

Final Report  
Biodiversity 2020  
Delivering Outcome 1C by England's AONB Partnerships

March 2019



THE NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
Areas of Outstanding  
Natural Beauty



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



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## Executive Summary

England's 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and 12 National Parks cover 23% of England (14% and 9% respectively). Together they have the potential to deliver Defra's Biodiversity 2020 policy Outcome 1C - 17% of land and inland water conserved and delivering for biodiversity and ecosystem services and Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan.

During 2018-19 AONBs reviewed how they contribute towards the above target, using the ecosystem approach checklist, and support on good practice, tools and guidance from Natural England.

### Action and success

AONBs are contributing towards Outcome 1c – they are delivering on biodiversity and securing multiple benefits for people through the ecosystem service approach. This approach applies well to AONBs and adds value to their work. Embedding the approach in their management planning enables them to take stock and review their work in a systematic way and supports them to:

- Think beyond an area's special qualities, linking them with natural capital and the multiple services that they provide for people both within and further afield from the AONB.
- Identify areas where they need to work differently to deliver more for nature and people in the future.
- Work with partners to find effective solutions through shared delivery.
- Develop and deliver projects that deliver multiple benefits for nature and people.
- Better align their plans and delivery with Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan, prioritising key activities, and showing the 'value' of the landscape in ways that decision makers understand.

### Delivering more

AONBs want to accelerate their work around natural capital and deliver more robust ecosystem services in their areas. The AONBs have identified several areas of support that they think could help them achieve greater results for nature and people in the future. These include:

- Continuity of core funding to support AONB teams of core staff along with a strong governance model.
- Additional staff capacity to develop evidence baselines, data to support ELMS, projects and partnership delivery.
- Support for existing behavioural change programmes to encourage innovative thinking and different ways of working within the community and stakeholders.
- Assistance to encourage cross cabinet support for delivery.
- A natural capital and ecosystem services support network to build confidence and capacity within AONB partnerships.
- Links to existing AONB platforms (Basecamp/website) to share advice, guidance, good practice and information between organisations working at a landscape scale.
- Building on existing thinking within the AONB family to develop a fit for purpose data system that will efficiently collate, develop and share data – particularly on natural capital and the public benefits this provides.
- Encouraging others to act through more active engagement in national landscape partnerships.
- AONB management plan guidance from Natural England on how to include the ecosystem approach and encourage embedding and more resilient landscapes.

The National Association of AONBs is a charity with very limited capacity at present. It shares the ambition of the AONBs to deliver more for people and nature but would need additional resources to support them in making a step change.

## Key Findings

During 2018-19 fifteen Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) reviewed how they contribute towards the integrated delivery to secure and enhance wildlife, natural capital and the public benefits that flow from it. They used the **ecosystem approach checklist to do this, along with support on good practice, tools and guidance from Natural England**. This work builds on a similar review carried out by National Parks in 2016<sup>1</sup>. From this work we found the following key findings.

### Planning to do more for nature and people

Using the checklist provides a good opportunity to stand back, reflect and consider the benefits that flow from the special qualities and natural capital of an area. It enables people to move beyond considering just biodiversity related projects and to **consider the links between an area's natural capital and special qualities and the benefits it can provide for people**. It is a clear and easy process to use.

“The checklist is a very clear and deliberate process that helped us to review our current approach to natural capital and ecosystem services and develop our thinking and priorities as we went. A very logical, clearly laid out tool. It helped to focus attention on what is happening already, where the gaps are and how we might go about addressing these.”

For many of the AONBs the checklist brings a new angle to management planning. The checklist can help to identify and **build stronger links** between an area's natural capital and special qualities, and the benefits they provide for people. While all management plans include sections on securing and improving biodiversity, the checklist process frequently **identified additional linkages and benefits** that would arise from the planned actions, such as planning habitat improvements that would not only benefit species, but could also improve soil quality and provide a new area for people to contemplate nature.

It is common for gaps in knowledge, data and delivery partners to be identified, along with a range of opportunities to fill these gaps and take action. The **gaps and opportunities always involved working with others and encouraging data and knowledge sharing across the partnership**. Many of the data gaps include up to date priority habitat surveys, species and habitat monitoring, soil condition, water quality, extent of ancient woodland. Many AONBs report that they need to develop stronger relationships with landowners and farmers as they were often identified as a gap to delivery.

