterfly Conservation Landscape Target Areas	78	Butterfly Conservation	2000	47,898
Catchment Sensitive Farming	66	Natural England/ Environment Agency	2006	61,655
Futurescapes	32	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	2010	24,461
Deer initiative	26	Deer Initiative Partnership	1995	19,792
RSPB Reserves	23	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	1932	822
English NNR	22	Natural England	1981	664
Riverine Strategic River Restoration	19	Natural England	2008	588
Scottish NNR	18	Scottish Natural Heritage	1981	809
Landscape Partnership	17	HLF	2004	2,967
Community Forests	15	Forestry Commission	1990	12,313
National Trust Land	14	National Trust	1894	3,073
Nature Improvement Areas	12	Natural England	2012	6,181
Total number of initiatives	572	Total area served (km²)		254,160

Figure 5. A review of large-scale conservation in England, Scotland and Wales. Natural England, January 2017

6. Farm Cluster

7. Public-private-community initiative

It is also important to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangements, against which other options can be compared, so the Status Quo has been included as an eighth option.

8. Status Quo

This section describes the essential characteristics of each of these models, and then appraises them against the “must have” requirements for any future delivery model for the Sandstone Ridge identified in Step 3 above.

Essential characteristics of the delivery model options

Model of delivery	Essential characteristics	Legal status and governance arrangements
1. Living Landscapes	<p>The Living Landscapes programme dates from 2007, and was set up as the Wildlife Trusts’ landscape-scale approach to rebuilding biodiversity, by restoring, recreating and reconnecting wildlife-rich spaces in rural and urban areas. Generally, the individual Living Landscapes projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• focus on landscapes or large areas, rather than individual habitat patches• employ a multi-disciplinary approach (e.g. habitat creation and restoration, provision of landowner advice)• are carried out in partnership with a range of other organisations and local communities• deliver environmental benefits for people, such as health benefits, skills training and green tourism, as well as improving conditions for wildlife.	<p>Non-statutory, public-private partnerships led by the local Wildlife Trust working with local communities, landowners, schools and businesses.</p>

	<p>There are more than 100 Living Landscape schemes around the UK.</p> <p>The Delamere Living Landscape project, led by Cheshire Wildlife Trust, aims to create a resilient network of habitats across Delamere that people can value and enjoy.</p> <p>The Meres and Mosses Living Landscape project, led by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, stretches across South Cheshire, West Wales, Shropshire and Staffordshire, and aims to protect and restore core wetland habitats in the area. It coincided with part of the Meres and Mosses Nature Improvement Area (described in 2 below).</p>	
<p>2. Nature Improvement Area</p>	<p>Nature Improvement Areas (NIA) were established in 2012 to create joined up and resilient ecological networks at a landscape scale. They were areas that had:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities to establish and improve ecological networks by enlarging, enhancing and connecting existing wildlife sites and creating new sites • a shared vision for the natural environment among a wide partnership of local people, including statutory and voluntary sectors • surrounding land that can be better integrated with valued landscapes by restoring wildlife habitats and support natural processes adapt to climate change impacts • benefits to urban areas and communities, with, where appropriate, ecological networks extending into urban areas • ‘win-win’ opportunities that offer multiple benefits, such as for: the water environment and Water Framework Directive objectives flood and coastal erosion risk management the low-carbon economy • opportunities to inspire people through an enhanced experience of the natural environment 	<p>Nature Improvement Areas were brought into law by the Natural Environment White Paper, but are non-statutory designations.</p> <p>NIAs were run by partnerships of local authorities, local communities and landowners, the private sector and conservation organisations with funding provided by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Natural England.</p>

	<p>Twelve NIAs were established by Government in 2012 through a national competition and allocated £7.5million. The funding lasted for 3 years, ending in February 2015.</p> <p>There are no plans by Government to establish and fund new NIAs. Local partnerships and local planning authorities can, however, identify and set up locally determined NIAs.</p> <p>The Meres and Mosses Nature Improvement Area led by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, stretched across South Cheshire, West Wales, Shropshire and Staffordshire, and included a small part of the Sandstone Ridge around Bickerton.</p>	
<p>3. Community Forest</p>	<p>The Community Forest programme was established in 1990 by the then Countryside Commission as a pilot project to demonstrate the potential contribution of environmental improvement to economic and social regeneration.</p> <p>Three initial pilots grew to a national programme, the aim of which is to deliver a comprehensive package of urban, economic and social regeneration, creating high-quality environments for millions of people by revitalising derelict land, providing new opportunities for leisure, recreation, and cultural activities, enhancing biodiversity, preparing for climate change and supporting education, healthy living and social and economic development.</p> <p>England’s twelve Community Forests are located in and around our largest towns and cities.</p>	<p>Non-statutory. Each Community Forest is a partnership between local authorities and local, regional and national partners including the Forestry Commission and Natural England. The founding basis for each Forest is a government-approved Forest Plan, a 30-year vision of landscape-scale improvement.</p> <p>The twelve community forests have sought different governance models depending on the needs of the area and the views of the partners. Several have established charitable</p>

