

# Cheshire Sandstone Ridge potential AONB designation project





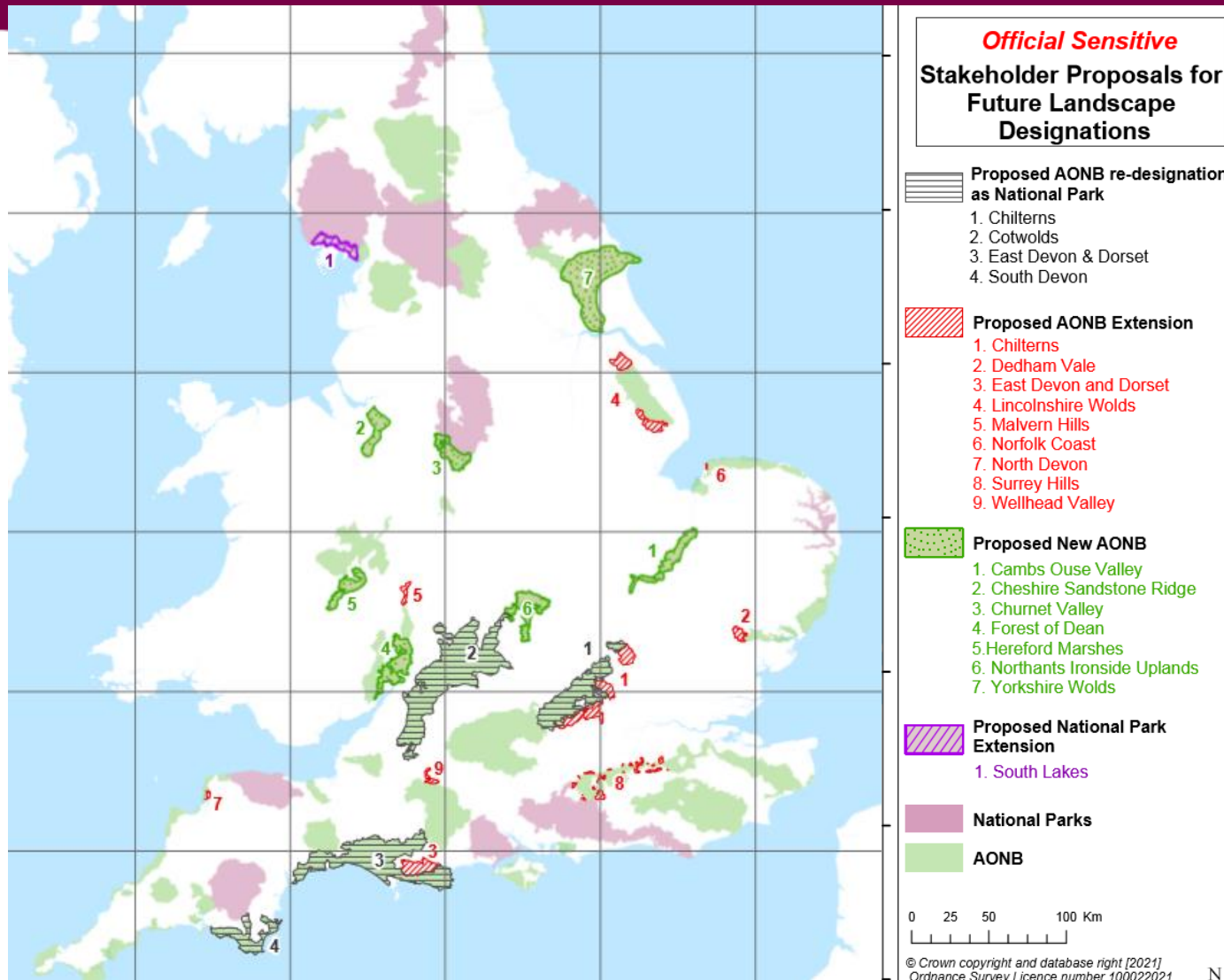
Published 2019

A challenge to Natural England to do more for landscape

Natural England's **designations programme**: NE Board requested a review of the designation requests in light of the Glover review.

