

AONB Partnership Position Statement on Potential Landscape and Environment Fund for Sizewell C (Jan 2021)

Introduction

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership periodically share their views on topics that have potential to impact on the purposes of the AONB. The AONB Partnership is made up of 26 organisations including: AONB staff team, Country Land and Business Association, Crown Estate, Environment Agency, Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust, Greenprint Forum, Forestry Commission, Marine Management Organisation, National Farmers' Union, National Trust, Natural England, RSPB, Suffolk Association of Local Councils, Suffolk Coast Acting for Resilience, Suffolk Coast Destination Management Organisation, Suffolk FWAG, Suffolk Preservation Society, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and its Joint Advisory Committee made up of Local Authority funding partners: Essex and Suffolk County Councils and Babergh Mid Suffolk, East Suffolk, Ipswich, Tendring District Councils.

The AONB Partnership members are all committed to the purposes of the AONB designation and this position statement reflects the view of the Partnership. For the avoidance of any doubt, individual partnership organisations may, on occasion, take a different view reflecting their organisation remit while still supporting the AONB Partnership, its purposes and positions.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by Government to ensure that the natural beauty of these nationally designated landscapes in England and Wales is conserved and enhanced.

Summary of Position

- The AONB Partnership considers that if the development proposals for Sizewell C are approved, that a Landscape and Environment Fund **should be made available by the developer to address the landscape and environment, including its wildlife and habitats** to mitigate and compensate residual negative impacts.
- The fund should be of significant benefit both **within the nationally designated AONB and the countryside beyond** where it is considered there is an impact arising from the development. All stakeholders should be encouraged to use the fund to support work that meets the common objectives of the fund and their own organisation aims.
- The AONB Partnership considers it (including appropriate partnership organisations) should have a significant role in **developing the Landscape and Environment Fund criteria**.
- The AONB Partnership considers that decisions relating to the distribution of any Landscape and Environment Fund should be made by a **decision board** made up of elected councillors and representatives of stakeholders (including those that form part of the AONB Partnership) and the AONB Chairman.
- The AONB Partnership considers that the **decision board should be advised** by expertise available from environmental stakeholders, including those organisations represented on the AONB Partnership. It considers that staff resource embedded in the AONB team could facilitate this coordination and the support the promotion of the fund.
- **The AONB team** can also draw on considerable experience and expertise to support the successful delivery of such a fund and an embedded officer as outlined above.
- The AONB Partnership does not consider it should hold the funds but that those that do ensure the expenditure of the fund is **transparent and open to public inspection**.

AONB Partnership position

Whilst the AONB Partnership has voiced concerns about the impact of the proposed development on the purposes of the AONB, at each stage of the consultation it has always stated that there should be a bespoke AONB fund to address the residual negative impacts to the nationally designated landscape which sits within a wider fund, the current position of the AONB Partnership is that:

- If the Sizewell C proposals are given consent, it will work with the developer to do everything possible to minimise the impact of the development and improve the natural environment within the AONB and beyond.
- The primary, most important and measurable landscape and environment impact will be on the nationally designated AONB. However, it acknowledges that there will be an impact beyond the AONB boundary, particularly in the setting of the AONB and associated to Associated Development Sites, and as such any Landscape and Environment Fund should reflect this but a majority proportion be ringfenced for impact on the AONB's natural beauty including its biodiversity.
- That the AONB Partnership is ideally placed to support the delivery of the proposed Landscape and Environment Fund as outlined in the summary above, as:
 - It can draw on expertise from AONB Partnership members that is relevant to the fund's purpose.
 - Experience of developing, delivering and advising on grants for large scale landscape and environmental work across the AONBs and associated hinterlands (for example Landscape Partnership Schemes, Countryside Management projects on Shotley peninsula and the Stour valley and developer funded programmes such as one for Sizewell B Amenity and Accessibility Fund).
 - It can host staff to provide technical support and promotional opportunities.
- The AONB staff team has considerable experience and the ability to convene partners for expert advice on landscape and environmental matters appropriate for the delivery of a Landscape and Environment Fund. This experience could help secure good decision making for the delivery of landscape scale activity.
- The AONB partnership is the only organisation in the area that draws together a coalition of organisations to further the purposes of the proposed Landscape and Environment Fund.
- The AONB Partnership has considerable experience in the delivery of landscape scale projects and providing robust governance for partnership projects funded by DEFRA, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, LEADER, Interreg, public and privately funded projects and Section 106 agreements.
- The AONB Partnership would welcome discussion with EDF Energy and other partners to pursue the idea of the Partnership taking a key role in the fund.