	<p>The Mersey Community Forest was set up in 1991 and covers 1370km² of Merseyside, Warrington and north Cheshire, stretching along the Sandstone Ridge as far south as Tarporley.</p> <p>In January 2018 plans were unveiled for a new Northern Forest to comprise 50 million trees over 25 years, delivering major environmental, social and economic benefits to complement the significant growth, investment and new infrastructure that is planned for the north of England.</p>	<p>trusts and at least one has become a trading company.</p>
<p>4. Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)</p>	<p>Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are distinctive landscapes of outstanding quality and value, designated in recognition of their national importance and to provide a mechanism to ensure their character and qualities are protected.</p> <p>The primary statutory purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape, with two secondary aims: meeting the need for quiet enjoyment of the countryside and having regard for the interests of those who live and work there.</p> <p>To achieve these aims, AONBs rely on planning controls and practical countryside management, set out in the framework of a statutory management plan.</p> <p>There are 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Along with National Parks and in Scotland, National Scenic Areas they are part of a wide network of protected landscapes.</p>	<p>Statutory. AONBs are designated under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.</p> <p>Although there is considerable variation in the detailed composition of AONB Partnerships, the most common governance model is one of local authority appointed members, supplemented by officers from the national countryside agencies and local representatives of business and community groups representing conservation, access, farming and land management interests.</p> <p>Increasingly, AONBs are looking at alternative governance models that offer greater flexibility and opportunities to enhance their financial sustainability.</p>

		<p>Small AONB units provide the staff resource to deliver the AONB purpose and statutory management plan.</p>
<p>5. Regional Park</p>	<p>Regional Parks in the UK are used to define distinctive and extensive areas (usually close to towns and cities) where management and spatial planning can bring about regionally significant economic, environmental and social benefits.</p> <p>UK Regional Parks do not have a fixed definition. Instead, individual Regional Parks develop their own definition and vision based on their local characteristics, needs and aspirations. Notwithstanding their core focus, all Regional Parks use environmental enhancement as a foundation for their social and economic improvement programmes.</p> <p>Unlike National Parks and AONBs, a Regional Park is not statutory, and is not a planning designation. A Regional Park is a mechanism for realising the opportunities within its areas and capitalising on the area’s assets. Proposed development in Regional Parks is subject to the usual planning procedures.</p> <p>The former North West Development Agency was committed to the Regional Park concept in its 2003 Regional Economic Strategy, and the development of Regional Parks was identified as a significant driver of regeneration and investment. Following the demise of the Agency and the abolition of regional planning, however, the push for Regional Parks in the north-west lost impetus.</p> <p>Many mainland European countries have government recognised or government-designated protected Regional Nature Parks, that have the</p>	<p>Lea Valley Regional Park was established by Act of Parliament in 1967. Others in England are non-statutory, having been established as a mechanism for realising regeneration ambitions, such as, River Nene Valley, Wigan Greenheart, East Lancashire and Mersey Waterfront.</p> <p>Scotland has three Regional Parks (Lomond Hills, Pentland Hills and Clyde Muirshiel), all designated under the Countryside Acts – with the purpose of enabling the coordinated management of recreation with other land uses such as farming and forestry.</p> <p>There is no standard model for the management of Regional Parks in England. Three basic types of governance are operated: 1) local authority controlled, e.g, Wigan Greenheart, 2) public/private sector partnerships, e.g, East Lancashire,</p>

	primary object of protecting nature and landscape. Europe's regional parks are represented by the EUROPARC Federation.	and Mersey Waterfront; and 3) private/independent companies, e.g. River Nene Valley.
6. Farm Cluster	<p>The Farm Cluster concept was developed by the Game & Wildlife Trust in association with Natural England. They comprise bottom-up, farmer level groups, working cohesively together in their locality, enabling them to collectively deliver benefits for soil, water and wildlife at a landscape-scale.</p> <p>Although several clusters have been set up with no financial support, facilitation funding through the Government's Countryside Stewardship scheme has been available since 2015. By 2018 there were 98 farm clusters across England.</p> <p>The Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network (led by Reaseheath College of Agriculture with the support of the Sandstone Ridge Trust) was set up in January 2018 and has 40+ members in the south of the Sandstone Ridge area.</p>	<p>Non-statutory. Participation is voluntary.</p> <p>Groups are usually chaired by a local farmer well known in the local farming community.</p> <p>Each group sets its own priorities and targets, supported by a funded facilitator.</p>
7. Public-private-community partnership initiative	<p>A variety of public-private-community initiatives work outside the usual structures to protect landscapes, underpinned by a variety of legal frameworks. Some are led by the public sector, some by charities, and others by not-for-profit enterprises.</p> <p>Examples of long-established entities working at a landscape scale include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sherwood Forest Trust (set up as a charity in 1995, and limited company since 2009, champions the protection, preservation and promotion of Sherwood Forest). • Pennine Prospects (South Pennines Rural Regeneration Company) is a not for profit partnership of South Pennines local authorities together with other key public, private and voluntary sector bodies, set up in 2005. 	<p>Non-statutory.</p> <p>Examples of the legal structures include:</p> <p>Charitable Trust Charitable Incorporated Organisation Charitable Company Company Limited by Guarantee Community Interest Company Community Benefit Society</p>