Natural England's **designation process**: Board is interested to pursue improvements to the current designations process

# Landscape Designation Prioritisation Process



Prioritisation analysis of pre-existing shortlist of 21 proposals

# Defra and Natural England agreed Policy Steers



## Nature Recovery and delivery of the 30 x 30 agenda

a. Area of land being (potentially) newly designated
b. Area of priority habitat contained in proposed area
c. Does the proposed area create a total designated area larger than 500 square km? (including all designations, not just National Park and AONB)

## Levelling up across the country

a. Location of proposed area in relation to existing designated areas – assuming “in white space” is better.
b. Proposed areas in closest proximity to areas of deprivation and 15miles away from existing designated landscapes
c. Proposed areas in closest proximity to centres of BAME populations and 15mi away from existing designations
d. Proposed areas which would benefit most in terms of Green Economic Recovery

## Supporting access to nature

a. Number of large settlements within fifteen miles of the proposed area boundary
b. Accessibility by bus and rail
c. Length of National Trail and / or National Cycle Network routes within proposed area
d. Density of PROW per square km in proposed areas



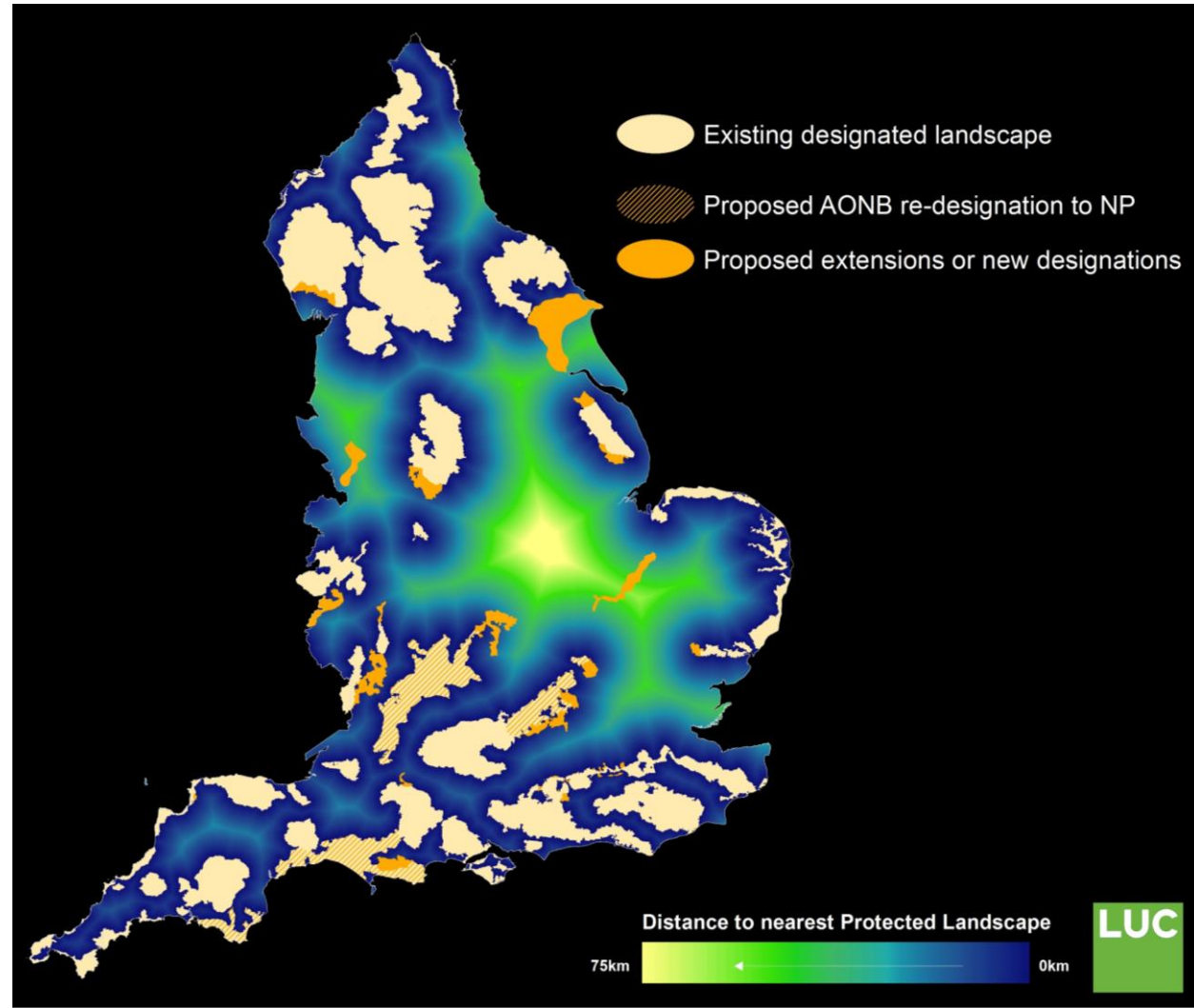
# Policy Steer 2: Levelling up across the country



