

Boost for picturesque landscapes as Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty extended

The government has today (7 July) confirmed the expansion of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (SC&H AONB).

The move sees the AONB expand by around 38 square kilometres, taking in a rich tapestry of attractive river valleys, ancient woodland, reed beds, wildlife-rich estuaries, and windswept beaches. The area includes the Stour estuary – one of the most important wildlife estuaries in Europe and of international importance for wildfowl and waders.

The last time an AONB was extended was the nearby Dedham Vale in 1991. The new designation means that a greater area of nationally significant landscape will be managed to conserve and enhance its natural beauty.

The newly designated area will benefit from the AONB's advice and guidance, as well as the funding which is made available to designated landscapes to deliver their statutory purpose. The area will also benefit from the greater focus on natural beauty in national planning policy to help protect and enhance its precious landscape.

The move will bring significant benefits to the local area, enabling local businesses and tourist sites to promote the area as an AONB and access relevant grants, including for sustainable tourism.

The announcement also marks a significant step in implementing the recommendations of the Landscapes Review – spearheaded by Julian Glover in 2019 – which called on the government to take bold action to make our national significant landscapes greener, more beautiful and open to everyone.

Defra Secretary of State, George Eustice MP, said:

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks are among the most treasured places in our great English countryside, and this landmark decision demonstrates our commitment to designating even more places for people and wildlife to enjoy.

The Suffolk Coast and Heaths is a landscape rich in history and a source of inspiration to countless artists, writers and musicians, and these extensions are a worthy addition especially during this unprecedented time, when many of us are connecting with nature more than ever before. This milestone marks a significant step towards putting our ambitious 25 Year Environment Plan to leave the environment in a better state than we found it into action.

Natural England, the statutory agency for the natural environment, carried out thorough technical analysis and extensive consultation, before submitting the proposed extensions to government for consideration.

Natural England Chair, Tony Juniper, said:

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty represent some of the country's most valued landscapes, designated to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

We welcome this magnificent milestone and firmly believe in the benefits this extension to the AONB will bring – for the environment, the economy and the many people who will enjoy in perpetuity the stunning landscapes and natural treasures found here.

Landscapes like this, which are designated for their natural beauty, will be a vital part of the new Nature Recovery Network that we are helping to establish. We look forward to working with our many partners in the AONBs and beyond to create more, bigger, better and connected natural areas, where people live, work and visit, as part of a truly green recovery from coronavirus.

Councillor David Wood, Chairman of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB Partnership, said:

We are delighted that this Order has been confirmed. The AONB partnership, made up of public private and third sector organisations, has had an aspiration to bring the benefits of the designation to a wider area for over 20 years.

Locally we have always known that the area identified in the Order was outstanding, and with this news we can be confident that the natural beauty of the area will be conserved and enhanced for future generations.

England's 34 AONBs, 9 National Parks plus the Broads Authority area represent the country's finest countryside, spanning from Cornwall to the Lake District, offering a wealth of opportunities for both people and wildlife to benefit from the countryside.

Designated landscapes cover a quarter of England's land and are home to over 2.3 million people – with more than 66 per cent of us living within half an hour of a National Park or AONB. They also generate more than £20 billion for

the rural economy, and support 75,000 jobs.

The Glover Review is one of the key commitments of the government's 25 Year Environment Plan, which outlines our vision for improving the environment over a generation by connecting people with nature and helping wildlife to thrive.

The newly designated areas included within the SC&H AONB are the Stour Estuary, northern estuary valley slopes at Brantham and the majority of the southern estuary valley slopes and the Freston Brook Valley. It also includes the Samford Valley, a tributary of the Stour Estuary and includes some areas of neighbouring Shotley Peninsula Plateau. For more information about the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB, visit [this website](#).

AONBs are designated by Natural England following detailed assessments of natural beauty and the desirability of designation, as well as extensive local and national consultations. They do not come into effect until confirmed by the Secretary of State. For more information on how Natural England designates AONBs visit: [Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for Designation as a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty \(AONB\) \(Revised, March 2011\)](#)

If visiting the countryside, please follow the Countryside Code and do not light fires or use disposable barbecues. Fires can be as devastating to wildlife and habitats as they are to people and property – so be careful with naked flames and cigarettes at any time of the year. If a fire appears to be unattended then report it by calling 999.

The consultation page for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB can be read [here](#).