	<p>It is interesting to note that a significant number of public bodies operating at a landscape scale have identified the need to establish additional organisational entities to supplement their work, for example, AONB Partnerships, National Park Authorities and Community Forests. Their motivations include the declining/uncertain public purse, a desire to tap into additional sources of funding from businesses and charities, opportunities to generate profit, and tax-efficient fund raising.</p>	
<p>8. Status Quo</p>	<p>The status quo is used in the appraisal as the option against which alternative models are compared.</p> <p>Under the status quo, the Sandstone Ridge Trust and other organisations operating in the project area would continue with their separate core purposes, applying on an ad hoc basis for grants ,recruiting members and volunteers to aid small scale environmental and heritage projects, and largely carrying out their activities independently of one another.</p>	<p>Current, non statutory arrangements continue to apply</p>

Appraisal matrices of delivery model options against “must have” requirements

This section of the paper takes each of the delivery model options in turn and assesses them against the “must have” requirements defined above. The level of opportunity or risk that is judged to be attached to that option meeting each requirement is rated using the symbols below.

Key to symbols

✓ ✓	Model is likely to be well suited to meet the requirement
✓	Model is likely to be well suited to meet some of the requirement, but less well-suited to other elements
0	No new opportunity is offered by the model
✗	There is a small level of risk that the model is unsuitable to meeting the requirement
✗ ✗	There is a strong level of risk that the model is unsuitable to meeting the requirement

A short commentary explains and sets out the assumptions behind the rating provided.

Opportunities and Risks matrix for the “Living Landscapes” option (Option 1)

“Must have” requirement	Rating	Explanation and assumptions
Leadership	✗	Since the vision of Living Landscapes schemes is to rebuild biodiversity, this single purpose would exclude the wider heritage, cultural and landscape interests on the Sandstone Ridge. This option would not, therefore, provide the leadership to speak with one voice on the full range of interests and issues affecting the area.
Focus	✗	Living Landscapes projects focus on landscapes or large areas. The two existing schemes operating in the area (Delamere and a small part of the wider Meres and Mosses) are both focussed on the restoration of wetland habitats. Expanding the geographic coverage of either, or both, of them to include other priority habitats on the Sandstone Ridge would be possible, but would risk diluting their current focus and impact.

		<p>An alternative option would be to create a new Living Landscape scheme for part or all of the rest of the Sandstone Ridge to complement and work alongside the two existing schemes.</p> <p>As the primary focus of the Living Landscapes is the natural environment, this option would fail to safeguard all types of assets, would not address all drivers of change, nor fulfil all of the core purposes desired for the Sandstone Ridge.</p>
Co-ordination	✗	<p>Living Landscapes schemes are led by local Wildlife Trusts and carried out in partnership with local communities, landowners, schools and businesses.</p> <p>A partnership focused on rebuilding biodiversity will exclude a wide cross section of stakeholder groups who have an interest in the landscape of the Sandstone Ridge.</p>
Champions	✓	It should be possible to find ambassadors to champion the wildlife of the Sandstone Ridge, but the Living Landscapes option is unlikely to attract individuals with other interests.
Change behaviours	✓	Living Landscapes Schemes would provide opportunities for working with local communities and volunteers. Those stakeholders who don't have an ecological interest, however, are unlikely to be engaged.
Wins resources	✓	Both the Delamere and Meres and Mosses Living Landscapes schemes have accessed funding programmes for ecological improvements, and it is assumed that this success will continue. A purely ecological focus, however, would exclude them from accessing a wide range of funding programmes for other types of assets.
Develop and deliver projects	✓	A Living Landscapes option would potentially access funding to deliver ecological enhancement projects, but given its focus it would not deliver the full range of environmental, cultural, social and economic projects envisaged for the Sandstone Ridge.
Place making	✓	The Living Landscapes option could raise the profile of the Sandstone Ridge and improve the perceptions of the public and partner bodies to the area, although it is not a widely known or promoted initiative.
Exert influence	✓	The Living Landscapes option should increase awareness of the natural values of the area. As its focus is the natural environment, however, it would not be an advocate for the full range of interests and issues affecting the Ridge.
Governance	✗	Living Landscapes schemes are organised around a public-private partnership led by the local Wildlife Trust in partnership with local communities, landowners, schools and businesses.

		Expanding the existing two schemes already operating in the area, or establishing a new scheme to cover the rest of the geographic area of the Sandstone Ridge would require new appointments to oversee delivery, thereby requiring additional resources. It is assumed that the local Wildlife Trust operating in the area would need to “host” the scheme and take on responsibility for employing additional staff. Set up and running costs would need to be met from new income and that no liabilities fell on the host organisation.
Designation	✘ ✘	Living Landscapes schemes are non-statutory, and therefore this option does not offer a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area.
Timeframe	✓ ✓	Two Living Landscapes projects are already established and operating within the Sandstone Ridge area.