*Policy steer 2a: Location of proposed new designation in relation to other designated areas – assuming “in white space” is better.*

*Proposals contributing most to plugging gaps in coverage:*

- *Cambs Ouse Valley*
- *Yorkshire Wolds*
- *Cheshire Sandstone Ridge*
- *Northants Ironstone*

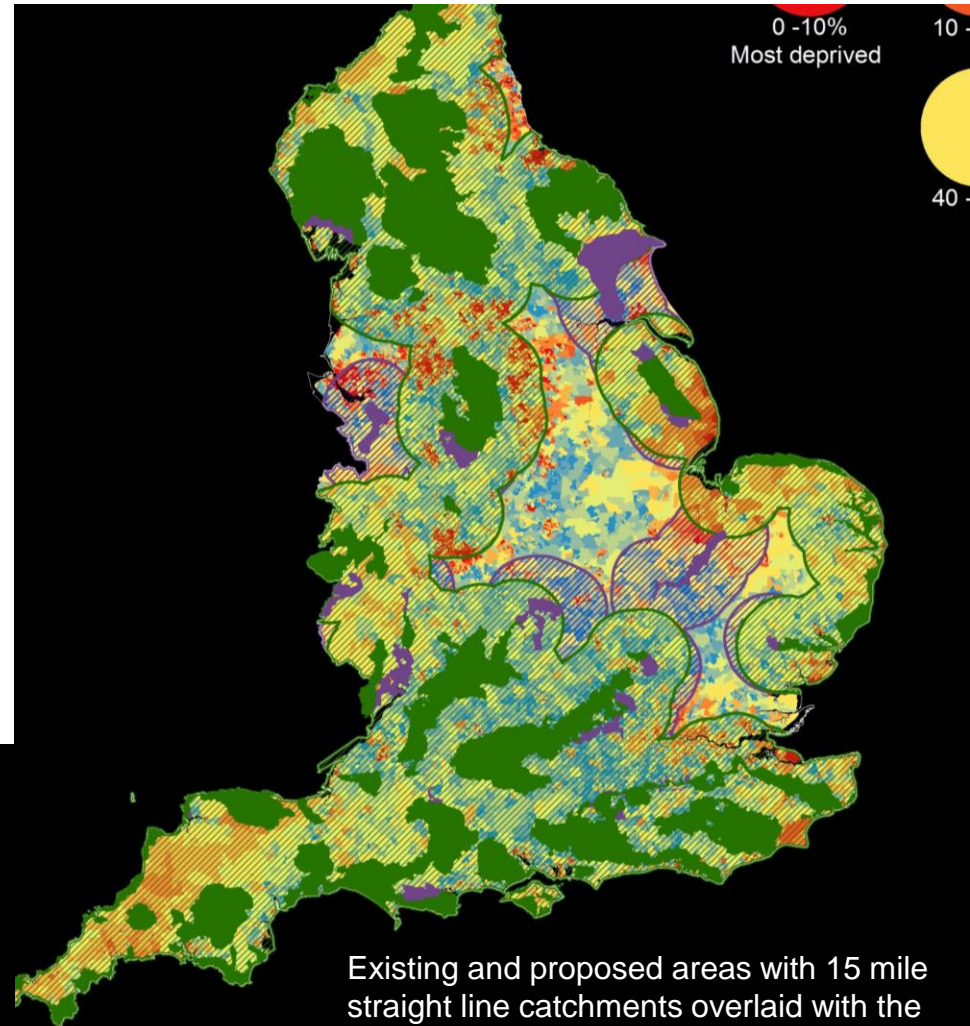
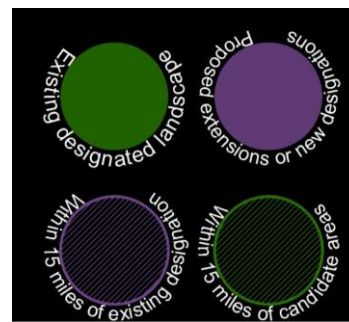


