

Detailed guide: Areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs): designation and management

Updated: Improved wording on what Natural England takes into consideration when prioritising designation proposals.

An area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) is land protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act). It protects the land to conserve and enhance its natural beauty.

The CROW Act sets out the roles and responsibilities that different organisations must follow to manage AONBs. There are 34 AONBs in England. See the [map of AONBs](#) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This guidance is for England only. Visit the relevant websites for AONB management in [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

Natural England's responsibilities

Under the CROW Act, Natural England can make orders to designate AONBs or vary the boundaries of existing ones. These powers apply to England only.

Natural England has the discretion to consider whether to assess and designate an area as an AONB. Natural England will prioritise proposals by considering if:

- evidence suggests the land might meet the natural beauty criterion
- there's local authority agreement that designation is appropriate
- it has the available resource to evaluate the proposal
- it's more important than other corporate priorities

For existing AONBs, Natural England must:

- give advice to local planning authorities on development proposals in an AONB
- consider the conservation and enhancement of AONBs in its work, for example when carrying out land management activities or giving permission for statutory bodies to carry out works in an AONB

Meet the natural beauty criterion

Before Natural England proposes an area becomes an AONB, it must meet the 'natural beauty criterion'. This could be a combination of factors, such as:

- landscape quality, where natural or man-made landscape is good quality
- scenic quality, such as striking coastal landforms

- relative wildness, such as distance from housing or having few roads
- relative tranquillity, where natural sounds, such as streams or birdsong are predominant
- natural heritage features, such as distinctive geology or species and habitat
- cultural heritage, which can include the built environment that makes the area unique, such as archaeological remains or historic parkland

Designation process

To designate an AONB, Natural England must issue an order under section 82 of the CROW Act for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of that area.

Before making an order to designate or vary an AONB, Natural England must:

- decide if a proposal meets the natural beauty criterion
- decide if it's desirable to designate for the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty
- define a detailed boundary

Natural England must also:

- consult each local authority affected by the proposed order (or variation order)
- publish the proposals in [The Gazette](#) and local newspapers of each affected local authority
- consider all representations made against the proposals and make any necessary modifications
- submit the order to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, including any unresolved representations or objections

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs can confirm, refuse, modify or vary any order made by Natural England to designate or vary the boundary of an AONB.

Local authority responsibilities

Under the CROW Act, you, the relevant local authority, must make sure that all decisions have regard for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. Your decisions and activities must consider the potential effect it will have within the AONB and land outside its boundary. Read more on [development proposals affecting AONBs](#).

Delegate authority

You can give authority to 'AONB partnerships' to:

- manage an AONB
- create a management plan

You can't give an AONB partnership the authority to make decisions on

development proposals or strategic planning (see [‘Development proposals affecting AONBs’](#)).

An AONB partnership could be:

- a joint advisory committee
- an AONB committee

You can also request that the Secretary of State establishes a conservation board with delegated powers to manage the AONB for you.

AONB management plans

Each AONB must have a management plan. It must be in place within 3 years of an AONB’s designation. A review must take place within 5 years of the start of the plan.

All plans must be available to the public. See the management plans available on each AONB’s website through the list of links on the [Landscapes for Life](#) website.

You’re responsible for producing and reviewing the plan. Its purpose is to consider conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB with continuity and consistency over time.

The plan should include:

- an assessment of the special quality of the AONB, such as a landscape character assessment that includes its condition and vulnerability to change
- cross reference to existing plans, such as local transport plans or biodiversity action plans
- a strategy, such as a 5 year plan, of how you’ll manage change
- other special sites that exist in the AONB, such as scheduled ancient monuments or sites of special scientific interest
- an action plan, for example who’s doing what, why and by when
- a monitoring plan to show how you’ll measure the AONB’s condition and effectiveness of management

Development proposals affecting AONBs

Only local authorities or the Secretary of State can give permission for development in, or affecting, an AONB. As a local authority, you must make sure that any proposals have regard for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB, for example when:

- adding utility services, like gas pipes and telecommunications cables
- creating public access as part of rights of way improvement

You can [consult Natural England](#) where development might have a significant impact. Read guidance on [how to review planning applications in a protected area](#) before you make a planning decision.

You can use AONB management plans to help:

- shape [local](#) or [neighbourhood plans](#)
- make decisions on development proposals

Consult Natural England

Email planning proposals to: consultations@naturalengland.org.uk

Natural England Consultation Service

Hornbeam House

Electra Way

Crewe Business Park

Crewe

Cheshire

CW1 6GJ

[News story: UK takes world stage in fight against marine plastic](#)

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey has set out how the UK is taking action to tackle marine litter and protect oceans from the effects of climate change at today's 'Our Ocean' conference in Malta.