Opportunities and Risks matrix for the “Nature Improvement Area (NIA)” option (Option 2)

“Must have” requirement	Rating	Explanation and assumptions
Leadership	✘	Since the vision of Nature Improvement Areas is to establish ecological networks, this single purpose would exclude the wider heritage, cultural and landscape interests on the Sandstone Ridge. This option would not, therefore, provide the leadership to speak with one voice on the full range of interests and issues affecting the area.
Focus	✘	A Nature Improvement Area could operate across the entire geographic area of NCA62. However, as its focus is ecological, it would fail to safeguard all types of assets, would not address all drivers of change, nor fulfil all of the core purposes required for the Sandstone Ridge.
Co-ordination	✘	A partnership focused on delivering ecological networks will exclude a wide cross section of stakeholder groups who have an interest in the wider landscape of the Sandstone Ridge.
Champions	✓	It should be possible to find ambassadors to champion the wildlife of the Sandstone Ridge, but the NIA option is unlikely to attract individuals with other interests.
Change behaviours	✓	A Nature Improvement Area would provide opportunities for working with local communities and volunteers. Those stakeholders who don’t have an ecological interest, however, are unlikely to be engaged.

Win resources	✓	Central government funding for Nature Improvement Areas was time limited (3 years) and ceased in 2015. No additional funding is likely to be forthcoming, so any new NIA would have to generate its own income. A new NIA would be able to access sources of funding for biodiversity enhancement, but a purely ecological focus would exclude it from accessing a wide range of funding programmes for other types of assets.
Develop and deliver projects	✓	An NIA option would potentially access funding to deliver ecological enhancement projects, but given its ecological focus it would not deliver the full range of environmental, cultural, social and economic projects envisaged for the Sandstone Ridge.
Place making	✓	The NIA option could raise the profile of the Sandstone Ridge and improve the perceptions of the public and partner bodies to the area, although it is not a widely known or promoted initiative.
Exert influence	✓	The NIA option should increase awareness of the natural values of the area. As its focus is the natural environment, however, it would not be an advocate for the full range of interests and issues affecting the Ridge.
Governance	✗ ✗	A Nature Improvement Area would require new appointments to oversee its delivery, thereby requiring additional resources. An existing organisation operating in the area would need to “host” the NIA and take on responsibility for employing additional staff. Set up and running costs would need to be met from new income and that no liabilities fell on the host organisation.
Designation	✗ ✗	Nature Improvement Areas are non-statutory, and therefore this option does not offer a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area.
Timeframe	✓ ✓	Being non-statutory and single purpose, it should be possible to establish a NIA option relatively quickly, ie, within 6-12 months.

Opportunities and Risks matrix for the Community Forest option (Option 3)

“Must have” requirement	Rating	Explanation and assumptions
Leadership	✗	Given that the vision of Community Forests is about urban, economic and social regeneration through tree planting (“more from trees”), this would largely exclude the wider heritage, cultural and landscape interests on the Sandstone Ridge. This option would not, therefore, provide the leadership to speak with one voice on the full range of interests and issues affecting the Sandstone Ridge landscape.

Focus	✘	<p>The Mersey Community Forest covers Merseyside, Warrington and North Cheshire, including the Sandstone Ridge down as far south as Tarporley. It is assumed that expanding its geographic coverage to include the rest of the Sandstone Ridge area could be possible. However, in so doing the Ridge would become subsumed within a much broader geographic project, and its identity and ability to address local issues and forces for change would risk being “lost” and “diluted”.</p> <p>The primary focus of Community Forests on trees and woodland would risk excluding other types of natural and cultural assets, would not address all drivers of change, nor fulfil all of the core purposes required for the Sandstone Ridge.</p>
Co-ordination	✓	Diverse partnerships with the public, private and community sectors are at the heart of Community Forests. The types of partners they engage align broadly with those required to deliver the core purpose of the Sandstone Ridge.
Champions	✓	It should be possible to find ambassadors to champion trees and woodlands on the Sandstone Ridge, but the Community Forest option may not attract individuals with other interests.
Change behaviours	✓	Community Forests provide opportunities for working with local communities and volunteers. Those stakeholders who don’t have a particular interest or enthusiasm for trees, however, may not be engaged.
Win resources	✓	The local authorities within the Mersey Forest have a partnership agreement with each other, and contribute core funding to The Mersey Forest team. The team and partners then draw down other funds to maximise the value and impact of all investments. Community Forest Trust, a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, provides further support to The Mersey Forest Partnership.
Develop and deliver projects	✓	Community Forests have a track record in accessing funding to deliver a range of projects. Given their focus on trees and woodlands, however, the Community Forest option is unlikely to deliver the full range of environmental, cultural, social and economic projects envisaged for the Sandstone Ridge.
Place making	✓	The Mersey Community Forest is well established in the region, and a Community Forest option for the Sandstone Ridge could potentially raise its profile and improve the perceptions of the public and partner bodies to the area. However, being part of a larger geographic project would not be conducive to building a separate brand image for the Sandstone Ridge and creating a sense of place.
Exert influence	✓✓	The Mersey Forest team seeks to influence strategic partnerships, such as, Local Economic Partnerships, in addition to participating in, coordinating and acting as the secretariat to a range of strategic partnerships such as the North West Forestry Forum, North West Green Infrastructure Forum, Natural Economy