# Policy Steer 2: Levelling up across the country



*Policy steer 2b: Proposed Areas in closest proximity to areas of deprivation and 15 miles away from existing designated landscapes*

- Cheshire Sandstone Ridge
- Yorkshire Wolds
- Cambs Ouse Valley
- Chilterns extension
- Northants Uplands



Existing and proposed areas with 15 mile straight line catchments overlaid with the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 data.

# Cheshire Sandstone Ridge



Press release  
**Natural England announces landmark new programme for protected landscapes**

Proposals for four new protected areas, and ambitious new programme to increase our protected landscapes and find innovative ways to bring nature and people closer together.

From: [Natural England](#)  
Published 24 June 2021



Turville village, Chiltern Hills. Credit: Hedley Thorne.

Natural England is today (Thursday 24 June) announcing proposals for new protected areas across England, alongside an ambitious, landmark programme to examine how more areas could benefit from landscape improvements, and deliver more for people and nature.

Cheshire Sandstone Ridge – 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.

# Timeline



	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25
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**PROJECT INITIATION**

Set up project governance	█	█																																		
Designation process workshop for stakeholders and Councillors			█																																	
Contract procurement		█	█	█	█	█																														
Early stakeholder evidence gathering						█	█																													

**EVIDENCE AND EVALUATION**

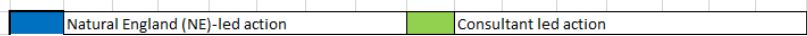
Project initiation. Strategic assessment screening for SEA and start EqIA							█																														
Early evidence gathering							█	█	█																												
Evaluation of natural beauty and identification of candidate area.								█	█	█																											
Early engagement period, analysis of results, natural beauty assessment											█	█	█																								
NE Decision on natural beauty assessment and whether to proceed																█																					
Assessment of the desirability of designating the Candidate Area																	█	█	█																		
Identification of a detailed boundary																			█	█	█																
NE decision re boundary																																					

**FORMAL CONSULTATION PROCESS**

Formal consultation including material preparation and comms																																					
Analysis of results, finalisation of proposal																																					