“Early on in the process we realised that we needed to carry out a range of studies to better understand the extent and state of our natural capital. We commissioned a priority habitat survey with the help of Natural England, collated local wildlife surveys from partners, audited our geological resources and reviewed our landscape character assessment to help do this.”

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance on undertaking the Ecosystem Approach Self Assessment for Biodiversity 2020 Outcome 1c – Bowfell Consulting June 2016.

## Working together

AONBs are well practiced at bringing a diverse range of partners and stakeholders together to plan and deliver improvements in the health of the environment and landscapes. The checklist aligns well with this approach and leads to an impressive variety **of ideas on how to develop and improve their work around natural capital and ecosystem services with their partners in the future.**

Aligning the checklist with work on management plans, landscape scale projects development and delivery plans proves to be a strong way to learn from and link with partners to work out ways to deliver more for nature and people. It enables partners and staff to come together and think about **how natural capital and ecosystem services can be embedded in the area's future management and delivery, and how they can best involve people.**

“There is a need to be even more proactive in liaising with partners to develop natural capital and ecosystem services planning and actions. The Facilitation Fund is taking us closer to those who own and manage land but there is a gap in our knowledge and experience in the area of land management which needs to be filled.”

Where AONBs involve partners in the checklist review, they use existing groups and networks, linking into planned meetings as an opportunity to gain their input. Many AONBs highlighted that some partners would benefit from additional support to understand the issues more and encourage action.

As it did with staff, **the ecosystem approach can help bring partners together** to think more broadly about issues, and to help them **think beyond just making improvements for biodiversity.** By applying it to both management planning and annual delivering planning, it can help **identify ways to deliver more benefits than had been initially considered.** It can also help partners think **beyond their land ownership,** creating ripple effects across a landscape.

## Delivering more for nature and people

The ecosystem approach applies well to AONBs and they are making good progress towards delivering more for biodiversity and people. However, many AONB partnerships aren't using natural capital and ecosystem services language extensively throughout their plans, projects and wider communication. This doesn't cause a problem as the special qualities of an area and biodiversity act as proxies for natural capital and they are already delivering a variety of different public benefits. Their plans still show **the critical link between the state of the natural environment, an area's special qualities and the multiple benefits being provided for people.** This approach is reinforced by new Defra KPIs that continue to measure special qualities and biodiversity. **KPIs could be developed that focus on natural capital and ecosystem service in future.**

We sometimes find it hard to find the time needed for pulling data together, in using tools and encouraging others to consider natural capital and ecosystem services. The terminology seems to confuse people and create barriers”

The approach highlights a **gap in knowledge around the value people place on the benefits that flow from an area's special qualities and natural capital.** AONB partnerships feel that they could do more if they better understood the value that people attached to the benefits their natural capital provides.

Steps are being taken by many to **engage more with communities**, with plans to use visitor surveys, event surveys and participatory GIS to help understand how people value places in the future.

“We used a participatory GIS tool to find out what people value in the AONB. Around 100 people placed 400 pins in the places that were special to them, or gave them a place to run, ride, fish or walk, or just sit and stare. Many of the places were priority habitats. This has enabled a robust picture to be formed on how people value the natural capital of the AONB and provides strong evidence for the cultural services provided by the AONB.”

AONBs felt it was appropriate to use an area’s special qualities and habitats to consider natural capital. Many of the objectives and priorities in AONB recent/emerging management plans link special qualities (e.g. woodlands, rivers, soils), with the provision of public benefits (e.g. access, recreation, clean water and carbon storage).

AONBs believe that the development and delivery of NELMS, and **a greater understanding of the value of a wide range of natural capital could both help secure more for nature and people**. All plan to more in these areas over the next 5 years.

### Time and resources

Time is needed to carry out the checklist and embed the ecosystem approach into how an organisation works. By investing a few days to kick start thinking through the checklist review, the AONBs are demonstrating that an organisation can quickly take stock of its position and begin to identify gaps to address. It provides a strong tool to take a step back from delivery and consider current approaches to integrated landscape scale delivery, and what could be done to **improve connections between sectors, partners and outcomes**.