		Investment Forum, Local Nature Partnerships, and Sefton Coast Partnership. Experience from Community Forests, therefore, is that they can exert influence on important policy areas, key projects, and funding priorities (e.g., the recently announced new Northern Forest).
Governance	✘	The Mersey Community Forest already has in place the appropriate systems for coherent direction, effective governance, efficient administration and collaborative management. It also has the benefit of a Mersey Forest team of officers to co-ordinate the partnership, and facilitate and deliver activities. The Mersey Community Forest is organised around a core partnership of seven local authorities – Cheshire West and Chester, Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St.Helens, and Warrington – as well as Natural England, the Forestry Commission, and the Environment Agency. Cheshire West and Chester Council is the host partner, providing employment, finance and accounting services. Cheshire East Council, which is the local authority over 12% of the Sandstone Ridge is not a partner.
Designation	✘ ✘	Community Forests are non-statutory, and therefore this option does not offer a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area.
Timeframe	✓	Community Forests are non-statutory, and the Mersey Community Forest is already established in the north of the area. Given that Community Forest partnerships involve local authorities, political discussions and negotiations may be time-consuming.

Opportunities and Risks matrix for the “Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty” option (Option 4)

“Must have” requirement	Rating	Explanation and assumptions
Leadership	✓ ✓	The purpose of AONBs is to conserve and protect the natural beauty and all of the special qualities of a given landscape.

		The statutory duty of AONBs to prepare a Management Plan for their area, setting out policy for management and an action plan for carrying out activity in support of the purposes of designation, would establish and communicate a vision, sense of purpose and direction for stewardship.
Focus	✓ ✓	<p>Although only some 27 square miles of the Sandstone Ridge around Delamere was recommended for designation as a Conservation Area (AONB) in Hobhouse’s 1947 Report to the National Parks Committee for, the whole of the landscape of NCA62 is worthy for putting forward for evaluation. NCA62 is a nationally recognised distinctive landscape, and its high landscape value is acknowledged locally by the designation in the Local Plans of most of the area as Areas of Special County Value for Landscape (ASCV).</p> <p>The purpose of AONBs to conserve and enhance the area’s natural beauty, contribute to promoting understanding and enjoyment, and seeking to foster the social and economic wellbeing of local communities is entirely compatible with the core purpose for the Sandstone Ridge. The AONB would focus on those matters which affected the special character of the area and the quality of life of those living and working within it.</p>
Co-ordination	✓ ✓	The engagement of AONB Partnerships made up of the constituent local authorities and other stakeholders in a broad range of actions supporting sustainable development and the conservation of natural beauty and special qualities is at the heart of their work.
Champions	✓ ✓	Champions for the Sandstone Ridge are more likely to be forthcoming with the raised profile and status that AONB designation would bring to the area.
Change behaviours	✓ ✓	AONBs are well placed to engage with those having an interest in the challenges facing a landscape area. Communication and community engagement are core components of AONB Management Plans, and the activities of most AONBs are supported by Friends Groups.
Win resources	✓ ✓	<p>Although declining in recent years, long-term core funding from Government (DEFRA) is available for the delivery of AONB purposes.</p> <p>There is clear evidence that AONB status combined with a dedicated unit promoting its special qualities, increases the chances of securing long-term funding and attracting inward investment from a wide variety of sources for the delivery of core purposes.</p>

Develop and deliver projects	✓ ✓	Evidence suggests that a dedicated management body and staff unit has capacity and skills advantages in developing projects and attracting investment for their delivery. AONB Management Plans set out programmes and activities to deliver their vision and objectives.
Place making	✓ ✓	The accolade of AONB status would significantly raise the identity and profile of the Sandstone Ridge nationally and internationally.
Exert influence	✓ ✓	<p>Compared with other delivery options, AONB designation clearly offers superior protection from adverse impacts arising from the forces for change.</p> <p>AONB status places a statutory duty on public bodies to have regard to its purpose.</p> <p>AONB status would ensure that policies and measures affecting the Sandstone Ridge are given greater scrutiny so that the natural beauty and special qualities of the area are managed in a more sustainable manner.</p> <p>AONB management bodies are respected and valued locally, regionally and nationally.</p>
Governance	✓ ✓	<p>The AONB option would put in place the appropriate systems for coherent direction, effective governance, efficient administration and collaborative management.</p> <p>AONBs have the benefit of funding access to a small core team (AONB Unit) to coordinate, facilitate and deliver activities.</p>
Designation	✓ ✓	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are designated under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which gives formal statutory recognition to these nationally important landscapes.
Timeframe	✗ ✗	<p>The process for designating an AONB in England is lengthy (conservatively estimated as between 5-10 years), expensive, with no guarantee of success at the end of the process.</p> <p>The Government's recent 25 year Environment Plan presents a timely opportunity for the Sandstone Ridge to be put forward for consideration for AONB designation, in that it includes a commitment to review AONBs including assessing whether more may be needed.</p>