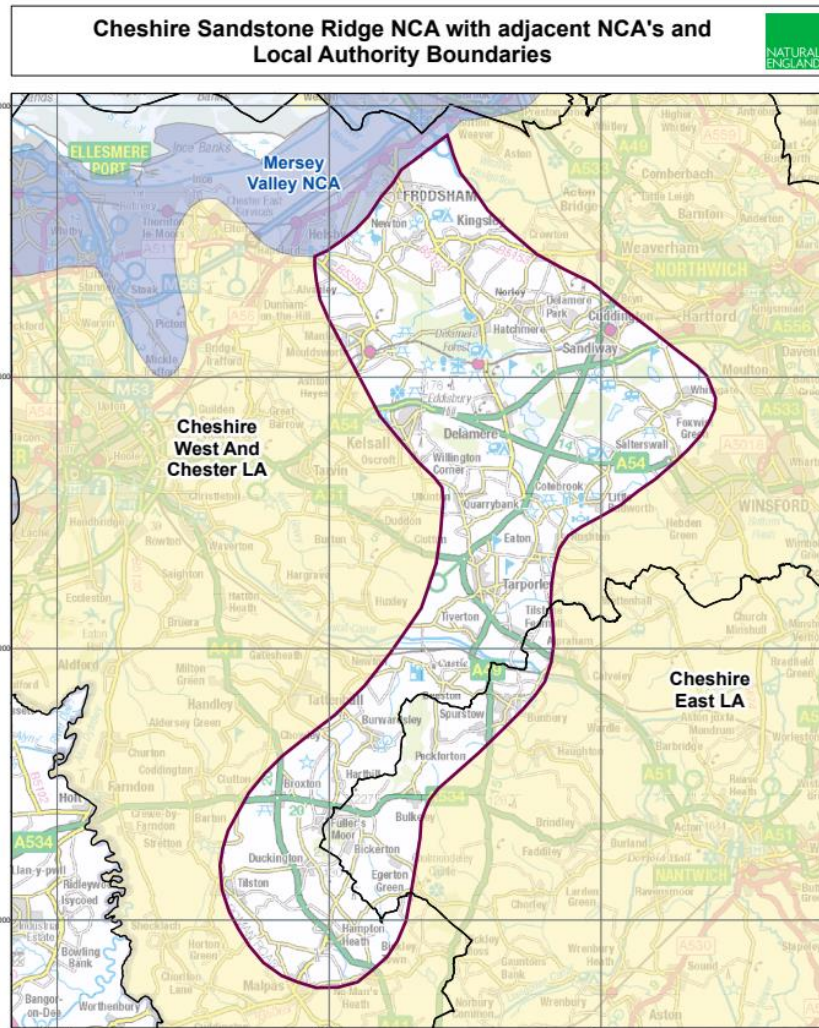
**FORMAL DESIGNATION PROCESS**

NE Board approval of draft AONB Order																																					
Notice Period																																					
Analysis of results and finalisation of Designation Order																																					
Submission to Defra Sec of State																																					





# Area of Search: National Character Area



Areas of special county value for landscape

Delamere

# Questions?

NATURAL  
ENGLAND



# Topics to be covered



The **Legislation** for the designation of AONBs

Assessing **Outstanding Natural Beauty**

Determining the **Desirability** of designation

Identifying **boundaries**

The **statutory process**

# What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?



**Section 82(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (“CROW”) defines an AONB in England as.....**

“an area that is not in a National Park but which appears to Natural England to be of such **outstanding natural beauty** that it is desirable that the protective provisions of Part IV of CROW should apply to it **for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the area’s natural beauty**. In such circumstances Natural England may, by order, designate the area as an AONB”.



# CRoW Act (for AONBs) requires Natural England to address the following:



1. Is the landscape of outstanding natural beauty?
2. Is the level of natural beauty such that it is desirable to designate this landscape as AONB to conserve and enhance its natural beauty?

...and (assuming 'yes') to these questions we must also determine where the boundary should be drawn

3. Undertake a statutory consultation
4. Make a designation variation Order

# Guidance for assessing landscapes for Designation as National Park or AONB



- subject to stakeholder consultation
- approved by Natural England Board and reaffirmed by NE Directors
- successfully tested during the Public Inquiry into the extensions to the Lake District & Yorkshire Dales NPs and
- Successfully applied in the extension of the SC&H AONB (accepted by the Secretary of State without a Public Inquiry).
- Updated in June 2021

Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England



Updated June 2021



# Assessing Natural Beauty





# What is 'landscape'?

***“.....an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”***





# Some technical points in a little greater detail: Defining Natural Beauty



- Characterisation: landscape character assessment techniques can be used to form a 'spatial framework'
- Evaluation makes judgements on the value of the landscape (for AONBs the value is Outstanding Natural Beauty)

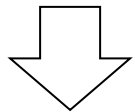
*However please note Natural Beauty is not:*

- Landscape character
- Natural landscape untouched by man

# Overview of assessment process

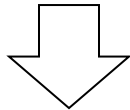


A. Characterisation and Spatial Framework



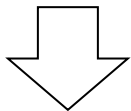
**Evaluation Areas**

B. Evaluation against the Technical Criteria



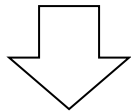
**Candidate Area**

C. Consideration of Desirability of Designation



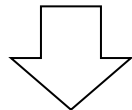
**Candidate Areas desirable to designate**

