



PART B:	RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL
REPORT TO:	POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
DATE:	11 NOVEMBER 2021
REPORT OF THE:	PLANNING SERVICES MANAGER JILL THOMPSON
TITLE OF REPORT:	YORKSHIRE WOLDS DESIGNATION PROJECT
WARDS AFFECTED:	DERWENT, WOLDS, RILLINGTON, SHERBURN, NORTON EAST AND NORTON WEST

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 Natural England has announced that it is to consider the designation of the Yorkshire Wolds as a new Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This report:

- updates Members on the current position in relation to the designation of the Yorkshire Wolds as an AONB
- addresses an outstanding motion on this matter which has been referred to this Committee by Council (April 2021)
- seeks agreement on which RDC Councillors should represent Ryedale at a forthcoming information meeting for local politicians

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Councillor Middleton's motion be supported, subject to the following amendments:

To delete the wording in the second sentence after "Ryedale District Council" and replace with:

"Therefore resolves

- (i) *Ryedale District Council support in principle, the designation of a new AONB covering the Yorkshire Wolds.*
- (ii) *Ryedale District Council note the purpose and key stages of the 'Yorkshire Wolds Designation Project'.*

- (iii) *Local affected ward members represent Ryedale District Council at consultation meetings and briefings which will be held specifically for local politicians.”*

3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To address an outstanding motion referred to this Committee by Council. To ensure members are aware of the project and to ensure that Ryedale District Council is represented at a political level at information/consultation meetings held specifically for local politicians.

4.0 SIGNIFICANT RISKS

- 4.1 There are no significant risks associated with the recommendations of this report.

5.0 POLICY CONTEXT AND CONSULTATION

- 5.1 National Government has pledged to increase the number of nationally protected landscapes in England, including additional Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. (AONB)
- 5.2 The statutory purpose of an AONB is set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. Once designated, the legislation currently places a general duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of an area when carrying out their activities in an AONB. For example, Local Planning Authorities will take the purpose of the designation into account when considering development proposals within an AONB. The Local Highway Authority will take the designation into account in considering new road improvements or public access/ Public Rights of Way improvements.
- 5.3 The planning system plays a key role in the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of an AONB. Permitted development rights are more restricted in an AONB and major development proposals are subject to a national ‘major development’/public interest test in national planning policy.
- 5.4 Enhanced landscape protection is often seen as the main advantage of the designation. In addition, within AONB’s, DEFRA has also historically supported agri-environmental schemes with additional landscape protection and enhancement support grant schemes for use within an AONB. This is now covered by the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme which has been recently introduced as part of DEFRA’s Agricultural Transition Plan.
- 5.5 In terms of potential disadvantages, the designation can sometimes be perceived by landowners as being overly restrictive in terms of the use of land or in terms of requirements for high design standards. Nationally protected landscapes can be attractive places for people to move to and that this can result in competition in the housing market and increased house prices and affordability issues. In addition, whilst national policy does allow for some major development in a nationally protected landscape that is in the national public interest, some forms of development, including renewable energy generation may be less easy to accommodate in a nationally protected landscape.

- 5.6 The statutory responsibility for the management of an AONB sits with the local authority/ies which cover the designated area. Governance arrangements are provided through an AONB committee or Joint Advisory Committee in partnership with a range of other stakeholders. Alternatively, the statutory responsibility for management of the area can be transferred to a Conservation Board where this is agreed by the Secretary of State.
- 5.7 The designation of new nationally protected landscapes is covered by legislation. There are specific legislative requirements covering the stages in the process and consultation. Natural England and DEFRA are responsible for the designation and confirmation of a new AONB.

6.0 REPORT

Background

- 6.1 On 24th July 2021, Natural England announced that the Yorkshire Wolds was one of four areas that would be considered for designation as a new AONB. Members may be aware that this is largely in response to the independent ‘Glover review’ into nationally protected landscapes. The findings of the review which were published in 2019 recommended an increase the number of protected landscapes in England for a range of reasons including addressing climate change, biodiversity loss/nature recovery and increasing access to nature.
- 6.2 The other areas prioritised for consideration as new AONB’s at the same time include the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge, an extension to the Surrey Hills AONB and an extension to the Chilterns AONB.

Motion to Council

- 6.3 In April of this year, Councillor Middleton proposed the following motion which was seconded by Cllr Garbutt-Moore:

“East Riding Council wants to see the Wolds recognised as part of the Government’s 2020 pledge to increase the number of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks in England.

As a large part of the Wolds sits within in Ryedale, Ryedale District Council fully endorse the bid by East Riding Council and RDC Officers will work with East Riding to ensure the bid is successful which will have benefits protecting the environment while supporting the economy.”