“The checklist gave an opportunity to evaluate our management planning process. Without this, it may not have happened in such a systematic way.”

Access to specialist knowledge is very important. **Natural England staff and the tools and guidance they and others in the Ecosystem Knowledge Network have developed have proved to be a significant resource to help organisations work out how to deploy resources and be more effective in how they work in the future.**

**Data appears to be critical in understanding the natural capital and ecosystem service baseline and to help target action and resources.** All AONBs identified gaps in data. It is often only available at a national character area or local authority scale. It isn’t specifically cut to AONB boundaries or AONB boundaries plus their settings. Many feel they need to commission surveys and research to fill the gaps. Where this happens it would be beneficial for it to be held in a **central repository and be integrated with national biodiversity and other opportunity maps** that are available or in development.

### Conclusions and next steps

The ecosystem approach is a great way to plan and manage landscapes and develop projects that **clearly demonstrate benefits for nature, places and people**. This can help projects succeed with funders as they **show how cultural and community benefits will flow from action rooted in a place’s natural capital**.

“The ecosystem approach should be central to the AONB ethos. Working at a landscape scale AONB's are well placed to deliver/influence.”

**Aligning it with the development or review of management plans, or landscape scale/partnership projects is likely to result in the ecosystem approach being embedded in activity.** This will have the greatest impact on delivering multiple benefits for people. However, it can be used to help develop annual or multi-year delivery plans, and to review progress and identify action at any stage in planning or project delivery. The checklist could, therefore, be of **great value to other landscape partnerships who focus more on project development than management planning.**

The ecosystem approach checklist is seen as a very **positive tool to discuss activities and develop delivery plans with partners.** It enables a review of current activities across partners, the identification of areas where joint working will deliver more and help to highlight where to focus future effort and resources.

The checklist has been devised such that it can be used by any organisation or partnership delivering at a landscape-scale. National Parks and AONBs have demonstrated leadership by undertaking the checklist but, **there are many other place-based partnerships and projects in England that would benefit from its use.**

The Wildlife Trusts, National Trust, RSPB, Woodland Trust, Local Nature Partnerships, National Nature Reserve Teams and Catchment Partnerships are all seeking to deliver the targets of Outcome 1C and many, if not all, are partners to AONBs and National Parks. The checklist and guidance should be shared widely with them, along with **encouragement to use the process to consider and develop their approach to integrated delivery.** It is **simple to use** and there is **clear guidance** to help answer each of the 6 questions. It may need to be tailored slightly to organisations working outside protected areas.

AONBs want to do more for natural capital and deliver more robust ecosystem services in their areas. They are committed to working with partners as plans need reviewing and projects develop to do this. **The AONBs have identified several areas of support that they think could help them do more in the future.** These include:

- **Continuity of core funding** to support AONB teams of core staff along with a strong governance model.
- **Additional staff capacity** to develop evidence baselines, projects and partnership delivery.
- **Support for existing behavioural change programmes** to encourage innovative thinking and different ways of working within the community and stakeholders.
- Assistance to encourage **cross cabinet support for delivery.**
- A **natural capital and ecosystem services support network** to build confidence and capacity within AONB partnerships.
- **ELMS should be developed with AONB input** to support more effective delivery.
- Links to existing AONB platforms (Basecamp/website) to **share advice, guidance, good practice and information between organisations** working at a landscape scale.
- Building on existing thinking within the AONB family to develop **a fit for purpose data system** that will efficiently collate, develop and share data – particularly on natural capital and the public benefits this provides.

- Encouraging others to act through more active **engagement in national landscape partnerships**.
- **AONB management plan guidance from Natural England** on how to include the ecosystem approach and encourage embedding and more resilient landscapes.

Bringing like-minded organisations together builds confidence and capacity within teams. The AONBs value the support given to them by the NAAONBs and Natural England during 2018/19. They would like continued support on this crucial area of work. The NAAONBs is well placed to deliver on this but would only be able to do so if financial resources were secured to do so. Alternative bodies that provide ongoing support to organisations on ecosystem services are The Ecosystem Knowledge Network and The Landscape Partnership Network. Stronger links should be made with these bodies.