Opportunities and Risks matrix for the “Regional Park” option (Option 5)

“Must have” requirement	Rating	Explanation and assumptions
Leadership	✓✓	The aim of Regional Parks is to act as a catalyst for action, enabling different partners to focus together to achieve broader, shared objectives. A Regional Park model could, therefore, provide a powerful, unified and single voice and clear leadership for the Sandstone Ridge area and offer a strategic overview.
Focus	✓	It is assumed that a Regional Park could operate across the entire Sandstone Ridge area (NCA62). Economic development and regeneration tend to be the main foci for regional parks rather than the environment <i>per se</i> . Having said that, building on the area’s positive key assets and linking the economy, culture, heritage and the arts with the natural environment is key to improving Regional Parks and the public’s perception of them.
Co-ordination	✓	Regional Parks encourage and require collaboration between partner authorities. A Regional Park option would join business and the environment in and around the project area.
Champions	✓✓	Champions for the Sandstone Ridge are more likely to be forthcoming with the raised profile and status that Regional Park status would bring to the area.
Change behaviours	✓	Regional Parks are well placed to engage with those in the private, public and voluntary sectors having an interest in the challenges facing a landscape area. Those stakeholders who don’t have a particular interest or enthusiasm for economic development and regeneration, however, may not be engaged.
Win resources	✓✓	With their focus on economic development and regeneration, Regional Parks can offer a route for regional and national funding that might not otherwise be accessible for other delivery models with more of an environmental focus. Regional Parks elsewhere have a track record of unlocking investment and leveraging regional and national funding sources.
Develop and deliver projects	✓	Although the primary focus of Regional Parks is economic development and regeneration, environmental projects should, however, benefit on the back of these other funding opportunities. Regional Parks should offer a way of helping projects and programmes succeed within a regional framework.
Place making	✓✓	Regional Parks can achieve a step change in the marketing of a local area as part of a larger regional asset. A Regional Park brand could provide momentum and enthusiasm amongst partners and the wider Sandstone Ridge “family” to drive forward ambitious programmes for the area.

Exert influence	✓✓	Experience from established Regional Parks shows that they can provide a unique development, planning and promotional mechanism for the regeneration of an area, exerting influence on important policy areas, key projects, and funding priorities. The Regional Park model is a suitable mechanism for meeting a number of emerging policy areas, including, rural regeneration and green infrastructure.
Governance	✓	<p>A new, bespoke legal and governance structure would need to be formalised for a Regional Park, with a partnership and Management Board taking responsibility for long term planning and investment and overseeing project activities.</p> <p>Experience elsewhere is that this would most likely be attached to an existing organisation already operating in the area to act as host and take on administrative and HR responsibilities for employing a small unit of staff that would be required to promote the Park and deliver activities.</p> <p>Compared with management arrangements for other delivery model options this may be an expensive structure to resource.</p>
Designation	✗✗	Regional Parks are non-statutory, and therefore this option does not offer a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area.
Timeframe	✗✗	Regional Parks have taken a number of years (5-10) to evolve, before structures are formalised.

Opportunities and Risks matrix for the “Farm Cluster” option (Option 6)

“Must have” requirement	Rating	Explanation and assumptions
Leadership	✗	<p>Given that the focus of Farm Clusters is to improve the natural environment on farms, this single purpose excludes wider cultural and landscape interests and would not address and deliver broader multiple environmental, social and economic objectives for the Sandstone Ridge.</p> <p>Membership comprises farmers and other land managers and is not representative of all sections of the community. This option would not, therefore, provide the leadership to speak with one voice on the full range of interests and issues affecting the area.</p>

Focus	✘ ✘	<p>The Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network was established with Countryside Stewardship Facilitation funding in January 2018, covering 40 farms south of the Shropshire Union Canal. Under the Facilitation Fund up to 80 farms can join the scheme, so there is potential for expanding its geographic coverage. However, given that there are over 400 farmers and landowners on the Sandstone Ridge this scheme could not cover the entire area.</p> <p>As the focus of Farm Clusters is the natural environment, this option would fail to safeguard all types of assets, would not address all drivers of change, nor fulfil all of the core purposes desired for the Sandstone Ridge.</p>
Co-ordination	✘	<p>Farm Clusters as set up in the UK are built on the principle of partnerships of farmers and other land managers working together to improve the natural environment at a landscape-scale and achieve greater improvements than individual holdings could on their own.</p> <p>A narrow partnership focused on the farming/land management sector will exclude a wide cross section of stakeholder groups who have an interest in the landscape of the Sandstone Ridge.</p>
Champions	✓	<p>It should be possible to find ambassadors to champion farming and land management interests on the Sandstone Ridge. A Farm Cluster option is unlikely, however, to attract individuals with other interests.</p>
Change behaviours	✓	<p>Farm Clusters have the potential to provide opportunities for working with local communities and volunteers. Those stakeholders who don't have an ecological or farming interest, however, are unlikely to be engaged.</p>
Win resources	✓	<p>Central Government funding for each Countryside Stewardship Farm Cluster is limited to 3 years. As things stand at the moment, thereafter, Farm Clusters would have to generate their own income or continue on a voluntary basis.</p> <p>Membership of a Farm Cluster is likely to increase the chances of individual farmers' successfully accessing agri-environment schemes.</p>
Develop and deliver projects	✓	<p>Farm Clusters choose their own priorities and the environmental and farming efficiency/technology projects they wish to pursue. Whilst no direct project funding is available through Facilitation Funding, the chances of individual farmer members accessing funding for agri-environment land management and capital</p>

