

TPR, 61 (3) 1990

---

MARGARET A. ANDERSON

## Areas of outstanding natural beauty and the 1949 National Parks Act\*

The thirty-eight areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales are designated under the 1949 National Parks Act. Drawing on public and private records this article explores the relationship of AONBs to the strong national parks lobby and within the pre-war drive to protect landscapes. The final aims of the Act are compared with the expectations and the author considers the reasons why AONBs were left with a misunderstood designation, disjointed administration and few resources. She suggests that perhaps AONBs should now step out of the shadow of the national parks and promote themselves as first grade landscapes in their own right.

---

The fortieth anniversary of the passing of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act has prompted at least one general reappraisal of the genesis and effectiveness of the Act,<sup>1</sup> and two specific reviews initiated by the Countryside Commission, one for national parks and the other for areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs).<sup>2</sup>

AONBs and National Parks are both designated under Part I of the Act but, despite the importance accorded to AONBs by committees and individuals prior to 1949, the AONB designation has never achieved the government or public recognition given to the parks. This does not mean that areas of countryside with AONB status are not well known—the Chilterns, Gower, Forest of Bowland, Cornwall Coast and South Downs, for example, are at least as familiar and loved by the people of England and Wales as are the national parks. It is of their status as AONBs, and the implications of that status, that people are frequently ignorant.

The purpose of this article is therefore to set AONBs into the context of the 1949 legislation and to clarify their relationship to the national parks at that time. The history of AONBs cannot be separated from the movement for national parks—indeed Sir Arthur Hobhouse stated that they were an ‘important corollary’<sup>3</sup> to the establishment of the parks—but very little has been written about the place of

---

\*Some of the historical parts of this article first appeared in a somewhat different form in *Historical Perspectives on the Role for AONBs: Recreation or Preservation* (Occasional Paper No. 3), Ashford, Department of Environmental Studies and Countryside Planning, Wye College, 1981.

AONBs in the overall pre-1949 debate. Forty-one years on it seems time to remedy that situation.

### *The major movements*

Three major areas of concern—the conservation of nature, public access to private land for walking and climbing, and preservation of landscape from mass suburbanisation and sporadic building—were the motivating force behind the 1949 Act and they are reflected in its three parts. Part I deals primarily with landscape conservation through the designation of national parks and AONBs; Part II sets up the nature conservancy and legislates for the designation of nature reserves for scientific purposes; and Part III establishes rights of public access in the countryside especially along footpaths and bridleways.

Pressure for protective legislation had developed over a considerable period, with organisations for nature conservation and for public access to the countryside being established back in the nineteenth century, but the movement for national parks as such can be said to have begun in the inter-war years when many people became increasingly concerned over the despoliation of the landscape through uncontrolled building. In 1926 the Council for the Preservation (now Protection) of Rural England (CPRE) was formed and its first actions were in support of pressure from other amenity organisations on the government for more extensive and firmer planning controls. Subsequently the CPRE took a leading role in the national parks movement and in 1936, with other major amenity organisations, founded the Standing Committee on National Parks (SCNP). The SCNP (now the Council for National Parks) drew its membership from voluntary organisations representing landscape, rambling, cycling, climbing, motoring, scientific, tourist and other interests. Its purpose was to lobby for the establishment of national parks, and it was largely responsible for keeping up the pressure during the Second World War and ultimately in framing the legislation.<sup>4</sup>

There was no such lobby promoting the cause of AONBs; nonetheless from 1931 to 1947 the documents of the time, both the well-known reports and the relevant files in the Public Record Office, demonstrate that the importance of AONBs in relation to the national parks became increasingly well discussed. It is proposed now to look at the events of this period from the point of view of AONBs, against the background of the national parks movement. The latter, however, will not be considered in any detail as it can be found elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE ADDISON REPORT 1931

At the time that the CPRE was being formed, land use planning in England and Wales was the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. The Ministry was not unaware of the difficulties and in 1926 noted '... the need for the preservation of considerable tracts of land against the modern spread of building development, often of a sprawling kind, over ever-widening circles of rural land. The saving of cliffs, downland, or other natural features from indiscriminate building invasion is but one form of the problem ...'<sup>6</sup> The legislation of the time was proving

inadequate to deal with the problem and the CPRE therefore suggested to the government in 1929 that a Committee should be set up to enquire into the preservation of the countryside through the establishment of national parks. The result was a Committee of Inquiry of eight members under the Chairmanship of the Right Honourable Christopher Addison (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture). Its terms of reference were:

To consider and report if it is desirable and feasible to establish one or more National Parks in Great Britain with a view to the preservation of the natural characteristics, including flora and fauna, and to the improvement of recreational facilities for the people; and to advise generally, and in particular as to the areas, if any, that are most suitable for the purpose.

The Committee met on twenty-eight occasions and took verbal evidence from thirty-four individuals or groups, as well as receiving written evidence.

The Addison Committee's Report<sup>7</sup> stressed the importance of preserving the national heritage in the face of changes being brought about by alterations in the economic and social life of the country, and at the same time recognised the need to provide access to open country particularly for city dwellers.<sup>8</sup> In its recommendations for the establishment of a National Parks Authority the Committee therefore called for two distinct types of designated area: 'National Reserves', which were to be selected by reason of their outstanding interest to the nation as a whole, the purpose of which was preservation; and 'Regional Reserves', which were to be areas of pleasant countryside, conveniently situated in relation to industrial centres, for which the prime purpose was to be public access.<sup>9</sup> Here, set out officially for the first time, is the suggestion that national parks should not stand alone.

#### POST-ADDISON 1931-1941

The Addison Committee reported at a time when the country was facing severe economic problems and the government took no steps to implement its recommendations. In addition new town and country planning legislation was being enacted, with a view to giving wider and stronger powers to local authorities for the control of developments in the rural areas and it was thought by many that these general planning controls would obviate the necessity for any specific action such as the establishment of national parks.

In spite of the 1932 Planning Act, however, pressures continued to be apparent in rural areas and the 1930s saw increasing amounts of land taken for urban growth each year, rising to a peak in 1931-35.<sup>10</sup> The major causes were the greater leisure, affluence and mobility that enabled more and more people to move out of crowded and smoke-laden cities for both living and recreation.<sup>11</sup>

Governmental inaction prompted a steady stream of prodding questions on national parks to the Minister of Health in the House of Commons.<sup>12</sup> The Minister's response was a report, *The Preservation of the Countryside*, 1938,<sup>13</sup> which outlined the problem of the continued disfigurement of the countryside and considered the effectiveness of the current legislation. The Report quite rightly pointed out that all the 'destruction' had not been loss as, since the First World War, three-and-a-half

million houses had been built, meeting the legitimate wishes of individuals for their own homes, and that what the authorities should be concerned with was not so much 'the extent to which the countryside has been destroyed, as the extent to which the destruction has been wanton and unnecessary'. Secondly, the Report stated that the greater part of the post-war building had taken place before the Town and Country Planning Act 1932 came into force (in 1933).

The Report therefore added its weight to the argument that the 1932 Act was quite adequate and special legislation for national parks was unnecessary. This contention was based on faith in the terms of the 1932 Act under which local authorities had practically unlimited powers to prohibit building, permanently or completely, over any stretch of country provided they were prepared to face a claim for compensation.<sup>14</sup> However, the park lobbyists had already pointed out that the compensation proviso presented many rural areas with a dilemma.<sup>15</sup> Should authorities in rural areas try to prevent destruction of beautiful countryside, and be faced with a compensation bill they could not possibly afford, or should they try to increase their incomes by allowing development to proceed? In partial recognition of this problem the 1938 Report suggested strengthening the 1932 Act by the designation of 'rural zones' outside village radii, but it still maintained that the 1932 planning legislation should be sufficient provided it was skilfully and firmly administered.

This sanguine view was not supported by the Standing Committee on National Parks (SCNP) which responded by publishing a pamphlet entitled *The Case for National Parks in Great Britain*,<sup>16</sup> in which it pointed out that the potential national park areas were precisely those where payment of compensation was impossible and where the resources and skill needed not only to preserve but also to open up the areas for public enjoyment were not available.<sup>17</sup> The SCNP therefore urged the government to set up a National Parks Authority that would have powers to designate and finance the park areas, and coordinate the activities of local authorities; the planning legislation as it stood, the SCNP said, was insufficient.

#### THE SCOTT AND DOWER REPORTS 1942–1945

The SCNP continued to press the case for national parks throughout the war years as it was anxious to ensure that national parks should have a distinguishable role to play in the comprehensive land planning schemes being discussed for the post-war period.<sup>18</sup>

A number of influential government committees were investigating the management of land use change during the early 1940s. For the countryside the most important of these was the Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas, usually referred to as the Scott Committee. The Report of the Scott Committee<sup>19</sup> covered social and economic aspects such as housing, services and industry in rural areas, as well as agriculture and forestry and the preservation of amenities. It stated that the Committee regarded the beauty of the countryside 'as the heritage of the whole nation . . . [which] must be farmed if it is to retain those features which give it distinctive charm and character'.<sup>20</sup> From this it followed that 'there must be facility of access for all'—a facility that must not, however, 'interfere with the proper use of

the land in the national interest'<sup>21</sup> and that the establishment of national parks in Britain, for which the main purpose would be public recreation, was long overdue.<sup>22</sup>

Although the recommendations on national parks only formed a small part of the Scott Report, the stress that was laid on the importance of the beauty of the farmed countryside reinforced government and national thinking of the time<sup>23</sup> and affected at least three important post-war Acts—the Agriculture Act 1947, the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, and the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. In all these Acts control over agricultural activities is minimal; its perceived importance for the preservation of amenity in the countryside is implicit.