- 6.4 The East Riding of Yorkshire Council (ERYC) has been keen for the Yorkshire Wolds to be designated as an AONB for a number of years and has been proactive in making a bid to Natural England to have the area prioritised for designation. The ERYC proposal was for a new AONB to cover the existing footprint of the Yorkshire Wolds National Character Area, as defined by Natural England.
- 6.5 The announcement that the Wolds has now been prioritised for designation post-dates the motion. In this respect, the purpose and intention of the motion have been superseded by events.
- 6.6 Notwithstanding this, the District Council could agree to support the designation of the Wolds landscape as an AONB in principle. Members are aware that within Ryedale,

the Wolds are locally designated as an Area of High Landscape Value. Designation as an AONB would ensure a greater level of protection against changes that would be detrimental to the area's natural beauty. Support in principle would not prevent the Council clarifying its position in the future when more details, including the views of wider stakeholders and options for future management arrangements are known. Clarification of the Council's position in principle would help Natural England understand the local political appetite for the designation at this stage.

Yorkshire Wolds Designation Project

- 6.7 Natural England will now undertake the work required to support the designation of the Yorkshire Wolds as an AONB and have termed this work the 'Yorkshire Wolds Designation Project'. It has prepared a high level project plan to cover key stages in the process. After the project initiation these are as follows:
- Detailed Assessment and Consultation – including assessment and evaluation of natural beauty and evaluation of the desirability of designation informed by consultation and engagement. This informs the extent of the area and the decision to designate the area
 - Designation Stage – a formal stage/s during which Natural England makes a statutory order to designate the area which is subject to formal publicity, submission to the Secretary of State (DEFRA) and a formal public inquiry if required.
 - Confirmation Stage – formal process by which the Secretary of State confirms an order to designate a new nationally protected landscape.
- 6.8 The high level project plan estimates that the assessment and consultation phase will cover the period to summer 2023. If an order to designate the area is subsequently made, it is anticipated that this will be submitted to the Secretary of State (DEFRA) in the winter of 2024. It is estimated that the process will take a minimum of four years to complete from this point.
- 6.9 Officers from East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Ryedale District Council, Scarborough Borough Council and North Yorkshire County Council were recently invited to an initial designation project meeting by Natural England. At the meeting Natural England provided a brief overview of the process for designation. An officer level management project group and technical project groups are to be established to include representatives of each of the local authorities within the area. It is the intention that both of these groups will meet monthly.
- 6.10 At the initial project meeting, Natural England also confirmed that the starting point for considering designation would be the area covered by the current National Character Area (NCA). This is not mapped on a detailed scale. However, as well as covering the Wolds ward, the NCA area also covers parts of Derwent, Rillington, Sherburn, Norton East and Norton West wards in Ryedale.
- 6.11 Natural England confirmed an intention to run an online information meeting for local councillors from each of the affected local authorities in late October/November this year. At this stage there is no indication whether there would need to be a restriction in the numbers attending this event. To that end it is considered that it would be appropriate for the local ward members of each of the affected wards in Ryedale to be

invited to attend this meeting on behalf of the District Council.

Summary

6.12 In view of the above, the report recommends that Cllr Middleton's motion is supported subject to amendments to reflect the current position.

6.13 The amended motion would therefore read:

“East Riding Council wants to see the Wolds recognised as part of the Government's 2020 pledge to increase the number of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks in England.

As a large part of the Wolds sits within in Ryedale, Ryedale District Council therefore resolves

- (i) Ryedale District Council support in principle, the designation of a new AONB covering the Yorkshire Wolds.*
- (ii) Ryedale District Council note the purpose and key stages of the 'Yorkshire Wolds Designation Project'.*
- (iii) Local affected ward members represent Ryedale District Council at consultation meetings and briefings which will be held specifically for local politicians.”*

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The following implications have been identified:

a) Financial

Financial implications are unknown at this stage. However it is possible that the council will be asked to make an annual contribution to the AONB as it does to support staff costs at the Howardian Hills AONB staff team. The contribution to the Howardian Hills AONB is £6.5k per annum, but this should be read as no more than a guide.

b) Legal

None identified at this stage. Once an AONB is designated all relevant authorities are under a statutory duty to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of the area.

c) Other (Equalities, Staffing, Planning, Health & Safety, Environmental and Climate Change, Crime & Disorder)

Nationally protected landscapes are given specific protection in the planning system. It is the Government's intention that nationally protected landscapes will play an enhanced role in addressing environmental objectives in the future. It is anticipated that specialist staff at North Yorkshire County Council will take a lead role in the staffing of the Technical Group with some contribution from Ryedale's Heritage Officer.

8.0 NEXT STEPS

8.1 Contact details of councillors for wards affected by the designation proposal will be

provided to Natural England.

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Background Papers:
Natural England press release 24 July 2021

Background Papers are available for inspection at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/natural-england-announces-landmark-new-programme-for-protected-landscapes>