



The National Association for AONBs
Cymdeithas Genedlaethol AoHNE

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Evidence gathering consultation

Response by the National Associations of NAAONBs

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) was formed in 1998 as an independent organisation to act on behalf of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Its membership is largely but not exclusively composed of local authorities whose boundaries include AONBs and who are concerned to improve their management and funding arrangements.

The Association also works closely with the Countryside Agency, Countryside Council for Wales and English Nature as well as through Joint Accords with the Association of National Park Authorities and other major organisations such as the Forestry Commission and English Heritage to establish agreements over issues which directly affect the work of AONBs.

There are 40 AONBs in England and Wales. Each AONB has been designated for special attention by reason of their high qualities. These include their flora, fauna, historical and cultural associations as well as scenic views. AONB landscapes range from rugged coastline (Cornwall, Gower) to water meadows (Dedham Vale) to gentle downland (Kent Downs) and upland moors (North Pennines). Approximately 15% of the countryside of England and Wales is designated as AONB

Local authorities have responsibility for the formulation of Management Plans for AONBs which they form part of, except in the case of the Chilterns and Cotswolds AONBs, where Conservation Boards have been established. Where more than one local authority is involved, AONB Partnerships have been established to co-ordinate activity.

AONB Management Plans are statutory plans setting out the policies of the local authorities and Conservation Boards for the management of the area. They will be

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primary documents for the formulation of Local Development Frameworks under the new Planning system.

Current Planning regime

The Governments National Planning policies with relation to AONBs are set out in Planning Policy Statement 7.

PPS 11 Annex A requires PPS7 and the Rural White Paper to be taken into account when Regional Spatial Strategies are being prepared.

Local Development Plans prepared by district councils, unitary authorities and in the case of minerals and waste development plan documents, county councils, have to reflect the content of the Regional Spatial Strategy of which together they form the development plan for an area.

In this way the long established national policy of conserving and enhancing the special characteristics of England's designated landscapes is delivered at the local level.

In view of this policy framework of constraint on development within AONBs since the 1960s, what is the evidence that this is hindering economic development?

In many AONBs tourism is a major economic activity. All visitor surveys indicate that the one attribute that attracts visitors and tourists is the beauty of the countryside. It is the quality of the physical, cultural, and historic environment that is the greatest contributor to successful tourism. Tourism is recognised to be one of the biggest earners of overseas currency. A robust Planning system is essential if these attributes are to be preserved against short term financial decisions by developers are not to undermine the long-term sustainable economy of these areas.

Statistics regarding economic activity within AONBs are very difficult to obtain. However, the use of statistics from Gloucestershire may be helpful, as more than half the land area of that county is designated as part of three AONBs – the Cotswolds, the Wye Valley, and the Malvern Hills.

The Gloucestershire Economic Strategy 2003 – 14 shows that despite the high proportion of designated landscapes, Gloucestershire's increase in economic productivity or GVA¹, has kept pace with the national figure

AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH

GLOS average increase	1995 – 2001	4.9%
UK average increase	1995 – 2001	5.0%

¹ Gross Value Added (formerly Gross Domestic Product) is defined as the sum of all the value added by the activities which produce goods and services

GVA in 2001 (£)

GLOS	14062
UK	14798

Assuming continued constraint, this growth is expected to continue in line with national trends

Economic forecasts for Gloucestershire, the South West and UK 2000-2015

	Glos	SW	UK
Average annual GVA growth	2.1%	2.4%	2.3%
Average annual employment growth	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%

Source: Cambridge Econometrics 2003

The Gloucestershire Rural Economic Strategy 2003 – 2014 notes that the Cotswolds contains a comparatively high level of micro and small enterprises. In Gloucestershire, none of the most economically deprived wards in the County are in the AONBs.

70% of Cotswold District lies within the Cotswolds AONB. This comprises 44% of the area of the AONB. Of the people in Cotswold District who were of working age (i.e. those aged 16 to 64 for men or 16 to 59 for women) the employment rate was 78 per cent during the Summer of 2004 (June to August), compared with an average for Great Britain of 75 per cent. Over the same three months in 1999, the number of people in employment in Cotswold as a proportion of those of working age was 91 per cent and the rate for Great Britain was 75 per cent

The tourism industry in Gloucestershire is heavily dependent on the high quality of the built and natural environment. South West Tourism has identified the Cotswolds as being a “Prime International Brand” in the leisure and tourism sector. Sustainability is important in maintaining the attractive qualities of the County and is to be strongly encouraged, and visitors must add value rather than volume. The Tourism Strategy has been produced to guide this. Tourism is highly important in rural areas, supporting many family businesses and providing valuable income to farms and other rural activities. In the larger urban centres tourism and leisure continue to grow in importance and leisure-based schemes feature prominently in major regeneration projects.²

“The County’s unique countryside plays a major role in successfully attracting new business and investment because it is a pleasant place to both live and work. In terms of exploitation it is a key component of Gloucestershire’s appeal to tourists and micro-businesses. It can play a greater role in the marketing of local products. Protection of what makes it distinctive is therefore an act of economic prudence.”³

² “The Gloucestershire Economic Strategy 2003 – 2014” Gloucestershire First

³ Para 88 “The Rural Economic Strategy for Gloucestershire 2003-2010” Gloucestershire First

The South West Regional Economic Strategy describes the importance of the 'Environmental Driver' in helping the region move to a more sustainable economy – “Where the region’s unique environmental and cultural assets are protected and enhanced so that they will continue to attract investment and develop economic linkage”.

This limited snap shot shows that the presence of extensive designated landscapes in Gloucestershire does not hinder the economic development of that county compared to the UK average.

The Association has not set out to answer all the specific questions posed in your paper directly. In part this is because we do not feel we have the data necessary to deal with them in detail. However we are also disappointed that the underlying tone of the questions which seems to be that a strong planning system is antipathetic to **sustainable** economic development. We believe that the experience of the past fifty years suggests this is not the case and one reason that the English and Welsh countryside and the Protected Areas in particular are so important to the rural economy is the development planning system has saved them from some of the worst types of development.

Yours sincerely

Mike Taylor
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