### **Case Study: developing the next Isles of Scilly AONB Management Plan**

The Isles of Scilly AONB partners have used the Ecosystem Approach Checklist to review and broaden their approach to their next Management Plan. They have used the process to engage with natural capital and ecosystem services for the first time:

*“The Ecosystem Approach is a new concept for our AONB partnership, and is helping us connect our land management activities with what the landscape means for locals and visitors. The Checklist has really helped us think about how we develop our next Management Plan so that it links them to the environment – their environment. It has given us impetus to take a much broader approach to the Plan and how it connects with people”*

From the Checklist the partners have developed an Action Plan for the AONB Management Plan review, agreeing that they want to:

- Work with AONB partners to **raise awareness of and better understand Ecosystem Approach and natural capital principles**, and how they could be practically applied to the Isles of Scilly, including to the AONB Management Plan process
- **Carry out a Natural Capital assessment** – 6-themed approach (biodiversity, soils, water, historic features, landscape and access and enjoyment)
- Where key natural capital assets provide essential or multiple ecosystem services, ensure their **continued protection, management and/or enhancement** by working with and **enabling the local community to act**
- **Identify natural capital assets at risk from climate change** and incorporate mitigation and resilience actions into the new AONB Management plan and other strategic plans
- Develop the AONB Management Plan and other strategic plans to **ensure the continued protection, management and/or enhancement of key natural capital assets** provide essential or multiple ecosystem services; by working with and enabling the local community to act
- **Raise awareness and understanding within the local community** about the key natural capital assets of the Isles of Scilly and the ecosystem services that provides for people.
- **Develop community participation** in the management of the natural capital of the islands through the delivery actions in the AONB Management Plan, and other key action documents
- Develop a **shared, cost-effective, repeatable monitoring programme** for the AONB management plan which shows the progress (or not) of plan delivery against KPI's, and informs regular 'State of Nature and Natural Capital' reports



## Project Summary

The National Association for AONBs, with support from Natural England and Defra, commissioned a support project with AONBs to embed and apply the Ecosystem approach for biodiversity and public benefits. The approach fits well with the review of AONB management plans, many of which were under review during 2018/19, enabling these plans to deliver more for biodiversity, natural capital and the public benefits these provide.

### Outcome 1C and the Ecosystem approach checklist

**Outcome 1C: By 2020, at least 17% of land and inland water, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, conserved through effective, integrated and joined up approaches to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services including through management of our existing systems of protected areas and the establishment of nature improvement of nature improvement areas.**

A central theme to the government's Natural Environment White Paper [\*The Natural Choice – securing the value of nature\*](#), June 2011, is connecting people with nature and understanding how the environment provides benefits for society. The subsequent [\*Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services\*](#), August 2011 outlines the Government's biodiversity targets. It contains the first government target focused on HOW delivery for biodiversity is achieved – known as **Outcome 1C**.

This Government target measures how the ecosystem approach is applied in delivering actions for people and nature. Core to this target is integrated planning and action for biodiversity and for ecosystem services at the landscape-scale – i.e. how is the ecosystem approach being used.

More recent Defra policy direction in *Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and environment in a Green Brexit*, September 2018, builds on and supports the core message that a healthy natural environment is critical for biodiversity and the essential services provided by ecosystems for people. The *25 Year Environment Plan*, January 2018, similarly amplifies this and provides further detail on actions to secure and improve both the natural environment and the benefits for people.

### The Ecosystem Approach

The ecosystem approach is about connecting people with nature and managing the natural environment to benefit biodiversity and communities.

The natural environment can provide a range of services for people, many of which are often taken for granted or go unseen. These are referred to as ecosystem services – which put simply are the benefits (i.e. goods and services) for people from a healthy natural environment. These range from providing food and drinking water supplies to providing people with recreation, health benefits and inspirational landscapes.

The natural systems (or ecosystems) that provide these ecosystem services are increasingly referred to as natural capital.

The ecosystem approach is about managing natural capital to secure and provide those ecosystem services – for both nature and people. Core to the ecosystem approach is integrated management of natural capital, achieved through joint working across the interests who benefit from the natural capital of an area.