Despite its terms of reference, the Addison Committee had side-stepped the problem of actually specifying particular areas for either national or regional reserve status. By the mid-war years it was becoming plain that some attempt must be made to survey and delineate possible national park areas, and this work was undertaken by John Dower, a prominent member of the SCNP and civil servant in the Ministry of Works and Planning. His report was published as *National Parks in England and Wales*.<sup>24</sup>

In the Report Dower listed ten proposed national parks (c. 3600 square miles, 9330 square kilometres), twelve reserves for possible future national parks (c. 4400 square miles, 11 900 square kilometres), and thirty-three 'Other Amenity Areas'. He considered that national parks should be broadly confined to 'relatively wild country' as only there could the public satisfactorily be given a wide measure of public access. Implicit in this definition is 'recreation' as a prime purpose for national parks—a view quite opposite to that of the Addison Committee whose support was for preservation in its national reserves.

It is the lists of 'Reserve' and 'Other Amenity Areas' however that are of particular interest in the history of AONBs. The twelve 'Reserves' included such areas as the Broads, North York Moors and Coast, Berkshire and Marlborough Downs and Elenith Mountains. Dower stated they should 'be generally safeguarded . . . no substantial "development" other than agriculture or forestry should be permitted unless shown to be desirable in the public interest'. He was much less concerned about the 'Other Amenity Areas' as he considered many of them, such as the Malvern Hills or Cannock Chase, to be too small or isolated for national action. Yet he acknowledged their value which he considered to be 'sometimes of critical importance for local or regional action under "open-space" or "green-belt" schemes, for preservation or recreation'. In this he was more in line with Addison's regional reserves. However, having listed them he made no further suggestions concerning their establishment, despite the fact that they also included some large and popular areas such as the South Downs, Bowland Fells, Cotswolds and New Forest.

The idea that both protection and recreation should not be confined solely to extensive wilder areas of country was also expressed in the House of Commons in March 1945. Sir Geoffrey Mander, initiating an adjournment debate, was firm in his opinion that while the national parks should be in regions of what he considered to be the finest landscape, mainly mountainous or coastal, it was also important to preserve smaller-scale areas on a regional basis.<sup>25</sup> John Dugdale was even more

positive: 'I would say that it is most important that we should not only develop these large parks, but consider smaller parks such as Charnwood Forest in the Midlands and the Cotswolds; that we should preserve them and realise that a small park near a large centre of population is of just as great a value as a large park further away'.<sup>26</sup>

Further recognition of the importance to the preservation of landscape of smaller areas of beautiful countryside came officially through the report of the Hobhouse Committee in 1947.

#### THE NATIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE (ENGLAND AND WALES) 1945–1947

Almost immediately after publication of the Dower Report the Minister of Town and Country Planning appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir Arthur Hobhouse, with the following terms of reference:

- (a) to consider the proposals in the *Report on National Parks in England and Wales* (Cmd 6628) of May 1945, as to the areas which should be selected as National Parks; and to make recommendations in regard to the special requirements and appropriate boundaries of those areas which should be first selected;
- (b) to consider and report on the proposals made in that Report as to the measures necessary to secure the objects of National Parks, and on any additional measures necessary to secure these objects;
- (c) to consider and make recommendations on such other matters affecting the establishment of National Parks and the Conservation of Wild Life.<sup>27</sup>

The setting up of this Committee was a positive step towards legislation for national parks, and the publication of its Report in 1947 was to provide the most comprehensive recommendations yet made for the designation of what have become AONBs, but which the Report called conservation areas.

If the Hobhouse Committee had adhered firmly to its terms of reference, virtually no recommendations over and beyond those for national parks (and wild life conservation) could have been made. From the very first meeting,<sup>28</sup> however, there were suggestions for an extension of Dower's list of ten national parks because of the desirability of including a wider variety of landscape types and areas nearer to London and the East of England. Under discussion were the Broads, North York Moors and Coast, New Forest, Chilterns, Breckland, Suffolk Coast and Heaths, Savernake Forest, North Downs, Dorset Coast and Heaths, South Downs, and the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs. The last three of these areas were eventually visited by the Committee for consideration as national parks.<sup>29</sup>

At its second and third meetings the Committee discussed the problems that were beginning to be apparent concerning protection for areas of landscape value. The first problem concerned the inclusion of agricultural land within national parks defined by Dower as 'relatively wild country'. It was finally agreed 'that in general "intensive" agriculture should normally be excluded from a National Park but that

"extensive" agriculture could normally be included'.<sup>30</sup> The second problem concerned the great number and variety of areas worthy of preservation, the impossibility of including them all within national parks, yet the desirability of fitting them into the framework of park organisation by provisions for protection and development. A draft document, entitled 'Outline Proposals for a National Parks Organisation' written by Sir Arthur Hobhouse and dated 20 November 1945 set out the Chairman's thinking on the latter subject.<sup>31</sup> The document states that in view of the great importance of protecting from disfigurement and making available to the public areas of high landscape value, inland and coastal, not in national parks, 'the Minister would have powers to designate, on the recommendation of the National Parks Committee, any such area, as an "area of national landscape value"', and thereupon certain provisions were to operate in respect of planning and development in these areas.

The suggested provisions were twofold: that planning in these areas was generally to be the responsibility of the local authorities, 'thus avoiding the need to delimit in detail the boundaries of such designated areas'; and that the National Park Commission was to have powers within its general Exchequer grant (say 20 per cent) for the funding of development in the Areas of National Landscape Value, but a Local Development Committee (or the Local Authority itself) should be the body concerned with any actual developments that took place. The developments referred to were to be for recreation, such as footpaths, access and youth hostel-type accommodation. There was general agreement in the Committee to these proposals, but although the Committee went on to elaborate these ideas considerably in later discussions and in its report, the terms of the 1949 Act returned almost exactly the terms of this very early document.

Sometime between the sixth and ninth series of meetings (January to April 1946) the name Area of National Landscape Value seems to have been dropped in favour of Conservation Area. It is probable that this was to bring the terminology into line with that proposed by the parallel government committee, The Wild Life Conservation Special Committee (Chairman Sir Julian Huxley), which was suggesting in addition to small Nature Reserves the preservation of large tracts of interesting country as Conservation Areas.

At a joint meeting of the National Parks Committee (Hobhouse) and the Wild Life Conservation Special Committee on 20 February 1946 the proposed Huxley conservation areas were discussed. Three types of conservation area were listed: (a) those of high importance for both amenity and wild life; (b) those where the main emphasis was on wild life; and (c) those where the main emphasis was on amenity. John Dower pointed out at the meeting that even if the National Parks Committee could not see its way to accepting responsibility for conservation areas, the idea of 'amenity areas' was already well established in the Ministry of Town and Country Planning and the trend towards their special preservation in some form would undoubtedly continue.

A number of definite themes emerged during subsequent meetings, particularly from the draft Reports. The three most important of these themes were (a) the difference between the proposed conservation areas and national parks; (b) the importance of recreation; and (c) control of conservation areas by local authorities.

(a) The difference between conservation areas and national parks was spelled out in, for example, the second draft of the Hobhouse Preliminary Report (July 1946), paragraph 165, where it says that the proposed special measures for Conservation Areas are not for the sort of 'living space' provided by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, 'but only for those areas of outstanding beauty or of comparatively large extent, which can make a special contribution to national recreation and enjoyment. We have in mind: areas recommended for declaration as National Parks but not so declared in the first instalment . . . areas which fall short of National Park standards but are of great value by reason of proximity to large centres of population, areas of high landscape value but below the size desirable for a National Park, stretches of unspoilt coastline, comparatively narrow in extent but specially vulnerable to development, and larger areas of the country where the competing claims of agriculture, forestry or other development must take precedence over popular enjoyment and recreation.'<sup>33</sup>

(b) Implicit in that paragraph is the idea that conservation areas were to be primarily for recreation. Paragraph 166 went further and pointed out the dangers of concentrating people just into the national parks and suggested it was better to have accommodation and recreation facilities spread over wider areas. Paragraphs 186–88 were even more specific, stating that it was fundamental to the concept of conservation areas that the resources of these areas for popular recreation and enjoyment should be developed for the benefit of the nation as a whole, and that local authorities should be given adequate powers and finance to enable them to achieve this.<sup>34</sup>

(c) There never seems to have been any real disagreement about who should be responsible for the management of conservation areas. As early as the sixth series of meetings the Committee agreed that the function of development for recreation and enjoyment in designated areas should normally be discharged by local authorities, and that a suitable financial provision would be no more than 25 per cent of the total national parks budget.<sup>35</sup> (This proposed provision was reduced to 15 per cent at the twelfth meeting, but was subsequently restored in the final Report.)