		schemes should be improved through the advice and support they receive through the Farm Cluster Facilitator.
Place making	✓	The Farm Cluster option could raise the profile of the Sandstone Ridge and improve the perceptions of the public and members to the area, although it is not a widely known or promoted initiative.
Exert influence	✓	As part of a nationally promoted initiative, drawing membership from interested local farmers and other land managers, Farm Clusters are engaging with those agencies charged with the implementation of environmental and rural economy policy. They have the potential, therefore, to increase awareness of the natural values of the area and local issues, although the audience may be somewhat limited.
Governance	✗	Farm Clusters are organised around an elected chair from within the Group, and small steering committee drawn from within the membership. Central government funding is available for them to engage a Facilitator to support the group. Their governance would not provide the capacity to deliver wider environmental, social and economic objectives outside the core purpose of the Clusters to improve the natural environment on farms.
Designation	✗ ✗	Farm Clusters are non-statutory, and therefore this option does not offer a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area.
Timeframe	✓ ✓	A Farm Cluster is already established and operating within the Sandstone Ridge area.

Opportunities and Risks matrix for the “Public-private-community Initiative” option (Option 7)

“Must have” requirement	Rating	Explanation and assumptions
Leadership	✓ ✓	A Public-private-community initiative could enable different partners from across sectors to join together to achieve broader, shared objectives. This model could, therefore, provide a powerful, unified and single voice and clear leadership for the Sandstone Ridge area and offer a strategic overview.
Focus	✓ ✓	It would be possible to set-up a new initiative to operate across the entire Sandstone Ridge area (NCA62).

		Being a bespoke arrangement, an initiative could be tailor made to address local concerns and forces for landscape change, and to deliver all of the core purposes.
Co-ordination	✓✓	Being bespoke, this model would maximise the opportunity for setting up a multi-sectoral partnership representative of the cross section of stakeholder groups who have an interest in the landscape of the Sandstone Ridge.
Champions	✓	A multi-sectoral partnership is likely to attract ambassadors to champion the Sandstone Ridge.
Change behaviours	✓	This option would provide opportunities for engaging and working with local communities and volunteers across all sectors.
Win resources	✓	The legal structure of a Public-private-community initiative could be set up in such a way as to maximise access to all available sources of funding, such as, from business, charities, government, membership, voluntary donations and trading. It is assumed that a multi-sectoral partnership demonstrating clear leadership and focus on local issues and need would have a good chance of attracting investment.
Develop and deliver projects	✓	This option could potentially access funding and volunteer (in kind) support to develop and deliver a wide range of environmental, cultural, access, social and economic projects.
Place making	✓	The creation of a Public-private-community Initiative with charitable purposes, working together to deliver the core purposes, should improve people's perceptions of the Ridge.
Exert influence	✓	This option should be able to increase awareness of the values of the area. A broad base partnership with a vested interest and stake in the area should be well placed to advocate and support policies and measures that promote, protect and enhance the area.
Governance	✓	A new, bespoke legal and governance structure would need to be put in place for a public-private-community initiative, with a Management Board taking responsibility for long term planning and investment and overseeing project activities. Various options are available for consideration. It is assumed that this would be a free standing arrangement, for which there would be set-up and running costs. The involvement of a broad partnership would provide access to new skills and experience.
Designation	✗✗	A Public-private-community Initiative is non-statutory, and therefore this option does not offer a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area.
Timeframe	✓✓	It should be possible to set in place a partnership, with terms of reference and a governance structure relatively quickly (ie, 12-18 months).

Opportunities and Risks matrix for the “Status Quo” option (Option 8)