#### Extract from the Ecosystem Approach Handbook 2014

The ecosystem approach is about managing the environment for the benefit of people and nature.

The ecosystem approach recognises that nature provides us with benefits including food, clean water and opportunities for recreation. Using the approach helps maintain and enhance these benefits, whilst enabling prosperous communities to develop.

The ecosystem approach provides a way of thinking about the value of nature, justifying its importance in planning and decision making at all levels.

This will involve a wide range of partners and stakeholders coming together to manage a particular area's natural capital to deliver a range of ecosystem services. Such joint action in a particular area is often referred to as landscape-scale delivery.

This style of joined up working is not new for many existing landscape-scale partnerships and projects across England, such as National Parks and AONBs. Partnership working across landscapes to deliver multiple outcomes is core to how the environment is managed in many areas of England. The ecosystem approach is focused on how these partnerships can achieve effective outcomes together that benefit people and nature in the long-term.

#### Ecosystem approach checklist

Building on the ecosystem approach self-assessment undertaken by National Parks in 2016, the approach has been developed for AONBs. This report seeks to review the approach taken and provide recommendations for future support.

To translate the commitment made in Outcome 1C into a deliverable and relevant target for landscape-scale action a working group, which included delivery organisations such as the National Parks, AONBs, RSPB and Wildlife Trusts, developed a definition for the target and a method to record achievement of it – the ***ecosystem approach checklist***.

The group concluded the following:

- Considering how landscape-scale partnerships and projects use the ecosystem approach is the best way to measure the target of ***Outcome 1C***.
- ***An ecosystem approach checklist*** process would be developed to enable different types of integrated and joined up partnerships to assess their current use of the ecosystem approach, consider how to develop this in the future, and report progress with contributing to the target.
- Undertaking the checklist should achieve more than simply 'tick the box' for the target. The self-assessment should aim to help those completing it to develop and improve how they plan and take action for biodiversity and people to ensure it is integrated.
- A set of 8 criteria (now reduced to 6 as a result of a review as part of this project) to assess the use of the ecosystem approach were devised. These reflected the well-established criteria used to define the ecosystem approach.

- When a partnership/project is meeting all 8 of these criteria it is deemed to be meeting the target. The land area it operates over is contributing to the total area meeting the target i.e. counts towards the 17% mentioned in 1C.

The checklist was devised in 2013 with the help of 2 National Parks and 2 AONBs. Further refinements were made following piloting by the Peak District National Park and The Broads in 2015. As part of the first stage of this project the checklist was reviewed and streamlined following a pilot with 4 AONBs that concluded in June 2018, which reduced the criteria to a set of six. This input by 'on the ground' practitioners has been invaluable in developing the tool.

New guidance and the revised ecosystem approach checklist was approved in August 2018. In early 2019, 10 AONBs carried out a self-assessment using the new checklist.

## Project phases

The project has been carried out in 3 stages.

Stage 1 – Piloting the checklist with 4 AONBs. This was completed in June 2018. This provided a revised self-assessment 'checklist', which was developed and used by 4 pilot AONBs to assess their current capacity to use the ecosystem approach to deliver improvements for biodiversity and people.

Stage 2 - Refining a checklist and toolkit. This was completed in August 2018.

Stage 3 – The embedding programme. This provided advice, support and tools to increase the capacity and confidence of AONB staff to apply the ecosystem approach to delivery of 'nature and people' outcomes. This will enable them to contribute more for these 25 YEP outcomes through delivery of their management plans, most of which will be finalised by March 2019.