The AONB Partnership considers that:

The fund should deliver a co-ordinated package of measures to conserve and enhance the defined special qualities of the AONB, its landscape, heritage, habitats and wildlife and the character of the surrounding countryside. This should be delivered by a wide range of stakeholders with expertise in delivering projects consummate to the purposes of the fund.

The Landscape and Environment Fund criteria be developed by a broad coalition of local authority, environmental Non-Government Organisations, the AONB Partnership and other representative stakeholders.

A bespoke panel of experts should advise a grants decision making board on fund expenditure. The collection of this advice should be co-ordinated by an officer embedded in the AONB team. This role would seek to draw on the expertise from a variety of disciplines that have experience and knowledge in delivering a landscape scale approach to appropriate projects, such as those from the AONB Partnership.

Furthermore, staff resource embedded in the AONB team, will support the promotion of the Landscape and Environment Fund and support fund governance.

The decision making board should include representatives of the developer (EDF Energy), AONB Chair, and elected representatives from the County and District Council and representatives from the relevant AONB Partnership organisations.

The AONB staff team has considerable experience relating to and promoting these types of funds and is well placed to support the fund.

The delivery of the fund should be by a broad coalition of different be transparent in its decision making processes.

Contact for AONB team:

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APPENDIX: Overview of relevant experience of the AONB Partnership:

The AONB envisages that Sizewell C's Landscape and Environment Fund would set up a plan of programmes and projects to deliver the mitigation. This is akin to schemes such as previous Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme that brought together local authority, eNGO, statutory bodies, charitable interests, community groups, commercial, agricultural, environmental interests to develop plan. The AONB team has significant experience of managing this type of broker work from numerous externally funded programmes such as Touching the Tide, (HLF funded) Balance (LEADER funded) and River Stour Enhancement Project (funded by public and private sector organisations)

The AONB Partnership has substantial experience of, and is well regarded for, working on projects and partnerships that cover an area well beyond the AONB boundary. For example, the River Stour Enhancement Project covers the whole catchment area of the Stour, that runs well beyond the AONB and Stour Valley Project area. The AONB Partnership runs this countryside management project beyond the AONB boundary (the Stour Valley project area is twice the size of the designated AONB and the Coast & Heaths team works within the non-designated Shotley peninsular hinterland and for 20 years on the Southern shore of the Stour estuary until it was designated in July 2020). It also runs a LEADER funded project to enhance the Wool Towns Local Action Group area which runs beyond the AONB and associated project area.

The AONB Partnership is experienced in supporting external governance structures for funds set up through section 106 agreements such as Amenity and Accessibility fund and Galloper Wind Farm Fund, with governance that is independent of the AONB governance structure.

The AONB Partnership is keen for officers in this fund to work alongside local authority and other officers. It currently undertakes this type of collaborative approach for the distribution of Sustainable Development Fund grants that draw on a panel that includes landowner, eNGO and Local Authority representatives.

The AONB Partnership has a wealth of experience in delivering environment enhancement work across private and public land holdings. It has excellent 'honest broker' credentials and experience of working with landowners, communities, businesses, eNGOs to deliver environmental projects.

As such, the AONB Partnership considers that it is ideally placed to administer and manage a Sizewell C Landscape and Environment Fund within the AONB boundary and beyond.