

# Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England

This document contains guidance on the relevant legislation and its application in practice, sets out Natural England's general approach to designation and summarises the relevant governance and statutory procedures. It also contains a suggested method for applying the legislation to the practical assessment of landscapes in designation decision-making.

## Contents

<b>FOREWORD</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK</b> .....	<b>3</b>
NATIONAL PARK.....	4
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB) .....	5
DISTINGUISHING NATIONAL PARK FROM AONB .....	5
PRACTICAL APPLICATION .....	5
<b>3. NATURAL ENGLAND'S APPROACH TO DESIGNATION</b> .....	<b>6</b>
PRINCIPLES .....	6
PRACTICAL APPLICATION .....	7
<b>4. CHARACTERISATION AND SPATIAL FRAMEWORK</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>5. TECHNICAL CRITERIA: GENERAL</b> .....	<b>9</b>
PRINCIPLES .....	9
PRACTICAL APPLICATION .....	10
<b>6. NATURAL BEAUTY</b> .....	<b>11</b>
PRINCIPLES .....	11
PRACTICAL APPLICATION .....	12
<b>7. OPPORTUNITIES FOR OPEN-AIR RECREATION</b> .....	<b>14</b>
PRINCIPLES .....	14
PRACTICAL APPLICATION .....	15
<b>8. CONSIDERATION OF DESIRABILITY OF DESIGNATION</b> .....	<b>16</b>
PRINCIPLES .....	16
PRACTICAL APPLICATION .....	18
<b>9. DEFINITION OF A DETAILED BOUNDARY</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>10. FORMAL DESIGNATION PROCEDURES</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>11. FURTHER INFORMATION</b> .....	<b>22</b>

- [Appendix 1](#): Evaluation Framework for Natural Beauty Criterion
- [Appendix 2](#): Evaluation Framework for Recreation Criterion
- [Appendix 3](#): National Park and AONB Mechanisms, Powers and Duties
- [Appendix 4](#): Boundary Setting Considerations
- [Appendix 5](#): Statutory Provisions

# Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation

## Foreword

This guidance is intended, primarily, for use by Natural England specialist staff to help identify whether land is likely to meet the statutory criteria for AONB or National Park designation. We are, however, making it available on request to external audiences who may find it useful as an aid to understanding how decisions to designate are reached.

We will consider and respond to any formal proposal to designate or vary the boundary of an AONB or National Park but will, at all times, retain discretion as to which if any proposals to take forward, and how and when to do so. In any case which may proceed, Natural England will form its own view on whether or not the statutory criteria are met. The final extent of the area to be the subject of any consequential designation or variation order will also be entirely at Natural England's discretion.

This guidance will only be applied once a decision to commit resources to an assessment of an area of landscape against AONB or National Park designation criteria has been made. In coming to this earlier decision Natural England will have regard to a range of factors including:

- The extent/quality of evidence submitted that land might meet designation criteria;
- The reason(s) for the proposal;
- Evidence of local consensus that designation is appropriate;
- Benefit/positive impact of proposal balanced against the likely cost of designation;
- The relative importance of the proposal compared against other corporate priorities.

## Appendix 1:

### Evaluation Framework for Natural Beauty Criterion

The sub-factors and associated indicators should be regarded as a “menu” of examples (developed from past designations and subsequent consultation) from which those appropriate to the character of the landscape under consideration should be chosen, adapted or added to. There is no “scoring” involving accumulations of indicators and it is possible for a landscape to exhibit natural beauty or offer opportunities for open air recreation even if a number of the indicators shown in this appendix are not present.

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example Indicator
<b>Landscape quality</b>	Intactness of the landscape in visual, functional and ecological perspectives	Characteristic natural and man-made elements are well represented throughout
	The condition of the landscape’s features and elements	Landscape elements are in good condition
	The influence of incongruous features or elements (whether man-made or natural) on the perceived natural beauty of the area	Incongruous elements are not present to a significant degree, are not visually intrusive, have only localised influence or are temporary in nature
<b>Scenic quality</b>	A distinctive sense of place	Landscape character lends a clear and recognisable sense of place
	Striking landform	Landform shows a strong sense of scale or contrast
		There are striking landform types or coastal configurations
	Visual interest in patterns of land cover	Land cover and vegetation types form an appealing pattern or composition in relation to each other and/or to landform which may be appreciated from either a vantage point or as one travels through a landscape
	Appeal to the senses	Strong aesthetic qualities, reflecting factors such as scale and form, degree of openness or enclosure, colours and textures, simplicity or diversity, and ephemeral or seasonal interest
		Memorable or unusual views and eye-catching features or landmarks
Characteristic cognitive and sensory stimuli (e.g. sounds, quality of light, characteristic smells, characteristics of the weather)		
<b>Relative wildness</b>	A sense of remoteness	Relatively few roads or other transport routes
		Distant from or perceived as distant from significant habitation
	A relative lack of human influence	Extensive areas of semi-natural vegetation
		Uninterrupted tracts of land with few built features and few overt industrial or

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example Indicator
		urban influences
	A sense of openness and exposure	Open, exposed to the elements and expansive in character
	A sense of enclosure and isolation	Sense of enclosure provided by (eg) woodland, landform that offers a feeling of isolation
	A sense of the passing of time and a return to nature	Absence or apparent absence of active human intervention
<b>Relative tranquillity</b>	Contributors to tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of natural landscape, birdsong, peace and quiet, natural-looking woodland, stars at night, stream, sea, natural sounds and similar influences
	Detractors from tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of traffic noise, large numbers of people, urban development, overhead light pollution, low flying aircraft, power lines and similar influences
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	Geological and geo-morphological features	Visible expression of geology in distinctive sense of place and other aspects of scenic quality
		Presence of striking or memorable geo-morphological features
	Wildlife and habitats	Presence of wildlife and/or habitats that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place or other aspects of scenic quality
		Presence of individual species that contribute to sense of place, relative wildness or tranquillity
<b>Cultural heritage</b>	Built environment, archaeology and designed landscapes	Presence of settlements, buildings or other structures that make a particular contribution to distinctive sense of place or other aspects of scenic quality
		Presence of visible archaeological remains, parkland or designed landscapes that provide striking features in the landscape
	Historic influence on the landscape	Visible presence of historic landscape types or specific landscape elements or features that provide evidence of time depth or historic influence on the landscape.
		Perceptions of a harmonious balance between natural and cultural elements in the landscape that stretch back over time
	Characteristic land management practices	Existence of characteristic land management practices, industries or crafts which contribute to natural beauty
	Associations with written descriptions	Availability of descriptions of the landscape in notable literature, topographical

Factor	Example sub-factor	Example Indicator
		writings or guide books, or significant literature inspired by the landscape.
	Associations with artistic representations	Depiction of the landscape in art, other art forms such as photography or film, through language or folklore, or in inspiring related music
	Associations of the landscape with people, places or events	Evidence that the landscape has associations with notable people or events, cultural traditions or beliefs