

# **AONB Facts, Benefits and Considerations**

## **What is an AONB?**

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an area of outstanding landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so precious that it is safeguarded in the national interest. They are treated as dynamic, living landscapes that underpin the economy, health and wellbeing, and are managed to preserve/conservate the range of benefits they offer to both people and wildlife.

## **What does the AONB designation mean?**

It represents the highest level of protection for the character of the landscape at the national level. AONB landscapes are equal to National Parks in terms of quality and protection afforded; Primary duty - the conservation and enhancement of the AONB's natural beauty. This is an Act of Parliament passed in 1949 to conserve and enhance the most sensitive areas of the UK as a result of the findings of two reports – The Hobhouse Report and The John Dower Report – that were commissioned to respond to the wish of the public to have access to land for recreation purposes. Protection is further enhanced by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000 (CRoW2000).

## **How is an AONB designated?**

Before Natural England proposes an area becomes an AONB, it must meet the 'natural beauty criterion'. This could be a combination of factors, such as:

- landscape quality, where natural or man-made landscape is good quality
- scenic quality, such as striking landforms
- relative wildness, such as distance from housing or having few roads
- relative tranquillity, where natural sounds, such as streams or birdsong are predominant
- natural heritage features, such as distinctive geology or species and habitat
- cultural heritage, which can include the built environment that makes the area unique, such as archaeological remains or historic parkland

(I believe the proposed area, between Thame and the Chiltern Escarpment, ticks every one of these boxes)

Further guidance (CCP352) which compliments the [National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949](#) – that underpins the AONB designation – goes on to say, "In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic

development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment. Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses”.

To designate an AONB, Natural England must issue an order under section 82 of the CROW Act for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of that area.

Before making an order to designate or vary an AONB, Natural England must:

- decide if a proposal meets the natural beauty criterion
- decide if it's desirable to designate for the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty
- define a detailed boundary

Natural England must also:

- consult each local authority affected by the proposed order (or variation order)
- publish the proposals in [The Gazette](#) and local newspapers of each affected local authority
- consider all representations made against the proposals and make any necessary modifications
- submit the order to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, including any unresolved representations or objections

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs can confirm, refuse, modify or vary any order made by Natural England to designate or vary the boundary of an AONB.

### **Development proposals affecting AONBs**

AONB designation does not completely prevent development taking place in or next to the designated area but it does act as a valuable check to ensure that development is not unrestricted, is well planned and of good quality. All new development in an AONB should conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the AONB without the need for screening and this should be demonstrated in any planning application.

Only local authorities or the Secretary of State can give permission for development in, or affecting, an AONB. As a local authority, you must make sure that any proposals have regard for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. You can [consult Natural England](#) where development might have a significant impact.