Speaking in front of heads of state, ministers and NGOs from around the world, the Environment Minister pledged her support to help small island developing states with marine science, research and conservation projects – alongside setting out how the government is continuing the fight at home against the eight million tonnes of plastic that make their way into oceans each year.

The UK's ban on microbeads has been lauded as one of the toughest in the world and nine billion fewer plastic bags have been distributed since the government introduced a 5p charge. This week the government also issued a [call for evidence](#) on the benefits of reward and return schemes for plastic bottles in a bid to clean up our oceans.

Speaking from Malta, Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Around the world our oceans are suffering from the blight of plastic pollution and the impacts of climate change.

The UK continues to be a global leader in protecting oceans and marine life – our 5p plastic bag charge has taken nine billion bags out of circulation, our microbeads ban is one of the toughest in the world, and we are now exploring what more we can do to reduce the impact of plastic bottles.

But there is always more we can do – which is why I am meeting with my counterparts in Malta today to pledge my continued support for marine conservation and discuss how we can work together to protect our precious oceans and marine life for future generations.

The [Our Ocean Conference](#), held in Malta from 5-6 October, brings together heads of state, governments, industry and NGOs to discuss marine conservation and agree actions to protect seas and oceans around the world.

Alongside further funding under the [Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme](#) – which began in 2015 to help small island states make the most of their maritime assets and encourage sustainable economic growth – the Environment Minister also announced support for global initiatives to tackle plastic pollution.

These include joining the Global Partnership on Marine Litter – one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – as well as signing up to the Global Ghost Gear Initiative, an alliance of the fishing industry, NGOs and government agencies working to solve the problem of lost and abandoned 'ghost' fishing gear that can trap sea life.

£5.2 million has also been granted to marine projects through the two most recent rounds of the Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus grant schemes – helping to protect coral reefs, set up Marine Protected Areas, encourage sustainable fisheries and increase the resilience of coastal communities to climate change.

While in Malta, Minister Coffey also reiterated the government's commitment to creating a network of marine protected areas around the United Kingdom, alongside reaffirming £4.8 million to drive forward the creation of a 'blue belt' across the UK's Overseas Territories.

[Guidance: Storing waste sandbags at collection sites after a flood: RPS](#)

If you comply with the conditions of this regulatory position statement (RPS) you can store waste sandbags at designated temporary collection sites without an environmental permit.

Press release: 'Right Waste, Right Place' spot-checks on Thames Valley waste firms

Updated: Updated summary.

A number of businesses across Berkshire and Buckinghamshire are on notice to comply with the law on waste disposal, after a series of unannounced checks by the Environment Agency on Tuesday 3 October.

Officers visited more than 100 sites and firms across the Thames Valley, and will be following-up on 10 illegal waste sites found during the day. The owners may face prosecution. Other premises were given advice and guidance to help them meet their legal requirements.

Firms are required by law to manage waste without a threat to the environment, such as not releasing anything other than waste water into the drainage network. The surprise inspections covered the removal of hazardous items, like chemicals and car batteries. Thames Water assisted the Environment Agency on pollution checks. Companies were also checked for having the correct environmental permit for their business.

Environment Agency staff were also on hand at DIY store Wickes in Slough, to offer free waste-handling advice to hauliers and homeowners, in order to reduce fly-tipping.

Mark Tucker, Installations Team Leader for the Environment Agency in the Thames Valley, said:

The Environment Agency works with business to make sure waste ends up in the right place, and may take more formal action where we believe a serious crime has been committed through illegal waste disposal.

Anyone who produces, carries, keeps, treats or disposes of waste has a duty of care to make sure it is managed correctly. The public

can do their bit by only using a licenced waste carrier, or reporting any concerns on waste management to the Environment Agency on 0800 807060.

The 117 sites we inspected this week were under no illusion of their legal obligations on waste management. Mishandling waste, poorly-operated permitted sites and illegal waste activities can pose a threat to human health and the environment by contaminating land, polluting rivers and producing emissions from burning waste.

As well as breaking the law, illegal operations undermine the work done by legitimate firms.

Waste crime is a very serious issue for both local communities and the environment. The Environment Agency uses reports from industry and the public to build intelligence, and target those involved in organised environmental crime, and where their activities pose the greatest risk to the environment.

Handling of illegal waste can be reported anonymously to Crimestoppers, on 0800 555111. There are lots of signs that could suggest suspicious activity. These include:

- Out-of-hours activity at night, over weekends and during bank holidays
- Smoke caused by constant burning
- An increase in the number of lorries entering a site
- Waste going into a site but not coming out with increasing quantities of waste stockpiled on site
- Water pollution

The Environment Agency and local councils also investigate reports of fly-tipping.

All media enquiries: 0800 141 2743.

Or email us at southeastpressooffice1@environment-agency.gov.uk.

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