On the face of it conservation areas and their treatment seem to have been a non-contentious issue. A number of changes to drafts, and correspondence with the Chairman, however, show that there were some pressures, conflicts and disagreements. For example, paragraph 212 of the Preliminary Report, third draft, reads ' . . . the promotion of popular enjoyment of the countryside is harmonised with the interests of farmers and agricultural owners'.<sup>36</sup> But in the final Report this 'harmonisation' is spelled out in greater detail and greatly strengthened in the direction of the agriculture lobby. The amended paragraph (now 251) reads ' . . . in certain of our proposed Conservation Areas arable farming occupies a greater proportion of the land. It will be essential in these areas that landscape preservation and public enjoyment, particularly access for ramblers, should be reconciled with the paramount interests of agricultural landowners and farmers'.<sup>37</sup> The use of the word 'paramount' reflects the strength of support nationally for



farming but at the same time undermines the whole thrust of the Hobhouse Report for harmonisation and reconciliation between users. Although in October 1945 Dr Huxley is minuted as having said that he thought that the effects of changes in farming practice on landscape value in national parks should be considered,<sup>38</sup> there seem to have been no suggestions that agriculture should be controlled. When John Dower asked a member of the Wild Life Committee in February 1946 if he hoped to control changes in agriculture and forestry in the 'biological' conservation areas the Committee was proposing, the answer was no—that there would probably be very little difference between its 'biological' and 'amenity' conservation areas in that respect.<sup>39</sup>

A second point of difficulty was the reconciliation of the National Parks Committee's original intentions for areas of national landscape value reflecting amenity and recreation interests, and the more scientific intentions of the Wild Life Conservation Special Committee's ideas for conservation areas. This is perhaps best summed up in correspondence between A. G. Tansley and Sir Arthur Hobhouse, early in 1947. Tansley had read the first draft of Hobhouse's report and wrote to him about the proposed chapter on conservation areas, saying, 'It gives a false impression of what Conservation Areas should or can be. There is too much emphasis throughout on development for public recreation and too little on maintaining the Areas as far as possible in their existing condition. You can't make the Conservation Areas into a kind of second-grade National Park—they cover too much of the country and, in our judgement, people simply would not "stand for it"! The main object is to get them left alone as far as is reasonable so as to preserve existing beauties and character'.

In a somewhat guarded reply, Sir Arthur wrote '... I fully appreciate that Wild Life (i.e. the Huxley Committee) is concerned with preserving Conservation Areas rather than making them available for the public. NPC (National Parks Committee) however, must have regard to both aims and although I would not describe them as "second grade national parks" their designation in the eyes of the NPC is obviously to preserve them for the wider use of public enjoyment and appreciation.' He concluded by saying that he thought some wording could be altered 'to combine the rather different objects of the two committees', especially an explanation that some conservation areas or parts thereof were particularly designated for wild life.<sup>40</sup>

Thirdly, some disagreement was evident when it came to the point of deciding whether borderline areas should be national parks or conservation areas. The Cornish Coast was the most important of these. No one questioned its beauty; the problem was more one of administration.<sup>41</sup> Correspondence between Sir Arthur Hobhouse and Committee member Mrs Haythornthwaite shows up the dilemma, and the explicit hope that the Cornish Coast could in some way be used to upgrade the idea of conservation areas. 'By including the Cornish coast ... the importance of Conservation Areas can be immensely emphasised', wrote Sir Arthur, 'I feel that if it is made clear in our report that the Cornish Coast is not excluded from National Parks for reason of any inferiority of landscape value ... there can be no reflection on this beautiful area. Moreover we must, in our proposals for Conservation Areas, include sufficient powers and finance to make

their protection a certainty.' In reply Mrs Haythornthwaite regretfully agreed to the exclusion of the Cornish Coast from the list of national parks, but emphasised that particular reference should be made to it in the final Report 'so that it is unmistakable that we consider it of no less value than the National Parks'.<sup>42</sup> This decision on the Cornish Coast is spelled out in paragraph 37 of the final Report.

When the Hobhouse Committee called for written evidence it asked that individuals and organisations should base their comments on the Dower Report. Given the important role for conservation areas envisaged by the Committee this request proved, perhaps unintentionally, to be very restrictive. Dower had paid scant attention to his suggested areas outside the national parks, and it was therefore presumably only those who felt strongly enough about Reserves or Amenity Areas to ignore the instructions who made any mention of them.<sup>43</sup>

The most extensive evidence on these subjects came from the County Councils Association in a Memorandum dated January 1946. The Association thought that the introduction of national parks legislation should be made the occasion for conferring on local authorities generally the power 'to safeguard, regulate and secure for public enjoyment' amenity areas. The memorandum suggested also that the National Parks Commission should be able to make grants and representations to local authorities and in some cases to take part in the management of amenity areas. Much of the rest of the evidence not surprisingly also showed the concern of organisations to protect their own interests. Generally speaking, however, comments on the conservation areas are hard to find in the three files of written evidence to the Hobhouse Committee.

#### THE HOBHOUSE REPORT 1947

The main bulk of the Hobhouse Report<sup>44</sup> was concerned with the setting up and administration of the proposed twelve national parks. True to its deliberations, however, the Committee recommended the designation of fifty-two conservation areas. The Committee stated:

... it is an important corollary to our main proposals that special measures should be applied to safeguard landscape beauty and to encourage its enjoyment in all those other areas which, though they satisfy the essential requirements of a National Park in scenic quality, are not included in our selection (paragraph 44).

Chapter VIII of the Report (paragraphs 227–58) dealt exclusively with conservation areas and incorporated most of the ideas already discussed. In particular the Committee wanted to ensure that, while conservation areas would be controlled under normal planning legislation, they would not just become unheedingly absorbed into the rest of a planning authority's area. To avoid this, three specific recommendations were made, of which it was felt that the first two could most effectively be achieved by means of the third:

- (i) that each of the conservation areas (since they are for the most part geographically homogeneous) should be treated as a single unit;
- (ii) that the expert advice of the National Parks Commission, and in appropriate cases, of the Biological Service,<sup>45</sup> is made available;

- (iii) that 'in the designation of any area as a Conservation Area' the Minister of Town and Country Planning should 'make an Order requiring the local planning authority to set up an Advisory Committee or (where two or more local planning authorities are concerned in any area), a Joint Advisory Committee' (paragraph 237).

The Advisory Committees were to be responsible only for the area co-existent with that designated, and the majority of members were always to come from the relevant local planning authorities. In addition there were to be persons nominated by the proposed National Parks Commission which, before making any nomination, should 'consult with the Biological Service, in order to secure the appointment, where necessary, of one or more persons qualified to give expert advice on the scientific problems affecting the area'. The actual number of members to be nominated by the Commission to any committee was to be left up to the Minister, and to depend very largely on the scale or difficulty of technical and scientific problems in each area (paragraphs 235–42). The National Parks Commission was not only to provide technical, but also financial assistance in conservation areas, 'where special standards of planning involve claims for compensation, notably for the removal or mitigation of existing undesirable development' (paragraph 247).

In addition to a general advisory role, the new committees were to have specific functions in relation to town and country planning:

We recommend, also, that the Minister should have power to require the local planning authorities concerned to consult the Advisory Committee on the drawing up of development plans for a Conservation Area, or to refer to them all or any class of applications for permission to develop land arising within its boundaries; and further to require the local planning authorities, before giving a decision on any such case contrary to the advice of the Advisory Committee, to refer the case for decision to the Minister (paragraph 240).

The last part of this recommendation, in particular, would have given the advisory committees some sanction in local planning which their purely advisory role did not allow.

The recommendations concerning the establishment and administration of the national parks were considerably more elaborate than those for conservation areas, as would be expected, but the care with which the latter scheme was spelled out is an indication of the importance the Committee attributed to it.

The Hobhouse Report ended with some estimates of expenditure. Capital expenditure by the National Parks Commission over the first ten years was expected to amount to £9 250 000, virtually all of which would be spent in the national parks. Only an unspecified proportion of the £3 million set aside for the 'Removal or Mitigation of Disfigurements in National Parks and Conservation Areas' would be available for the latter. Under the head of recurrent expenditure, however, conservation areas were initially to receive £50 000, rising to £200 000 per annum when the scheme was fully operative (paragraph 318). It was proposed that this money should be spent in the form of grants 'to local authorities and voluntary

and other bodies for landscape improvement and the promotion of popular open-air enjoyment in Conservation Areas. Such grants would assist them in meeting compensation for planning restrictions under the new Bill (1947 Town and Country Planning) and in the provision of holiday accommodation, footpaths and other recreational facilities.' The report pointed out that conservation areas covered almost twice as much land as the national parks and that many of them, particularly on the coast, were very vulnerable to undesirable development. It went on 'it would be fair to say that a limit could hardly be set to the amount that might be spent on their protection and improvement. At the same time, we do not propose that the treatment of these areas should be on the same scale as in the National Parks.' The annual budget allowance for all the areas was therefore approximately one third of that for the parks.