## Project activities

26 AONBs participated in the programme.

- ❖ The ecosystem checklist was piloted with 4 AONBs and refined for wider circulation.
- ❖ A successful workshop was held for AONBs to help them apply and embed the ecosystem approach in to their planning and delivery for the next management plan period. The workshop focused on 25 YEP outcomes, looking at practical tools to help AONB Partnerships to further contribute. 16 AONBs attended.
- ❖ Phone and email support provided to 10 AONB partnerships to undertake the Outcome 1C Ecosystem checklist and identify actions for development.
- ❖ Each AONB completed a short 'next steps action plan' to help them take forward the actions identified through the checklist process.
- ❖ Guidance and support provided to 26 AONBs to help them to build their capacity and take forward the actions they identified during the workshop and checklist process. This included:
  - A 'People and Nature' workshop on 20 March 2019 will share a range of tools and approaches, with specialist input on key topics from Natural England. 15 AONBs and 2 landscape partners attended the workshop.
  - Four webinars were held covering a range of additional topics, allowing AONBs to remotely access further methods, tools and examples. 26 AONBs attended the webinars.
  - Short written briefings on how to access the tools, all workshop presentations, recordings of the webinars and examples of good practice are hosted on the AONBs 'Basecamp' web platform. All 34 AONBs have access to these resources.

## Review of AONBs using the checklist approach

### Planning to do more for nature and people

#### Strengthening the management plan process

For many of the AONBs the checklist brought a new angle to management planning. Although the management plan is central to AONB activities, the checklist was seen as a way to building stronger links between an area's natural capital and special qualities and the benefits it can provide for people.

The wider dialogue with partners on how AONB partnerships plan and deliver provided very useful insight for how future joint working could be enhanced. They see the checklist as a tool that will help them to bring the partnership together and work more closely and effectively with relevant partners in the future. There are interesting tools available to do this, including the Child's Address and ecosystem matrix. Again, the focus of the checklist on 'how' rather than 'what' AONB partnerships deliver was really welcomed. This led to helpful discussion and ideas on how actions set out in the agreed management plan could be delivered differently and achieve more benefits than had been initially identified. While all management plans include sections on securing and improving biodiversity, the checklist process frequently identified additional linkages and benefits that would arise from the planned actions, such as planning habitat improvements that would not only benefit species, but could also improve soil quality and provide a new area for people to contemplate nature.

"The ecosystem approach should be central to the AONB ethos. Working at a landscape scale AONB's are well placed to deliver/influence."

The main opportunities will come through implementation of the AONB management plan. AONB project and partnership work is guided by the management plan, which includes reference to natural capital and ecosystem services.

AONBs saw that it could help better align plans with Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan, prioritising top activities, and showing the 'value' of the landscape in ways that decision makers understand.

#### Addressing gaps in knowledge

The checklist process helped AONBs identify and agree to take action on key gaps in knowledge, data and activity. It has enabled them to address gaps in knowledge and shape future plans and direction of project delivery. It provides the opportunity to step back and assess what they had been doing and how it addresses or informs their thinking and action. The majority of AONBs recognised that gaps in data on natural capital and ecosystem services was a key issue that needed to be addressed. Data is often only available at a national character area or local authority scale. It isn't specifically cut to AONB boundaries or AONB boundaries plus their settings. For AONBs that straddle counties and countries, they often have even more data gaps and inconsistencies, with one county/country providing data and the other not. Many feel they need to commission surveys and research to fill the gaps. Several will be working more closely with partners to gather relevant data that they hold. Where more data is collected it was felt by many AONBs that it would be beneficial for data to be stored in a central repository and be integrated with national biodiversity and other opportunity maps that are available or in development.

"The checklist was great for filling gaps, identifying ways to work together better and better monitoring/assessing and mapping of assets and the services they provide. We plan to improve our information gathering and recording and to be proactive in our action planning as far as is possible."

Several AONBs demonstrated that they understand the benefits that arise from natural capital (and many identified them in tables in their plans). However, many felt that they could engage more with their communities to find out what they valued and to talk to them about the wide range of benefits the area brought to them and others. They have set actions to do more on this in the future. These include visitor and community surveys, popularity mapping at community events and the use of participatory GIS to engage people using tablets and mobile phones when experiencing cultural ecosystem services.

### Working together

The checklist provided insights into how shared delivery works and helped to highlight where to focus future effort. AONBs believe it will be a very positive tool when undertaking their next management plan review. It provides the opportunity to use tools to look at management from a different perspective and that focusses on the full range of services that might stem from one area of natural capital. In the meantime, they will use it to discuss activities and develop delivery plans and projects with partners.