“Must have” requirement	Rating	Explanation and assumptions
Leadership	0	The Sandstone Ridge Trust is the only organisation operating on the Sandstone Ridge that exists with the sole purpose of championing the protection, conservation and enhancement of the area. Whilst the Trust could continue to deliver its vision for the Sandstone Ridge, the capacity of its small group of volunteer Trustees to unite partners and the wider Sandstone Ridge family behind a shared vision would prove challenging.
Focus	0	The current geographic focus and core purpose under this option would be unchanged.
Co-ordination	X	<p>Several landscape-scale initiatives already operating in parts of the Sandstone Ridge (NCA62) area are run by partnerships representative of some of the stakeholder groups. These include Delamere Living Landscape Project (Delamere Forest), Meres and Mosses Living Landscape Project (Bickerton), the Mersey Forest Community Forest (between Frodsham and Tarporley), and Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network (south of the Shropshire Union Canal to Malpas).</p> <p>Each has its own partnership, geographic focus and core purpose, and it is assumed unlikely that any of them would expand their coverage to embrace the whole of NCA62 <u>and</u> re-focus their purpose to address the sustainable management of the landscape and natural assets of the Sandstone Ridge.</p>
Champions	0	Champions are more likely to come forward if the profile and status of the Ridge is elevated above the current situation.
Change behaviours	X	Existing connections with Trust members and volunteers are likely to continue. Actively and positively engaging the wider Sandstone Ridge “family” requires considerable and, ongoing investment, and is unlikely to be sustained under a status quo option. This could make it difficult to manage the public’s expectations, and lead to reputational risks.
Win resources	✓	Individual organisations operating in the Sandstone Ridge area have a successful track record of accessing funds for a range of different types of environmental investment, and there is every chance that this success will continue. Evidence from other areas suggests, however, that a dedicated body and unit for the Sandstone Ridge could have an advantage in applying for project funding and in developing new investment sources in the local area.

Develop and deliver projects	✓	It is assumed that environmental, cultural and heritage projects will continue to be developed and implemented, <i>ad hoc</i> , by the various organisations operating in the area. Evidence from other landscape-scale projects suggests, however, that a dedicated management body and staff unit will have an advantage in developing projects and attracting investment for their delivery.
Place making	✘	The ability to develop and build a Sandstone Ridge brand image would be compromised through lack of dedicated staff resources and investment under the Status Quo.
Exert influence	✘ ✘	The ability to exert influence would be seriously impaired through lack of leadership, co-ordination, credibility, and dedicated staff resources under the Status Quo.
Governance	0	It is assumed that there would be no change to the present governance arrangements.
Designation	✘ ✘	The Status Quo does not offer a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area.
Timeframe	0	There would be no impacts on this requirement.

Step 5. Preferred delivery model option

Suitability of delivery model options to deliver the “must have” requirements

“Must have” requirement	1. Living Landscapes	2. Nature Improvement Area	3. Community Forest	4. AONB	5. Regional Park	6. Farm cluster	7. Public-private-community Initiative	8. Status Quo
Leadership	X	X	X	✓✓	✓✓	X	✓✓	0
Focus	X	X	X	✓✓	✓	XX	✓✓	0
Co-ordination	X	X	✓	✓✓	✓	X	✓✓	X
Champions	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	0
Change behaviours	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Win resources	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓
Develop and deliver projects	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Place making	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	X
Exert influence	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	XX
Governance	X	XX	X	✓✓	✓	X	✓	0
Designation	XX	XX	XX	✓✓	XX	XX	XX	XX
Timeframe	✓✓	✓✓	✓	XX	XX	✓✓	✓✓	0

Conclusions

The above table draws together the rating assessments for all seven options, with the Status Quo for comparison.

All of the options offer opportunities over the Status Quo, and all have risks attached to them.

To varying degrees most of the options could attract champions, change behaviours, win resources, develop and deliver projects, build a brand image and, exert influence.

The emphases of four of the options (ie, 1. Living Landscapes, 2 Nature Improvement Area, 3. Community Forest and 6. Farm Cluster) is considered too narrow (biodiversity, farming, and trees/woodland) to offer the required leadership, focus and co-ordination across the full range of interests and issues affecting the entire Sandstone Ridge landscape.

Option 4, AONB, is considered the most well suited to meet the requirements, and is the only one which offers a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area. Its disadvantage is the lengthy timeframe (at least 5-10 years) it is estimated it would take to seek and secure approval for such a designation. It is also likely to require funding to commission studies to support the case for designating the area an AONB. Given this, and with no guarantee of success at the end of the process, it is considered necessary to have running in parallel another option that is relatively easy and inexpensive to establish and run; would provide leadership, focus and co-ordination; would access funding, expertise and new partners; and sustain interest and activity whilst the long-term ambition of AONB status is being pursued. Option 7 – a bespoke Public-Private-Community Initiative could fulfil this role. A hybrid combination of options 4 and 7 could, therefore, be the most effective way of realising the immediate, medium and long-term aspirations for the Sandstone Ridge.

Option 5, Regional Park, is considered less well suited to meeting the full range of requirements when compared with Option 4 – AONB. Furthermore, it does not offer a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area. Like AONBs, Regional Parks take a number of years (5-10) to evolve, before structures are formalised. It is interesting to note that some landscape areas that were on Hobhouse's 1946 list of "Areas of Conservation" but have never progressed to AONB designation, for example, South Pennines and Charnwood Forest, are now actively pursuing Regional Park status as a substitute. The Regional Park option may, therefore, be an alternative route to pursue for the Sandstone Ridge if the AONB option was discounted. Given the similarly lengthy timeframe likely to be involved, it would also require a hybrid arrangement with Option 7 – a bespoke Public-Private-Community Initiative running in parallel.

The views of the Trustees are sought on the analysis and conclusions of this appraisal, so that the preferred option can be identified. This includes the need for peer review and consultation. Once consensus on the preferred option has been reached, a route map for its establishment and implementation can be prepared.