The concluding paragraph of the Hobhouse Report contained a note of determined enthusiasm in the belief that 'we have set out a scheme for the protection of landscape beauty and the encouragement of open air recreation in the wild and unspoilt country of England and Wales which will be a great national investment . . .' (paragraph 322).

#### COMMENT

Despite the growing recognition in official circles in the 1940s that something should be done about beautiful areas of countryside over and above any legislation specifically for national parks, problems still remained. Firstly there was little in the way of active support from the national parks movement itself, particularly from the SCNP which directed all its efforts towards achieving its national park objectives. Although Dower was the first to list possible areas for a different designation, they aroused little interest among those giving evidence to the Hobhouse Committee. Secondly there was the confusion over objectives arising largely from the link between the Hobhouse and Huxley Committees. It is clear from its deliberations that the Hobhouse Committee saw protection of landscape as primarily important for amenity and recreation reasons, but it was required to arrive at a compromise recommendation. In the final Report conservation areas were to be protected mainly for their wider interest for nature conservation and only when their nearness to population centres dictated it should they also be places of recreation.

Even so the Hobhouse Committee maintained that conservation areas should have a definite status within the administrative framework of the country, and saw them as an essential corollary to the national parks. It is possible, however, that the Hobhouse Committee was being unrealistic in its attempt to give wide scope for consultation on developments within conservation areas and protection from undue development to such a potentially large total area of land. The Committee itself recognised that the aims of the conservation areas would have to be weighed in the balance with other legitimate aims of government (paragraph 244) and the Minister reinforced this in 1949 when he pointed out in the House that the proposed national parks and conservation areas together amounted to twenty-five per cent of England and Wales:<sup>46</sup> 'We have to be extremely careful how far we sterilise an area of that size. Those areas must be used to maintain the economic life of the community. It may be inevitable that different uses of land should exist

cheek by jowl'—but 'by preserving and developing the beautiful parts of our countryside we are seeking to promote happiness for ordinary men and women.' He ended with a phrase that has passed into history:

This is not just a Bill. It is a people's charter . . . With it the countryside is theirs to preserve, to cherish, to enjoy and to make their own.

How the Hobhouse proposals for conservation areas were worked out in the 1949 Act will now be considered.

### ***AONBs and the National Parks Act 1949***

It took two years for the recommendations of the Hobhouse Committee to be transformed into Part I of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill 1949. The sections of that Bill referring to AONBs went through the recorded parliamentary process virtually without mention and certainly without any detailed discussion. Only one specific reference was made in the Second Reading Debate when Mr Chetwynd (Member for Stockton-on-Tees) noted that the conservation areas of the Hobhouse Report were now called 'areas of outstanding natural beauty, which for one reason or another, are not classified as national parks'. He went on: 'Because they will be nearer and easier of access to large centres of population I think we ought to have from the Minister some idea of what his proposals are in this direction. Is it proposed to establish the 52 conservation areas which were proposed by the Hobhouse Committee? . . . Could my right honourable Friend tell us about his plans in this matter, because it is of great importance to those people who cannot get to the major national parks?'<sup>47</sup>

Mr King, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Town and Country Planning, sidestepped Mr Chetwynd's question when he replied to the debate for the government. He referred to the Hobhouse Report, paragraphs 46 and 47, and after reading out paragraph 47<sup>48</sup> he made the bald statement: 'Apart from the dropping of Conservation Areas, which we all seem to have accepted, I see nothing in that which we have not already done'.<sup>49</sup>

From a study of the documents of the time it has not been possible to ascertain at what point everyone accepted that the name 'Conservation Area' should be dropped, or why. Certainly no queries of any kind were raised on AONBs during the meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee;<sup>50</sup> the relevant clauses were passed without discussion. The transformation of the recommendations of the Hobhouse Committee to these clauses will now be considered under five headings: purpose; administration; provision for consultation; financial provision; and designation procedure and choice of areas.

#### **PURPOSE**

While there had been increasing recognition over the years of the need to have another type of designated landscape other than national parks, the role of these other areas had never been satisfactorily decided. It does seem, however, that the general trend from Addison to Dower was to move away from recreation as the primary objective towards a more preservationist role. The deliberations of the Hobhouse Committee on the other hand show that they were originally in no doubt

that open-air enjoyment by the public should be important in conservation areas,<sup>51</sup> but this aspect was later weakened by the virtual amalgamation of the Huxley Committee's suggestions for conservation areas with the Hobhouse Committee's suggestions for areas of national landscape value.

The Hobhouse Report, then, saw conservation areas as standing between the national *parks* that needed a high degree of positive management, and the national nature *reserves* which needed close scientific control (paragraph 227). The Report states:

Whilst it is implicit in the title of Conservation Areas that the protection of their natural beauty should be the first concern, nevertheless in some of these areas, or in parts of them, expansion or improvement of holiday accommodation and facilities for open-air enjoyment of the countryside will undoubtedly be desirable. We have in mind in particular the provision of carefully sited and well-designed hostels and camping grounds, of local Nature Reserves, and of footpaths and access for ramblers (paragraph 248).

The Committee envisaged that generally it would be those conservation areas accessible to towns and cities that would require these facilities so that people could 'visit and explore their Conservation Areas in shorter periods of leisure' (paragraph 232).

The Huxley Report, as one would expect, was more concerned with the preservation of the existing landscape character of conservation areas than with their recreational aspects. Twenty-seven of the Hobhouse conservation areas were considered to be of sufficient importance that they were indexed in the Huxley Report in their entirety as 'scientific areas' and, in addition, twenty-six of the proposed National Nature Reserves fell within the boundaries of eighteen of the fifty-two conservation areas.<sup>52</sup> The Committee did not claim that scientific considerations should have an overriding voice in conservation areas, but it did recommend that local authorities should recognise the importance of nature conservation, and that they should be empowered to designate nature conservation as the land use of certain areas (paragraphs 236 and 239).

How, in the event, did the 1949 Act define the role of AONBs? It is necessary to consult three sections of the Act in order to be sure. Section 88 (2) states:

Section eleven of this Act, so far as it confers powers for preserving and enhancing natural beauty, shall apply as aforesaid.

Section 11 (1) states:

A local planning authority whose area consists of or includes the whole or part of a National Park shall have power, subject to the provisions of this section, to take all such action as appear to him expedient for the accomplishment of the purposes specified in subsection (1) of section five of this Act in relation to their area or so much thereof as is comprised in the Park.

Section 5 (1) states:

The provisions of this part of this Act shall have effect for the purpose of preserving and enhancing natural beauty of the areas specified in the next

following subsection (National Parks) and for the purpose of promoting their enjoyment by the public.

In other words, the combination of Section 88 (2) with Section 11 (1) and Section 5 (1) has the effect of making a very clear and fundamental distinction between the national parks and AONBs. While preservation and enhancement of their natural beauty is to be encouraged in both, enjoyment by the public is to be promoted only in the national parks. Those who had seen regional reserves and their successors as places where provision would be made for the mass of urban people to enjoy the countryside were disappointed, but those like the Huxley Committee who were much more strongly in favour of preservation must have been pleased.

#### ADMINISTRATION

Perhaps the most glaring difference between the Hobhouse proposals for conservation areas and the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty of the 1949 Act lies in the area of administration. Hobhouse recommended that planning should be carried out in conservation areas by the local planning authorities and, to ensure that they should be 'comprehensively treated as a single unit', he recommended that the Minister should make an Order requiring the local authority to set up an Advisory Committee with members from the local planning authority (authorities) and persons nominated by the National Parks Commission (paragraphs 235–139).

The 1949 Act follows Hobhouse by making AONBs the responsibility of local authorities, but makes no provision for the setting up of Advisory Committees nor has there been any subsequent Ministerial Order. The reason for this is almost certainly the fact that a long and often bitter debate had gone on about the form of administration that should be set up for the National Parks,<sup>53</sup> which revolved round a basic choice between control by a central authority answerable to, and receiving its funds from, central government, and control by the local planning authorities using their powers under the various planning acts, with perhaps some additional funds from central government. The Minister himself was in a difficult position. In the Town and Country Planning Act 1947 he had just created new and larger planning authorities with considerably increased powers and so he was obviously reluctant to dismantle any part of that new system. For him to give full powers to a National Parks Commission so soon would be tantamount to telling twenty out of the sixty-three county councils that they could not be trusted to do their job and their authority must be handed over to a non-elected body.<sup>54</sup>

In the event, Mr Silkin decided to set up a National Parks Commission which would have an advisory role only, and to leave administration for individual parks in the hands of the local authorities. In doing this he declared that he had 'complete confidence in the Act of 1947'.<sup>55</sup> As this system bore a strong resemblance to that originally recommended by Hobhouse for conservation areas it was inevitable that any special arrangements that might be made for AONBs would be much weaker. What happened was that the special arrangements disappeared altogether, and AONBs were left to come under the general planning laws.

The 1947 Planning Act, by which Mr Silkin set such store, had provisions within it

under which local authorities could set up special sub-committees of the county planning committee and co-opt on to it outside members with special knowledge. Some counties have in fact done this but not to the extent that Hobhouse would clearly have wished.