While AONBs recognise the benefits of involving colleagues and partners in using the checklist, the time and logistics required to do that was a barrier for some. Especially as many had just completed the management plan review which had involved lots of meetings with staff and partners. Those who did involve others used existing groups and networks, linking into planned meetings as an opportunity to gain their input. All plan to use the checklist to help engage more staff and partners in the coming months. They will use their technical officers' groups and joint advisory committees to do this.

Involving partners in the checklist is welcomed by the AONBs that were at the start of the management plan review process. It enables partners to consider a wide variety of actions in their area and the many benefits that they provide – some of which had not been identified before.

For those AONBs that were finalising or had just published their management plan, it was more difficult to engage partners during the checklist process in early 2019. They indicated that they were committing to engaging with partners as opportunities arose through delivery planning and project development in the next year. All are taking the checklist and action plan to management and joint committee meetings for discussion and approval. They will definitely engage more with partners in the next review period. They could see the value in the ripple effect of focussing on ecosystem service delivery beyond AONB partnerships and boundaries.

### Identifying solutions and addressing barriers

The AONBs commented that the checklist was a good way to look at what's working well, where the gaps are and the opportunities for doing more in the future. Reviewing their work in this way highlights new solutions and flags up ways in which they might address barriers.

Frequently the discussion on solutions and next steps focuses on actions in parts of the AONB, rather than across its entirety. This helps to identify realistic and deliverable next steps that are more likely to be carried through.

AONBs identified the following areas where they felt more support is needed to help them improve their activities around natural capital resilience and ecosystem service delivery:

- Additional staff capacity to develop baselines, projects and partnership delivery.
- Breaking through entrenched thinking and supporting change within the community and stakeholders.
- Additional direction and support from policy makers and Government.
- Support to encourage investment from major partners.
- GIS Expertise and resources.

- Freely accessible good quality data cut to AONB boundaries/ National Character Area (NCA) boundaries.
- AONB support network -including examples of AONB checklists that have been completed.
- ELMS developed with AONB inputs.
- AONB wide habitat opportunity mapping (and training).
- Specific training in a modelling technique available through Ecosystem Knowledge Network.

We sometimes find it hard to find the time needed for pulling data together, in using tools and encouraging others to consider natural capital and ecosystem services. The terminology seems to confuse people and create barriers”

## Time and Resources

The purpose of the checklist is to help landscape-scale partnerships and projects review and develop their use of the ecosystem approach, enabling them to see how they can better contribute to delivery of the national Outcome 1C target. It can be undertaken at any time, but the greatest benefits are seen when it is undertaken as part of a management plan review or during project development.

The experience of the AONBs mirrored that of the National Parks in that the greatest benefits are achieved when the checklist process is aligned with the early stages of the management plan cycle. This provides excellent synergy and enables partners and staff to come together and think how natural capital and ecosystem services can be embedded in the area’s future management and how they can best involve people.

As many AONBs were just completing reviews of their management plans when they undertook the checklist, they saw it as a useful way to take stock and reflect on where they were. It was a good way to identify the areas that they wanted to develop during the delivery phase of their plans. Some found it a useful tool to help develop annual or multi year delivery plans.

Very few AONBs are using the checklist to inform project development, but they can see its benefits in bringing partners together to discuss future projects and optimise the benefits for nature and people. The checklist could, therefore, be of great value to other landscape partnerships who focus more on project development than management planning.

“Perhaps more flexibility over the year to complete - consultants have been really helpful and flexible, but the timing for completing the project nationally has coincided with a busy period at the end of the financial year. Guidance has been good - perhaps more examples of how others have completed and the type of data/examples we're looking to identify”

## Sharing with others

### AONBs

A total of 14 AONBs undertook the checklist and a total of 26 engaged in the wider embedding programme of workshops and webinars. Only 8 weren’t in a position to engage with the process during September 18 – March 19. All AONBs would benefit from using the checklist process. They can

be encouraged to do so by their peers at the 14 AONBs that undertook the checklist, through the guidance, tools, presentations and webinars available on Basecamp, and support from the NAAONB and Natural England.

The NAAONB is well placed to provide ongoing support to a network of AONBs delivering more for nature and people. However, given the current capacity of the charity it would require additional financial and staff resources to do this.

