

Briefing for SC&H AONB Partnership website July 2015

Process for varying the boundary of an AONB

Natural England has a discretionary power under S.82(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act) to designate Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AsONB) or to vary the boundary of an existing AONB. Three questions must be addressed:

1. Does the landscape have sufficient natural beauty to be considered outstanding?
2. Is it desirable to designate this landscape as AONB?
3. Where should the boundary be drawn?

The legislation also requires Natural England to

- undertake a statutory Local Authority consultation. We will also consult other stakeholders and the local community. In doing so we intend to follow best practice on consultation and allow a 12 week period for receipt for responses; and
- place any proposed variation Order 'on Deposit' prior to submission to the Secretary of State (EFRA) for confirmation. A variation to the AONB will not take effect unless and until confirmed in this way.

Where we have got to (as of July 2015) for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB

Initial desk studies and site visits have now been undertaken. In addition to the south side of the Stour estuary, previously evaluated by Alison Farmer Associates, we are considering the merits of varying the boundary on parts of the Shotley peninsula. Areas we are evaluating include the Dodnash Special Landscape Area designated by Babergh District Council and several of the small river valleys lying adjacent to, but outside the existing AONB boundary. A further site visit is planned for early August to consider possible revised boundaries.

A Technical Advisory Group of Local Authority and AONB officers has been set up to help with our consideration of the boundary variation.

Next Steps

The next steps and expected timescale are as follows:

- informal consultation, October 2015;
- submit any proposed AONB variation to Natural England's Senior Leadership Group for approval for formal statutory consultation, December 2015;
- statutory (Local Authority) & public Consultation starting early in 2016;
- submit any proposed boundary variation to Natural England's Board for approval to go on Deposit, October 2016;
- three month Deposit period January to March 2017;
- submit any draft legal Orders to Natural England's Board for final approval by May 2017;

Assuming satisfactory completion of this process Natural England would expect to make and submit a legal Order varying the boundary of the SC&H AONB to the Secretary of State for confirmation during the summer of 2017. Please note that this timetable is subject to change as the project progresses.

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