

Project to Consider Variations to the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Boundary Briefing for SC&H Partnership January 2016

1. Introduction

This note explains the current position with regard to the project and sets out a revised timetable as a consequence of the confirmation of the legal Orders varying the boundaries of the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks, by the Secretary of State.

2. Summary of the previous briefing

A previous briefing note (July 2015) explained:

- that Natural England is considering a variation to the boundary of the AONB to the south side of the Stour estuary and on the Shotley Peninsula through a discretionary power under S.82(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act);
- the questions as set out in statute that must be addressed (the assessment of natural beauty; determination of the desirability of designation and where appropriate the identification of revised boundaries);
- the practical approach that Natural England will follow to address these questions. This is contained in a guidance document available via the .gov website;
- that although the legislation requires a statutory Local Authority consultation, we also intend to consult other stakeholders and the local community; and
- that a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of Local Authority and AONB officers has been set up to help with our consideration of the boundary variation.

The July 2015 briefing note also stated that any variation to the AONB boundary will not take effect unless and until confirmed by the Secretary of State.

3. The Significance of the recent confirmation of national park boundary variations for the SC&H AONB

Confirmation of the legal Orders varying the boundaries of the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks by the Secretary of State on 23rd October 2015 provided an endorsement of Natural England's approach to landscape designations. This decision, following the 2013 Public Inquiry and receipt of the Inspector's Report, represents the first test of our methodology as set out in our guidance document. Both the SC&H AONB Partnership and Natural England itself can now have complete confidence in the approach we are taking.

In the short term however, the work required in order to ensure that the legal documents and process as set out in statute both prior to, and following, the Secretary of State's decision are fit for purpose, has meant that the relevant Natural England staff have had to be temporarily taken off the SC&H boundary variation project. A 12 week period when the Orders could be challenged finished on 14th December 2015 without any challenge having been submitted to the High Court. What follows now is a transition period, to enable both the National Park Authorities and the existing Local Authorities to be ready when the Orders take effect on 1st August 2016.

Revised Timetable for the SC&H AONB Boundary Variation Project

Although the Natural England designation team staff will be required to continue to be involved in work related to the transition period for the national park boundary variations, it is

anticipated that we will be in a position to resume work on the Suffolk Coast and Heaths boundary project at the beginning of February 2016.

Desk work and fieldwork undertaken over the summer of 2015 included the assessment of the natural beauty of the Evaluation Areas on the south side of the Stour and on the Shotley Peninsula and consideration of initial draft boundaries. Desk studies were commenced to consider in detail factors relevant to considerations of the desirability of designation. Further field and desk work will be required and the results written up, prior to discussing possible revised boundaries with the TAG and prior to informal consultation.

The revised timescale is now expected to be as follows:

- Develop detailed evidence-based proposals and write up justification Feb – April 2016;
- Presentation to the TAG and informal consultation on proposed boundaries May 16;
- Prepare papers and submit to NE Exec Board to approve boundary for formal statutory consultation Aug – Nov 16;
- Statutory (LA) & public Consultation on proposed boundary; desirability & assessments (including stakeholder engagement) Dec 16 – Feb 17;
- Evaluate representations and if necessary amend proposals March 17 – May 17
- Submit Boundary proposals to NE Board for approval to go on Deposit following evaluation of consultation responses June 17;
- Three month Deposit period Sept – Nov 17
- Evaluate representations and if necessary amend proposals Dec 17 – Jan 18
- Prepare Papers and submit final proposals to NE Board for final approval;Feb 18 – Mch 18.
- NE makes Order and submits to Sec of State April 2018

David Vose
Project Manager January 2016