

Committee: High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Date: 1 November 2010

Title of Report: National Policy: Making space for nature: A review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network

By: AONB Director

Purpose: To inform members about the review.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Advisory Committee is recommended to note the report.

Supporting information

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The review was initiated in 2009 to consider the options for halting loss of biodiversity in England and enhancing its resilience. It was endorsed by the new Government in May 2010. The review considered the nature and status of current wildlife sites including SSSI's, local wildlife sites and protected landscapes (AONBs and National Parks) and whether this approach to nature conservation achieves a coherent and resilient network.

1.2 The report was submitted to the Secretary of State, defra, in September 2010. It concluded that the area of wildlife habitat remaining is no longer sufficient for biodiversity and we need a concerted effort to 'rebuild' nature. It summarised in four words what needs to be done to enhance the resilience and coherence of England's ecological network – *more, bigger, better and joined*.

2. AONB COMMENTS

2.1 The report recognises the importance of AONBs for wildlife conservation and this is borne out in the High Weald AONB which has an exceptionally intact matrix of high quality interconnected linear habitat in the form of ancient woodland, shaws, hedgerows, wooded gill streams and ancient routeways enhanced by large areas of semi-natural habitat in the form of managed heathland and many smaller wildflower grasslands, ponds and heathland fragments. The high degree of spatial pattern in the landscape and connectedness of wooded habitats means that species with less exacting habitat requirements can thrive. The challenge in the High Weald is to improve habitat quality by more appropriate management both to maximise the opportunities for a wider range of more vulnerable species whilst delivering other benefits such as local food production, carbon sequestration and flood management.

2.2 In a time of budgetary constraint the mechanisms for encouraging management are limited, particularly incentive based schemes relying on public funding. We have made it clear to the Minister that our focus is on rebuilding people's economic relationships with

the land around them and fostering understanding so that conservation of the landscape's valuable assets is embedded in decisions. Our comments were welcomed by the Minister as reported under Item 7 on the agenda

2.3 'Making Space for Nature' will inform the Government's Natural Environment White Paper due early next year. The AONB Unit will submit a separate response to this consultation.

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