### Other landscape organisations

The checklist has been devised so that it can be used by any organisation or partnership delivering at a landscape-scale. National Parks and AONBs are demonstrating leadership by using the checklist, but there are many other place-based partnerships and projects in England that would benefit from its use. The Wildlife Trusts, National Trust, RSPB, Woodland Trust, Local Nature Partnerships, National Nature Reserve Teams and Catchment Partnerships are all seeking to deliver the targets of Outcome 1C and many, if not all, are partners to AONBs and National Parks. The checklist and guidance should be shared widely with them, along with encouragement to use the process to consider and develop their approach to integrated delivery.

This report will be shared with Defra's Terrestrial Biodiversity Group to discuss the potential for the wider application of the checklist approach.

The report will be shared widely in Natural England, including with key people such as Ruth Waters and Jane Lusardi who are leading work on natural capital.

## Appendix 1: AONBs involved in checklist

### Pilot AONBs

Blackdown Hills

The Chilterns

Dorset

North Pennines

### Supported AONBs

Arnside & Silverdale

Cranborne Chase

Forest of Bowland

Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust

Lincolnshire Wolds

Malvern Hills

Mendip Hills

Nidderdale

Shropshire Hills

Wye Valley



## Appendix 2: Workshop Feedback from AONBs

15 November 2018 and 20 March 2019

<b>Support networks</b>	<b>Who could help?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AONBs would love to share projects/good practice etc. Past good intentions have stalled at the individual AONB level. Really needs facilitation from somewhere to make it happen.</li> </ul>	NAAONB or NELMS Tests and Trials group suggested to facilitate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up clusters of AONBs linked to habitats and species focussed on in the FCS and combined maps to improve effectiveness and efficiencies.</li> </ul>	Nature Recovery Network/facilitated by NAAONB/NE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coastal AONBs could get together to focus on issues. Often feel isolated. Europarc Coastal Team might be able to help/facilitate.</li> </ul>	Could links be made with the NAAONB conference?
<b>Shared information, including:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact details of all the AONBs that accessed the support programme.</li> </ul>	Bowfell to share
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NAAONB NELMS Phase 1 Tests and Trials will help AONBs better understand the value of capital assets via farm plans and farm economics. 13 AONBs collaborating on the project.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marches Local Enterprise Partnership: example of natural capital accounting.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List of habitats and species that have FCS strategies and statements, along with their functions and structures</li> </ul>	Bowfell to add to Basecamp when received from Fran Randerson.
<b>Habitat portal providing</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National combined habitat network maps cut to AONB boundaries and surrounds/buffer areas. Currently available on Open Data Portal as GIS layers to download. Could also be available as pdfs for AONBs without GIS capability</li> </ul>	Natural England/Jeff Edwards will consider actioning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National combined habitat network maps need to be upgraded to include local data (where available). This could benefit from central coordination from NAAONBs to ensure effective use of resources and liaison with AONBs and NE.</li> </ul>	<i>Qu. Does NE want to be involved in this and upgrading to include local data?</i>
<b>Advice and guidance on:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AONB Management Plan guidance should be updated to include NC and ESS to help embed principles and action through the next MP review.</li> </ul>	Natural England
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How should AONBs seek to monetarise value?</li> </ul>	Could the approach used for NNR value be applied?

	Can Jane Lusardi help with managing expectations on valuing ESS and the availability of economists?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good practice advice on engaging major landowners, such as the Duchy, to encourage them to 'buy in' NE expert advisors</li> </ul>	NE regional offices could help building on SW experience with Duchy of Cornwall.
<b>Resource help:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data – not all AONBs have access to GIS. No consistency of GIS across those that have one, often linked to accountable body IT policies. This can cause issues with data sharing and monitoring</li> </ul>	Could be an opportunity for a NAAONB led project to secure funding for all to have GIS and trained staff?
<b>Encouraging others to act:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AONBs could be useful delivery bodies for other partners to take more action. They often have foot in the door due to the joint management planning and delivery approach.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could NAAONB become a 'lead partner' in the Landscape Partnership alongside RSPB, National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and Woodland Trust?</li> </ul>	Natural England commenced dialogue on ESS with LP.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AONBs would like to be more active in the Landscape Partnership Network.</li> </ul>	Bowfell to share link.