D. Assessment for designation under the statutory provisions



**Proposed designation**

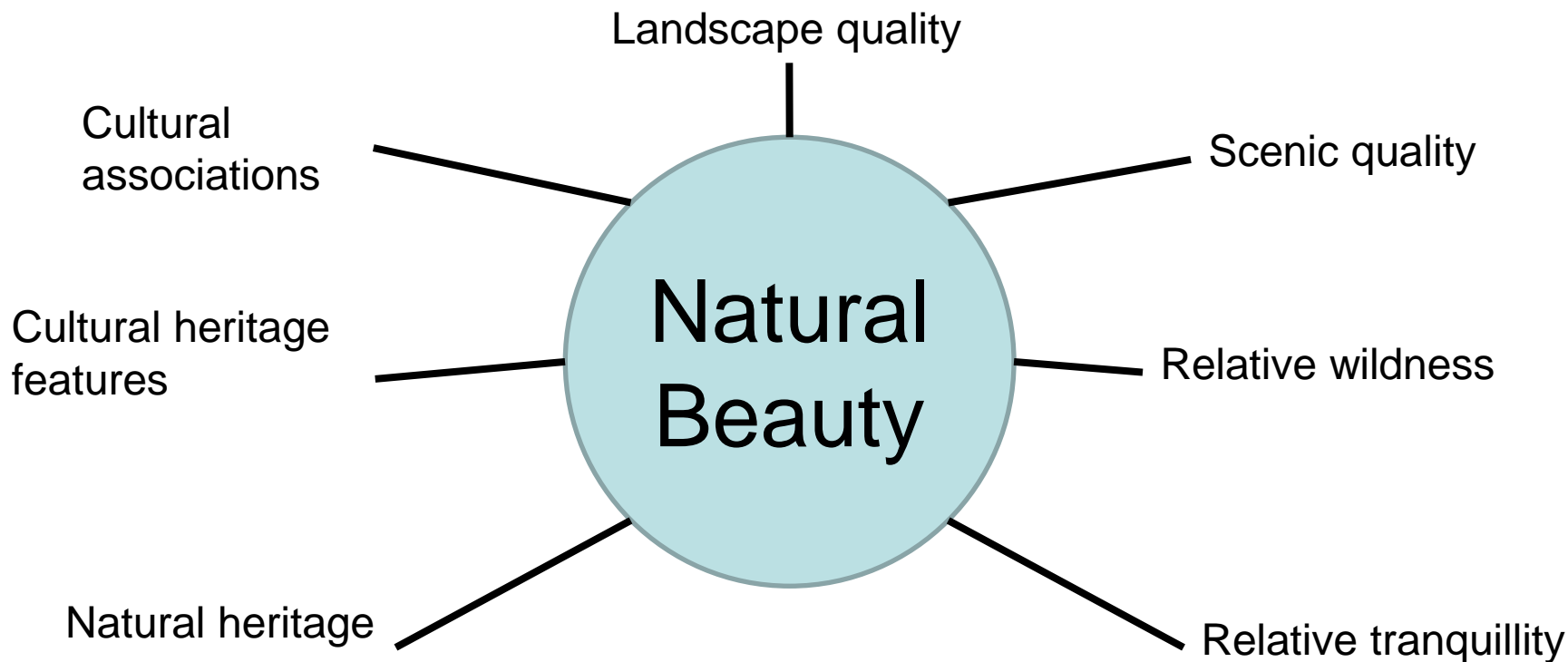
E. Definition of a Detailed Boundary



**Boundary for designation**

F. Formal Designation Procedures

# Natural Beauty assessment covers a range of factors and indicators accepted as contributing to high levels of natural beauty



Assessment of **current natural beauty** not future potential

Landscape & Scenic Quality: sense of place, intactness or incongruous elements/ visual aesthetics & interest,