#### PROVISION FOR CONSULTATION

The Hobhouse Committee recommended that the Minister should have powers to require local authorities to consult the proposed conservation area (or AONB) advisory committees when drawing up development plans covering such an area and when considering applications for development within the area's boundaries. By this means it was expected that development planning would be consistent within each conservation area despite individual local authority boundaries. In any case where the local authority wanted to give a decision contrary to the committee's advice the matter should be referred to the Minister (paragraph 240).

As AONB advisory committees were not set up by the Act, no such procedure could be followed; what was substituted by way of consultation was very much weaker. Under the Act local planning authorities were required to consult the National Parks Commission (NPC) when preparing or amending a development plan (Section 9), when considering what action should be taken about access to open country (Section 61 [1]), and before making any access agreements in an AONB (Section 64 [5] and [6]). The authorities had to take the NPC's observations into account, but there is no suggestion that a contrary decision should automatically be referred to the Minister. With regard to the question of development within an AONB, the Act only says that a local planning authority *may* consult the Commission, and the Commission is required to give advice on such occasions (Section 6 [4] e).

#### FINANCIAL PROVISION

The Hobhouse Committee recommended that grants should be available to carry out the purpose of conservation areas (paragraphs 247, 157–58). Under Section 97 of the 1949 Act, Exchequer grants of up to 75 per cent could be made to local authorities for work in AONBs, as follows:

- (a) securing the discontinuance or modification of uses of land and the alteration or removal of buildings, upon payment of compensation (in accordance with S26 and S27 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947);
- (b) planting of trees, or carrying out of other work for the restoration and improvement of unsightly derelict land (S89 [1] and [2], 1949 Act);
- (c) payment of compensation under Tree Preservation Orders (S28, 1947 Act);
- (d) the provision of public access to 'open country' by the making of access agreements or orders, or the acquisition of land (Part V, 1949 Act);
- (e) the appointment of wardens on land subject to access agreements or orders, or which is owned by the local authorities (S92, 1949 Act).

It can be seen from the grants (d) and (e) that the public was not to be *excluded* from AONBs, but whereas all the above grants were available in national parks, the parks



could also obtain grants for the positive promotion of public enjoyment, such as the provision of accommodation, meals, refreshments and parking places.

#### DESIGNATION PROCEDURE AND CHOICE OF AREAS

The Hobhouse Committee made no particular recommendations about the procedure for designation of a conservation area beyond suggesting that it should be agreed jointly by the NPC and the local authority and submitted to the Minister for final approval (paragraph 234). The enabling clause in the 1949 Act, Section 87, follows that general pattern:

87 (1) The Commission may, by order made as respects any area in England and Wales, not being in a National Park, which appears to them to be of such outstanding natural beauty that it is desirable that the provisions of this Act relating to such areas should apply thereto, designate the area for the purposes of this Act as an area of outstanding natural beauty; and references in this Act to such an area shall be construed as references to an area designated under this section.

It should be noted that there is no *requirement* for the NPC to set up AONBs.

The remaining subsections of Section 87 refer to the manner in which designations are to take place, requiring considerable consultation between the Commission and all relevant local authorities, the wider public and central government before submission of a Designation Order to the Minister for final confirmation.

As far as the choice of areas is concerned, the Hobhouse Committee proposed fifty-two areas for designation as conservation areas. The list included a wide variety of landscape types all of which were noted for great natural beauty or special interest and most of which were of substantial extent. The list was drawn up in consultation with the Huxley Committee and many of the areas included land of outstanding scientific value.<sup>56</sup> The 1949 Act left the actual choice of AONBs to the discretion of the National Parks Committee in consultation with local authorities and no criteria were laid down, just that designation should appear to be 'desirable'.

#### COMMENT

There can be little doubt that the areas of outstanding natural beauty in the 1949 Act were only a pale shadow of the conservation areas recommended by the Hobhouse Committee. A number of suggestions can be put forward to explain this.

Firstly, the last few years of the battle for recognition for the national parks, of which AONBs were a part, was fought against a background first of war, then of difficult peacetime reconstruction. When the Hobhouse Committee reported in 1947 the nation was in a parlous economic state, with a serious balance of payments deficit, very low reserves, crises in the supply of wheat and fuel, and strikes in such areas as the docks and the coal mines. In addition, a great deal of parliamentary time was being taken up with post-war legislation, including many expensive measures such as the nationalisation of several industries. Any apparently unnecessary expense in the area of countryside preservation and

recreation had to be looked at very carefully against this backcloth of financial stringencies, and it is evident that AONBs could not figure very highly in a list of national priorities.

Secondly, as already mentioned, the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, with its increased powers of planning control and its new system of surveys and development plans, was looked upon by many as obviating the necessity for any special legislation for national parks, let alone the AONBs.

Thirdly, those who saw the problems facing national parks and who were committed to the fight for legislation, banded together into a formidable lobby, but there was no such group campaigning for the AONBs. It could be said that they were sacrificed for what some considered the greater cause. The Standing Committee on the National Parks, for example, discussed its recommendations for the position of conservation areas *vis-à-vis* the National Parks Commission at its meeting on 25 October 1947 and decided that the Commission 'should hold an informal status for making recommendations to the Minister upon any threats which might arise in Conservation Areas, but that the defined responsibility of the Commission . . . should not be extended formally to embrace the Conservation Areas as well as the National Parks'.<sup>57</sup>

Even so, there were some National Parks supporters who wondered if even what *they* achieved was worth it. Whereas Mr Silkin called the Act a 'people's charter', Mr Keeling remarked that the government mountain had brought forth 'only a very small mouse' and he doubted whether it was worthwhile even having a Bill for such shadowy objects as those contained in Parts I and II.<sup>58</sup>

If the national park supporters were disappointed, and the fact that the arguments concerning park administration have continued even to the present day shows that they were, then those interested in the fate of conservation areas must have been more so, particularly in relation to the practical problems involved in attempting to treat each AONB as a cohesive whole.

Firstly, even if an AONB Advisory Committee were set up under the terms of the 1947 Planning Act the local authority was under no obligation to consult it, nor was there any sanction against totally ignoring its advice. Secondly, although the National Parks Commission had to be consulted over development plans, it was unlikely either to be able to give the requisite amount of time or have the necessary local knowledge to be able to deal really effectively with each one. Thirdly, where AONBs fall into more than one planning area, it would be most unusual for each of these areas to be at the same stage of development planning, and therefore the Commission would be unable to judge each plan in relation to its neighbours and see how the AONB would be affected as a whole. And finally, the likelihood of sufficient additional funding being available to give AONBs special treatment at a time of general economic difficulty, was small.

### *Areas of outstanding natural beauty since 1949*

#### DESIGNATION AND REVIEW

Immediately following the passing of the Act the National Parks Commission (NPC) set about the task of designating the ten national parks so it was not until the

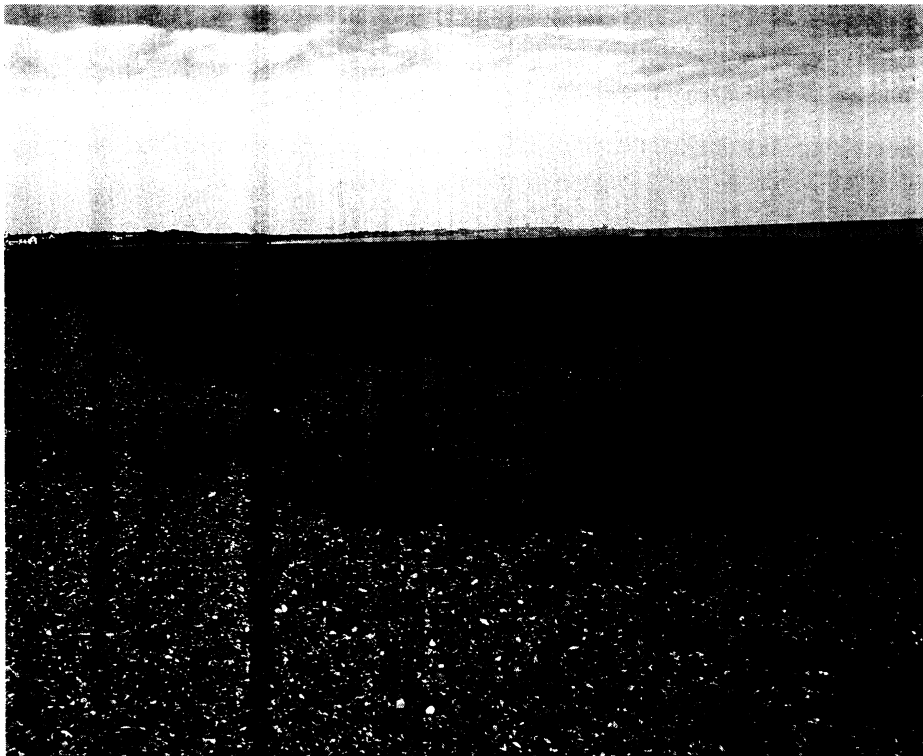


Fig. 1 Bardsey Island and the Llyn AONB (photograph: Ray Woolmore [Countryside Commission])

