

4 APRIL 2022

PR 4-22 | LANDSCAPES REVIEW

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the nationally recognised organisation representing and campaigning for the interests of the some 10,000 parish and town councils and many parish meetings in England. Local councils are the backbone of our democracy and closest to local people, providing our villages, towns, small cities and urban neighbourhoods with a democratic voice and structure, now contributing in excess of £2 billion of community investment to support and improve local communities and deliver neighbourhood level services. With some 100,000 local councillors from all walks of life who are committed to public service, they also provide a pool of talent both for their local and the wider, district, county, regional and national communities.

Summary

- As with its October 2019 response to the original Glover Review consultation, on this occasion NALC also consulted all county associations covering in part or in whole National Park areas (Norfolk, Devon, Somerset, Cumbria, Hampshire, Northumberland, Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Cheshire, Lancashire, Staffordshire, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex).
- In principle NALC supports the original proposal that AONBs be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, and renamed as National Landscapes. This is because it is a key plank of our support to combat the climate change emergency that we all protect the rural and natural heritage of England as far as we can. We would also like to make the point that local councils know their areas best – so it would be an excellent idea to include local council representation (or at least continue to) – on AONB Conservation Boards and Joint Area Committees.
- On reformed governance to inspire and secure ambition in our national landscapes and better reflect society we would counsel retaining strong local council representation on National Park Authorities as local councils are the grassroots knowledge source for National Park Authorities within NPA areas. To lose that would be to cut a historic and effective golden thread which would be hard to replace and would risk creating a knowledge vacuum which other appointees may not entirely be able to replace.

- We entirely support the need for better representation of all local government representatives on National Park Authorities. However we would urge DEFRA to be balanced with any reforms they wish to make and to retain local council representation – ideally retaining the same numbers of local council representatives to NPAs – and working with county associations of local councils covering National Park areas – to encourage more diverse memberships of local councils – or at least more diverse members currently elected to those local councils – to consider standing for election to National Park Authorities.
- In reference to Proposal 26, our local councils are broadly supportive of the government's response to the proposed reforms on public bodies that govern national landscapes. Our local councils agree that increased diversity on public bodies is a positive step but this should not affect parish representation.
- Our local councils are cautious of proposed reforms that could damage democratic representation and ties to local communities. These public bodies would do well to retain the knowledge resource of local (parish and town) councils. Local councils maintain a grassroots connection to local communities and businesses which are invaluable to the governing of our national landscapes.
- Furthermore, we must ensure that local councils are heard when considering the planning process in national landscapes. These public bodies will require local expertise to review planning applications and develop neighbourhood plans to make certain that local voices are heard and develop appropriate policies e.g. restrictive covenants on new builds to reduce second home investment, increasing affordable and sustainable housing.
- In the consultation document there is no explanation as to how partnerships would be led or funded and also there is no commitment to the multi-year funding agreements suggested by Glover which would provide the certainty needed to plan ahead.
- Whilst 'the vision', in the 'Introduction', recognises the need to support thriving local communities, nothing is said here or anywhere else about giving them a direct say as to how they are managed.
- There is no requirement for local councils to be represented on governing bodies or on Nature Recovery Networks.
- We welcome the proposals to strengthen the statutory purposes of AONBs and to align them with National Parks but, here again, there is some detail missing. The government recommends that the first 'purpose'

should include driving nature recovery and a wide range of societal benefits. However, it is rather odd in view of the fact that this is about 'The Glover Landscape Review' that the government has not recognised that landscape and landscape character should be a central part of the primary 'purpose'.

- Whilst the government acknowledges the need to protect precious landscapes from too much unsustainable tourism, it makes no mention of new funding to ensure this protection.

NALC's responses to the main consultation questions affecting local councils are as below:

Chapter 4: Supporting local delivery

Local governance

21. Which of the following measures would you support to improve local governance? [National Park Authorities, the Broads Authority and AONB Conservation Boards]

Include all that apply.

- **Improved training and materials**
 - **Streamlined process for removing underperforming members**
 - **Greater use of advisory panels**
 - **Greater flexibility over the proportion of national, parish and local appointments**
 - **Merit-based criteria for local authority appointments**
 - **Reduced board size**
 - **Secretary of State appointed chair**
 - **Other [Please state]**
 - **A clearer role for public bodies [National Park Authorities, the Broads Authority and AONB Conservation Boards]**
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- Improved training and materials – supportive of the benefits of structures training and support materials.
 - Streamlined process for removing underperforming members – needs to be scope to address issues to reduce reputational damage.
 - Greater use of advisory panels – Used correctly to allow local expertise to inform decisions that will positively impact on residents.
 - Greater flexibility over the proportion of national, parish and local appointments – it is crucial there is always parish and town council

representation to ensure that locals are given the opportunity to participate and engage with public bodies.

- Merit-based criteria for local authority appointments – to ensure that individuals with the necessary skills and experience are appointed whilst retaining democratic accountability.
- Reducing the size of boards of National Parks and AONBs would not necessarily work to their advantage. These are large areas with diverse problems and communities and it is imperative that all voices are heard. It is essential that local council representation is not diminished. In addition not only would reducing board size reduce the ability to represent all interests (geographical and thematic), but also it creates difficulties for populating the committee substructure of the boards: standards, audit, HR, planning and others.
- Secretary of State appointed chair – it is essential to the democratic nature of these public bodies that local people should agree to the chair.

Local councils would like to see greater inclusion in planning committees. This is to ensure that local views are heard, to ensure that steady employment is not reliant on tourist-dependent hospitality, and restrictive covenants are put in place to reduce speculative investment in second homes.

22. Should statutory duties be strengthened so that they are given greater weight when exercising public functions? YES/NO/UNSURE

Yes. This will assist local councils in their understanding of the priorities and actions to facilitate access and community engagement to meet their targets. Local councils have a key role to play in Local Nature Recovery Strategies. There should be a requirement for local councils to be represented in facilitating these strategies.

Again - reducing the size of boards of National Parks and AONBs would not necessarily work to their advantage. These are large areas with diverse problems and communities and it is imperative that all voices are heard. It is essential that local council representation is not diminished.

23. Should statutory duties be made clearer with regards to the role of public bodies in preparing and implementing management plans? YES/NO/UNSURE

Yes. Provision of greater clarity should help manage expectations and ensure that local councils are able to fully support the development of management plans. This should allow local councils to facilitate nature recovery and climate mitigation to work in conjunction with national policy targets such as the 25 Year Environment Plan/Net Zero.

Should you require any further information on this response please do not hesitate to contact Chris Borg, policy manager, on 07714 771049 or via email at chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk .

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