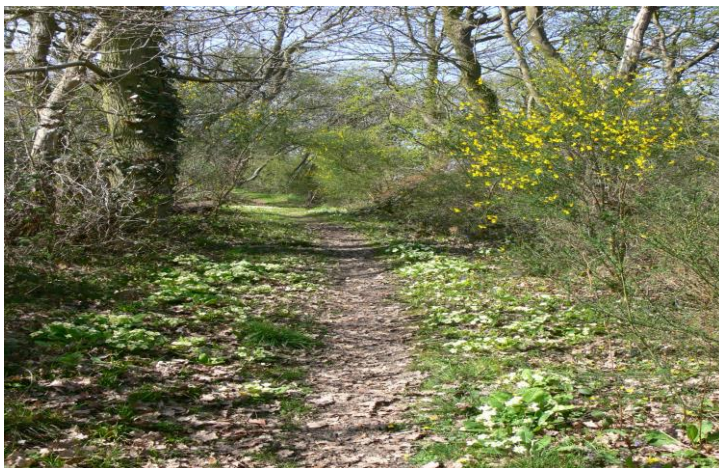


# Relative wildness and tranquillity: sense of remoteness, openness, exposure, quietude, natural sights and sounds





# Natural Heritage: geology, landform, habitats, wildlife





# Cultural Heritage: historic features & archaeology



# Cultural & artistic associations





## Is it Desirable to Designate?

*'desirable that the protective provisions of Part IV of CROW should apply to it for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the area's natural beauty'*

# The Desirability of Designation



Once an area is assessed as having sufficient natural beauty...

- Is this area of such **national significance** that the AONB purpose should apply to it?
- What are the **issues and forces for change** affecting the area and would designation improve their management?
- Can the statutory AONB purpose be best pursued through the **management mechanisms, powers and duties** which come with AONB designation?
- Are there **other relevant factors** which tend to suggest whether it is or is not desirable to designate the area?
- **Care required here as this is often misunderstood!**

# Boundary Setting Considerations



Appendix 4 of the Guidance document contains considerations used when setting a boundary covering the following

- **Transitional areas:** *the boundary should be tightly drawn around higher quality areas*
- **Types of boundary:** *easily distinguishable permanent physical boundary*
- **Other boundaries:** *avoid using LA and/ or landholding boundaries*
- **Inclusion of settlements:** *only if within a wider tract of qualifying land*
- **Integrity of settlements:** *avoid cutting a settlement in two*
- **Incongruous development:** *excluded unless of a temporary or transient nature*
- **Land allocated for major development:** *normally exclude*
- **Features of interest:** *include where practicable*

# Consultation





# Statutory Consultation (for an AONB designation)



## **Statutory consultees**

- for an AONB = principal local authorities with land in the proposed extension, ie county and district level
- We will however, ensure we engage openly and widely with stakeholders and the public

The **questions** we ask:

- Do you agree that each area has sufficiently outstanding natural beauty to warrant designation?
- Do you agree that it is desirable to designate the proposed area as an AONB to conserve and enhance its natural beauty?
- Do you agree with the proposed boundary?
- Any other issues that are considered relevant?

# The stages following the statutory consultation



## ***Assuming Natural England Board approves the designation variation..***

- Natural England produces a draft legal order to vary the boundary of the AONB
- Natural England publishes Notice of its intention to 'make' (sign and seal) the order and provides an opportunity for anyone wishing to do so to make written representations (objecting to, supporting or suggesting amendments)
- All representations have to be considered and if necessary, reflected in any final amendments, following which Natural England 'makes' the legal Order

# The stages following the statutory consultation



- The legal Order is then submitted to the Secretary of State together with all representations including unresolved objections
- SoS may decide to hold a public Inquiry
- SoS may decide to confirm the Order, with or without modifications. They may also decide not to confirm the Order.
- If minded to confirm, a Confirmation Order is produced – specifies any modifications.

# In summary: the tasks to be undertaken prior to drafting a legal order



## **Review the area proposed for designation by considering:**

- Whether this is the full extent of the area that should be assessed (the ‘area of search’)?
- whether this area contains outstanding natural beauty and can therefore be considered for national level designation?
- whether it is *‘desirable that the protective provisions of Part IV of the CRow Act 2000 should apply for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the area’s natural beauty?’*



And finally...



**...and assuming a positive answer to these questions:**

- Identify proposed detailed boundaries
- Undertake a statutory consultation
- Submit the proposal to Natural England's Board for approval
- Undertake the legislative procedures prior to submission to SoS
- SoS has the final say, and may call a Public Inquiry

# Questions?