Fig. 2 Benacre Ness, Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB (photograph: Suffolk County Planning Department)

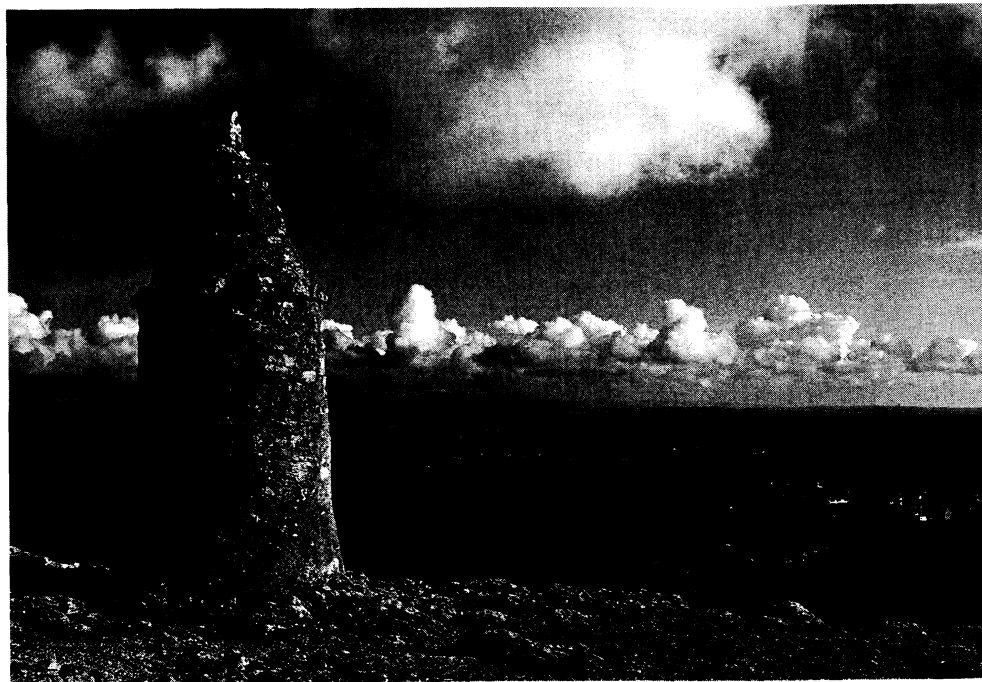


Fig. 3 Neolithic portal dolmen and nineteenth-century mine, Lanyon Quoit, Cornwall AONB (photograph: Brian Shipman [Cornwall County Planning Department])

Fig. 4 Jubilee Monument, Arnside and Silverdale AONB (photograph: John Fielding [Countryside Management Service, Arnside and Silverdale AONB])

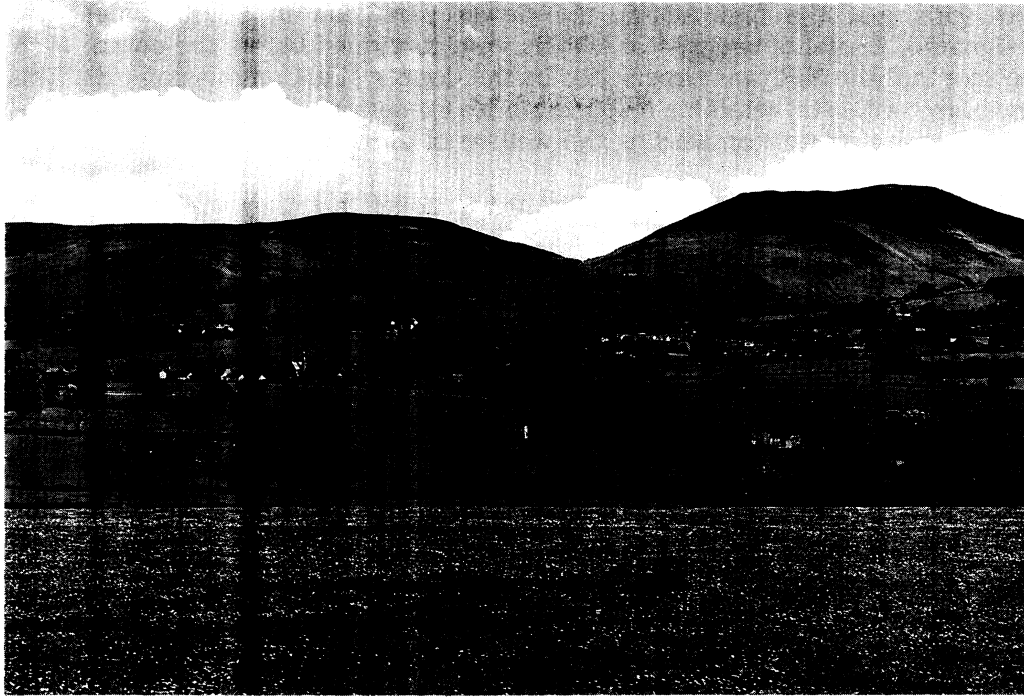


Fig. 5 Bwlch Pen Barras, Clwydian Range AONB (photograph: Clwyd Countryside Service)



Fig. 6 North Pennines AONB (photograph: Peter Foreman [North Pennines Project, Durham])

mid-1950s that the first AONB, the Gower peninsula in South Wales, was designated. A total of twenty-five AONBs were confirmed before the end of 1968, the year that the NPC was superseded by the Countryside Commission (CC). This new body, while still retaining responsibilities for national parks and AONBs, was given a wider role encompassing the welfare of all countryside in England and Wales.

The NPC began designating AONBs in the belief that they would enjoy 'the special protection which it is the object of the Act to afford',<sup>59</sup> but by the end of the 1950s some doubts were beginning to creep in about the effectiveness of AONB designation. In particular the NPC was worried about areas of coastline which were coming under threat from development.<sup>60</sup> As a result, nine of the fifteen AONBs confirmed in the 1960s were coastal and stretches of coastline formed part of another two (Table 1).

The CC completed the programme previously proposed by the NPC, bringing the total to thirty-two, and then in the early 1970s conducted an internal review to consider the position of AONBs and possible future designations. Although it had been suggested that the need no longer existed, the evidence of support from local authorities and the general public persuaded the Commission that there was still value in the designation and it therefore proposed another ten to fifteen areas.<sup>61</sup>

In 1978 the CC commissioned Kenneth Himsworth to carry out a wider reappraisal of the successes and shortcomings of AONBs. From his study several issues came through very clearly: that many people were ignorant even of the existence of AONBs; that financial problems were frequently uppermost in the minds of those responsible for 'preservation and enhancement of natural beauty'; that development control should not act to the disbenefit of people living and working in AONBs; and that, while recreational provision may not be an aim, it is frequently a reality that needs to be recognised and managed. A new policy statement for AONBs, taking on board much of the thrust of Himsworth's Report, was published by the CC in 1980.<sup>62</sup>

The changing direction of rural policies since 1980, and the fortieth anniversary of the 1949 Act prompted the CC to commission a further review of AONBs in 1989. This study, carried out by Gerald Smart and Margaret Anderson, considered not only AONBs themselves but their relationship to the wider countryside.<sup>63</sup> They found that the fundamental problems have changed little since Himsworth's Report in 1980, although many have intensified, but that the important national changes in political and economic goals for rural policy that began in the mid-1980s now seem likely to provide new opportunities for the greater achievement of AONB objectives. Following this Report the Commission's AONB Policy Statement 1990 reconfirmed the value of the AONB designation, but also recognised that its purpose is still not well known or understood. The main priorities of the new policy are therefore to raise awareness amongst all those with an interest in managing and using land in AONBs, to encourage cooperative action and to find adequate financing from government and other sources in order to realise AONB objectives more positively in the future.<sup>64</sup>

## AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

333

Table 1 *Designated areas of outstanding natural beauty*

AONB	Confirmation of order	Area sq. km.
Gower	1956	189
Quantock Hills	1957	99
Lleyn	1957	155
Northumberland Coast	1958	129
Surrey Hills	1958	414
Cannock Chase	1958	68
Shropshire Hills	1959	777
Dorset	1959	1036
Malvern Hills	1959	104
Cornwall	1959	957
Camel Estuary (extension to Cornwall)	1983	
North Devon	1960	171
South Devon	1960	332
East Hampshire	1962	391
East Devon	1963	267
Isle of Wight	1963	189
Chichester Harbour	1964	75
Forest of Bowland	1964	803
Solway Coast	1964	107
Chilterns	1965	833
Chilterns Variation	1990	
Sussex Downs	1966	981
Cotswolds	1966	1507
Anglesey	1967	215
South Hampshire Coast	1967	78
Norfolk Coast	1968	450
Kent Downs	1968	845
Suffolk Coast and Heaths	1970	391
Dedham Vale	1970	72
Dedham Vale extension	1978	
Wye Valley	1971	325
North Wessex Downs	1972	1738
Mendip Hills	1972	206
Mendip Hills Variation	1989	
Arnside and Silverdale	1972	75
Lincolnshire Wolds	1973	560
Isles of Scilly	1976	16
High Weald	1983	1450
Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs	1983	960
Clwydian Range	1985	156
Howardian Hills	1987	205
North Pennines	1988	1998
TOTAL		19324 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 12.8 per cent of the total area of England and Wales.

## AONBs AND THE WIDER COUNTRYSIDE

This greater stress on the importance of AONBs in the 1990s brings into focus the idea that since 1949 AONBs should possibly have been seen not so much in relation to the national parks but more in relation to the wider countryside. Since the 1940s all the countryside of England and Wales has been subject to rising pressure from the demands of economic, social and technological change. Most noticeable are the results of the modernisation of agriculture, the continuing spread of urban development and the increased demand for rural recreation.<sup>65</sup> Because of the inherent differences in the landscapes of AONBs and national parks, the effects of these trends has also tended to be different.

The precedence accorded to agriculture over virtually all other rural activities since the 1940s has meant that local authorities have had little control over farming practices even in the designated areas. The political and financial support for agriculture that has transformed the industry has therefore also had an effect on many landscapes. In the parks the major landscape battles have been to maintain the extensive and traditional agricultural practices that give openness to the moorlands and mountains and to resist intensification and enclosure. In AONBs, where the better quality of the land means that agriculture was usually more intensive than in the parks, technological advances have served to increase intensity even further and the landscape changes have been similar to those that have occurred throughout the wider lowland countryside.<sup>66</sup> With virtually no relevant powers, local authorities in AONBs have been unable to take positive steps to control these changes.

Control over urban growth, on the other hand, has been the main protection weapon available to local governments and it is generally recognised that they have been largely successful in preventing urban sprawl and steering major developments away from AONBs.<sup>67</sup> It was never intended, however, that AONBs should be sterilised, and building has always continued to occur particularly in response to the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities.<sup>68</sup>

Coming between agricultural revolution and urban expansion has been the other rising pressure on AONBs since 1949, that of recreation. Unlike national parks, provision for public enjoyment is not a statutory aim of AONBs, but people have nonetheless been visiting these areas for their beauty in increasing numbers and the CC has had to respond to help local authorities with grant support specifically channelled for AONB purposes.<sup>69</sup> As Himsworth pointed out,<sup>70</sup> AONBs are not in fact exempt from the requirements for recreational provision laid on the rest of the countryside by the 1949 Act, particularly for access. It can also be argued that in AONBs it is even more important to recognise and respond to people pressure if the scenery is to be protected and the main aims achieved.

Perhaps the major disappointment in terms of either linking AONBs with national parks or in differentiating them from the wider countryside lies in the lack of arrangements for the planning, financing and administration of each AONB as a cohesive whole. From Hobhouse's original suggestions for joint advisory committees (IACs) to the present day, first the NPC and subsequently the CC have



exhorted local authorities to establish good liaison between themselves and, more importantly, to set up JACs.<sup>71</sup> The study by Smart and Anderson<sup>72</sup> showed that, generally, relations between authorities were good but there are still only twelve AONBs that have JACs or an equivalent organisation. Although there are always problems with such committees, most notably logistical ones, the recent trend towards greater integration in rural policies may signal a change in attitude, and the need highlighted in the Policy Statement 1990 for concerted action to raise awareness of AONBs in order to achieve funding for their management and conservation may result in a welcome increase in joint committees in the future.

### Conclusion

There are now thirty-eight AONBs covering 12.8 per cent of England and Wales (Fig. 7) and the Countryside Commission expects to designate another four or five before ending the designation programme. This demonstrates the high degree of commitment to the *idea* of designation since the 1949 Act. Forty years on, however, it is not clear that commitment to the *objectives* of AONBs has in the past been nearly as great.

The history of AONBs given above demonstrates that AONBs have always been strongly linked with the national parks. Nonetheless, they have never achieved the recognition from government, in terms of financial or administrative support, that the reasons for their designation seem to imply. Why this is so may well be to do not only with the strength of the national parks lobby, but also with the differences in landscape types. The national parks represent the finest examples of upland landscape. While each has its own characteristics, Dartmoor being very different from the Lake District for example, they nevertheless are a group of landscapes that is relatively homogeneous. AONBs, on the other hand, represent the great diversity and beauty of mainly lowland landscapes. With the exception of the North Pennines and the Forest of Bowland, which in many ways mirror the scenery of the parks, AONBs are either softer, more rolling landscapes of intensive farming and improved pasture, deciduous woodland, villages and small market towns, or are coastal scenery of cliffs and bays, sand dunes, marshes and mudflats. What differentiates these landscapes from the wider countryside in which they lie is that their special beauty has been recognised by designation and by the accompanying charge that they be preserved and enhanced.

The designation implies high quality. When something of quality is damaged, the loss is greater than where quality was lower in the first place. This is seen, for example, in the world of antiques. The problem for local authorities has been to protect the quality when they have had little if any control over the main agent for change, agriculture, and when they may not always see AONBs as their main priority for countryside funding when resources are scarce.

In seeking national resources—recognition, legislation and finance—AONBs have for the last forty years been competing with the national parks and to a large extent they have lost. Failure has in great part been due to their image as second-

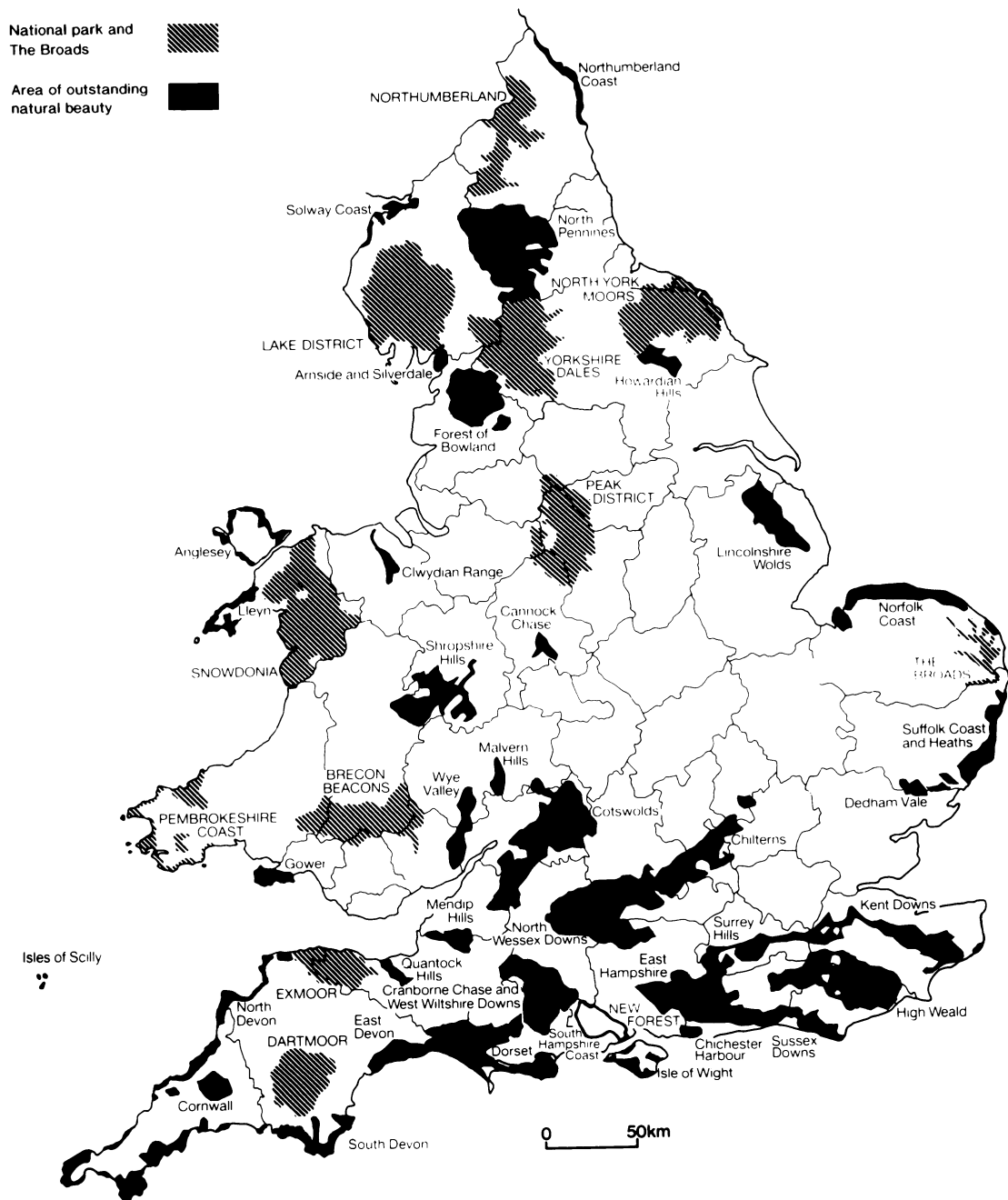


Fig. 7 Areas of outstanding natural beauty as at 1 August 1990 (reproduced by permission of the Countryside Commission)

grade national parks. Perhaps the time has now come for AONBs to throw off this erroneous image and to promote themselves for what they really are—first-grade landscapes *in their own right*. They are ‘stars’ in the diversity of English and Welsh

landscapes whose special qualities have caused them to be singled out for special treatment. Should this *now* be the policy and resources emphasis if 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' is to be a credible designation on the fiftieth anniversary of the Act in 1999?

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Blunden, John and Curry, Nigel (eds.), *A People's Charter*, London, HMSO, 1990.

2 In April 1989 the Countryside Commission asked Gerald Smart and Margaret Anderson to review the planning and management of AONBs since 1980. This report has been published as Smart, Gerald and Anderson, Margaret, *Planning and Management of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty* (CCP295), Cheltenham, The Commission, 1990. Later in 1989 the National Parks Review Panel began work under the chairmanship of Professor Ron Edwards.

3 Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)*, Cmd 7121, London, HMSO, 1947, para. 44, popularly known as the Hobhouse Report after its chairman Sir Arthur Hobhouse.

4 The definitive history of the national parks movement can be found in Cherry, Gordon E. E., *Environmental Planning 1939–1969*, Volume II, *National Parks and Recreation in the Countryside*, London, HMSO, 1975. More recent works include MacEwen, Malcolm and MacEwen, Ann, *National Parks: Conservation or Cosmetics?*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1982; Council for National Parks, *Fifty Years for National Parks*, London, The Council, 1986; MacEwen, Malcolm and MacEwan, Ann, *Green prints for the countryside?*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1987; and Blunden and Curry, op. cit., N1.

5 For example in Cherry, op. cit., N4.

6 Ministry of Health, *Seventh Annual Report* (1925–26), Cmd 2724, London, HMSO, 1926.

7 *Report of the National Parks Committee*, Cmd 3851, London, HMSO, 1931.

8 Ibid., paras 13 and 39.

9 Ibid., paras 38 and 39.

10 Best, Robin H., *Land Use and Living Space*, London, Methuen, 1981.

11 Cherry, op. cit., N4.

12 See, for example, questions by G. Mander in the *House of Commons Debates*, London, HMSO, for 1933, vol. 280, col. 753, 10 July and for 1935, vol. 229, col. 199, 12 March.

13 Ministry of Health, *Report on the Preservation of the Countryside* 1938, London, HMSO, 1939.

14 Ibid.

15 See, for example, C. Ede in *House of Commons Debates*, London, HMSO, 1936, vol. 318, col. 2114, 9 December.

16 Standing Committee on National Parks, *The Case for National Parks in Great Britain*, London, The Standing Committee, 1938.

17 Ibid., p. 8.

18 See, for example, The Standing Committee on National Parks, Minutes of a Meeting, 1941, 8 August, and also Cherry, op. cit., N4.

19 Ministry of Works and Planning, *Report of the Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas*, Cmd 6378, London, HMSO, 1942.

20 Ibid., para. 160.

21 Ibid., para. 175.

22 Ibid., para. 178.

23 The importance of the Scott Report in encouraging 'agricultural fundamentalism' has been increasingly recognised; see for example Cherry, op. cit., N4 and Davidson, Joan and Wibberley, Gerald P., *Planning and the Rural Environment*, Oxford, Pergamon, 1977.

24 Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *National Parks in England and Wales: Report by John Dower*, Cmd 6628, London, HMSO, 1945.

25 Mander, G. in *House of Commons Debates*, London, HMSO, 1945, vol. 409, col. 774ff, 30 March.

26 Dugdale, J. in *House of Commons Debates*, London, HMSO, 1945, vol. 409, cols. 778–79, 30 March.

27 Ministry of Town and Country Planning, op. cit., N3.

28 The files of the Hobhouse Committee's deliberations are lodged in the Public Record Office under the reference HLG/93/ . . .

29 HLG/93/3, Agenda and Minutes of the 1st to 4th series of Meetings, 1945, 1 August.

30 Ibid., 1945, 16–17 October.

31 Ibid., 1945, 20–21 November.

32 HLG/93/36, Routine correspondence with the Chairman.

33 HLG/93/5, Agenda and Minutes of the 11th and 15th series of Meetings, 1946, July to October.

34 Ibid.

- 35 HLG/93/4, Agenda and Minutes of the 4th to 10th series of Meetings, 1945–1946, December to June.
- 36 HLG/93/5, op. cit., N33, 12–13 September.
- 37 Ministry of Town and Country Planning, op. cit., N3.
- 38 HLG/93/3, op. cit., N29, 16–17 October.
- 39 HLG/93/36, op. cit., N32, 20 February.
- 40 HLG/93/37, Routine correspondence with the Chairman.
- 41 See Cherry, op. cit., N4, pp. 54–55.
- 42 HLG/93/37, op. cit., N40.
- 43 HLG/93/41–43, Files of written evidence from Voluntary and other Organisations to the National Parks Committee.
- 44 Ministry of Town and Country Planning, op. cit., N3.
- 45 The setting up of the Biological Service to provide scientific expertise for all nature conservation activities was recommended in the Huxley Report: Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Conservation of Nature in England and Wales: Report of the Wildlife Conservation Special Committee*, Cmd 7122, London, HMSO, 1947.
- 46 Silkin, J. in *House of Commons Debates*, London, HMSO, vol. 464, cols 1466, 1485 and 1493, 1949, 31 March.
- 47 Chetwynd, G. R. in *House of Commons Debates*, London, HMSO, vol. 463, col. 1637, 1949, 1 April.
- 48 Paragraph 47 of the Hobhouse Report reads: 'It will be the Commission's responsibility to frame policy for the planning and management of the Parks, to see that it is fully and effectively applied, and to supervise the expenditure of money for this purpose. They will be further responsible for the provision of advice and guidance and the allocation of monetary grants, to the local authorities concerned with the planning and management of Conservation Areas' (Ministry of Town and Country Planning, op. cit., N3).
- 49 King, E. M. in *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 463, col. 1658, 1941, 1 April.
- 50 *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons Official Report, Standing Committees Session 1948–49. Standing Committee A, National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill, cols 478–1083, London, HMSO, 1949.
- 51 See, for example, HLG/93/5, op. cit., N33.
- 52 Ministry of Town and Country Planning, op. cit., N3, Appendix 6, para. 16 and Appendix 8, para. 3.
- 53 See particularly the *Parliamentary Debates*, op. cit., N50; Cherry, op. cit., N4; MacEwen and MacEwen, op. cit., N4; and Blunden and Curry, 1990, op. cit., N1.
- 54 See Cherry, op. cit., N4.
- 55 Silkin, J. in *Parliamentary Debates*, op. cit., N50.
- 56 Ministry of Town and Country Planning, op. cit., N3, paras 229–33 and Appendix C.
- 57 Standing Committee on National Parks, Minutes, op. cit., N18.
- 58 Keeling, E. H. in *House of Commons Debates*, op. cit., N46, vol. 464, col. 1534, 1949, 31 March.
- 59 National Parks Commission, *Annual Report*, London, HMSO, 1956.
- 60 National Parks Commission, *Annual Report*, London, HMSO, 1961.
- 61 Countryside Commission, *Annual Report 1972–73*, London, HMSO, 1973.
- 62 This review of AONBs produced a number of related documents from the Countryside Commission: *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty—a Discussion Paper*, CCP116, 1977; *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty—a report of a one-day Conference*, CCP125, 1979; *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty—a response to the Countryside Commission's Discussion Paper*, CCP137, 1980; *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty—a Policy Statement*, CCP141, 1980 (subsequently reissued with a supporting statement by the Secretary of State for the Environment as CCP157, 1983); and Kenneth Hims-worth's report published as *A Review of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty*, CCP140, 1980. All reports were published in Cheltenham by the Commission.
- 63 Smart, Gerald and Anderson, Margaret, op. cit., N2. See also AONB Conference 1989, *Report of Proceedings* (CCD59), Cheltenham, The Commission, 1990.
- 64 Countryside Commission, *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty—A Policy Statement 1990* (CCP302), Cheltenham, The Commission, 1990.
- 65 Smart and Anderson, op. cit., N2.
- 66 Anderson, Margaret, 'The Land Pattern of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales', *Landscape Planning*, 7 (1) 1980, pp. 1–22.
- 67 See for example, Anderson, Margaret, 'Planning Policies and Development Control in the Sussex Downs AONB', *Town Planning Review*, 52 (1) 1981, pp. 5–25.
- 68 The Countryside Commission, CCP157, op. cit., N62.
- 69 The Countryside Commission *Annual Report for 1973–74* spelled out the Commission's priorities for grant aid to AONBs and subse-

quent policies have continued to recognise the need for support for recreational management; see The Countryside Commission CCP157, op. cit., N62, and CCP302, op. cit., N64.

70 The Countryside Commission, CCP140, op. cit., N62.

71 See the National Parks Commission, *Annual Report*, London, HMSO, 1966; The Countryside Commission, *Annual Report* 1973–74,

Cheltenham, The Commission, 1974, Appendix 14c; The Countryside Commission, CCP157, op. cit., N62, and CCP302, op. cit., N64.

72 Smart, G. and Anderson, M., op. cit., N2. This report is the result of an independent study by the consultants and neither it nor this article necessarily represent the views of the Countryside Commission. The conclusions of this article are the author's own.