

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

May 2019



## Contents

Executive Summary .....	2
1. Key Findings .....	4
2. Project Outline .....	6
3. Ecosystem Approach Checklist: the AONB experience .....	9
4. Next steps .....	15
Appendix 1: AONBs involved in Checklist .....	17
Appendix 2: Workshop Feedback from AONBs .....	18

**Authors:** Dan Hunt, Director and Jenny Wain, Senior Consultant, Bowfell Consulting Ltd

Prepared on behalf of National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Natural England and Defra.

With thanks to the support and guidance of Liz Bridges, Natural England and Ian Marshall, National Association for AONBs.

May 2019

## 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.

During 2018-19 AONBs reviewed how they contribute towards the above target, using the Ecosystem Approach Checklist with support on good practice, tools and guidance from Natural England.

## Action and success

Utilising the Ecosystem Approach Checklist AONBs identified that they are contributing towards Outcome 1c – ie, they combine delivering for biodiversity with securing multiple benefits for people. This 'nature and people' approach to delivery applies well to AONBs and adds value to their work.

**The Ecosystem Approach Checklist enables AONBs to take stock and review their work in a systematic way and supports them to:**

- Embed natural capital and the Ecosystem Approach into their management planning.
- Think beyond an area's special qualities, linking them with natural capital and the multiple services they provide for people both within and out with 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 realise multiple benefits for nature and people.
- Better align their plans and delivery with Biodiversity 2020 as well as the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, prioritising key activities, and showing the 'value' of the landscape in ways that decision makers understand.
- Some examples of how they are doing this are:
  - Embedding natural capital and ecosystem services thinking into project development.
  - Working with partners to collate and share natural capital baseline information from projects and studies, commissioning studies to fill gaps, and integrating them into State of the AONB reports. This will help target action where it can make the biggest difference.
  - Using participatory GIS to better understand the ecosystem services that people value and develop management approaches that improve their resilience.
  - Commissioning studies to assess the economic and health benefits of AONBs and the monetary value of them.
  - Building on agri-environment schemes to increase wildlife packages that link and extend habitat corridors and protect watercourses.
  - Securing funding to undertake landscape and catchment scale habitat restoration projects with multiple partners.

## Delivering more

AONBs want to accelerate their work around natural capital and deliver more robust ecosystem services in their areas. **The Checklist has helped AONBs identify the key support required to deliver greater results for nature and people:**

- 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 for AONBs shares the ambition of the AONBs. Additional resources would allow the charity to better support AONBs in making the step change to deliver more for people and nature through ongoing engagement programmes, technical advice and guidance.

## 1. 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 the following key findings emerged.

### AONBs are making good progress to delivering more for biodiversity and people.

The Ecosystem Approach is an effective 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.

### Doing 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 **examine 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.

AONB management plans show **the critical link between the state of the natural environment, an area's special qualities and the multiple benefits being provided for people** in a variety of different ways. There is sometimes a **gap in knowledge around the value people place on the benefits that flow from an area's special qualities and natural capital**. AONBs are demonstrating how they will close this gap in the future.

Section 3 includes a **case study** of an AONB using the Ecosystem Approach Checklist as part of their management planning process - **Case Study 1**: developing the next Isles of Scilly AONB Management Plan.

### Working together

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

It enables a review of current activities across partnerships, the identification of areas where joint working will deliver more, and helps to highlight where to focus future effort and resources. AONBs are committed to raising awareness on natural capital and ecosystem services with their partners to deliver more effectively in future.

### Ecosystem Approach Checklist - lasting benefits

The AONBs found the Ecosystem Approach Checklist a very **positive tool to engage partners on combining 'people and nature' outcomes, reviewing current progress and developing future delivery plans with partners**.

All AONBs have a **suite of projects that they are planning or delivering (often with partners to improve and restore habitats as well as provide multiple ecosystem services to people and businesses**. They are looking for opportunities to develop more following the use of the Checklist.

---

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

Section 3 includes a **case study** of an AONB applying their findings from the Ecosystem Approach Checklist to develop future partnership delivery - **Case Study 2: implementing the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan.**

### Time and resources

Although time and staff resources are needed to review work using the Ecosystem Approach Checklist, it provides **a focused and structured review tool for partnerships** enabling them to take a step back from delivery to consider new approaches to integrated landscape scale delivery. AONBs see the value of approaching natural capital and biodiversity delivery in a systematic way. It helps them to **take stock of what could be done to improve connections between sectors, partners and outcomes.**

Developing their natural capital understanding and capability, and linking this to future biodiversity delivery requires action and resources. **The Checklist helps identify where best to focus limited resources to have impact,** and practically take forward the Ecosystem Approach.

Bringing like-minded organisations together builds confidence and capacity within teams. The AONBs value the support given to them by the NAAONB and Natural England during 2018/19 on this crucial area of work, and would like this support to continue. The NAAONB is well placed to deliver on this but would only be able to do so with additional financial resources and capacity. Other bodies that can 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.

## 2. Project Outline

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 them 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 Government 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 Government's *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 operating 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. 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 aims 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 reflect 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 achieving the target. The land area it operates over is contributing to the total area meeting the target i.e. it 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 the current project the Checklist was reviewed and streamlined following a pilot with 4 AONBs that concluded in June 2018 - reducing 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 the Checklist and toolkit.** This was completed in August 2018.

**Stage 3 – Natural Capital and Ecosystem Approach embedding programme.** This provided advice, support and tools to increase the capacity and confidence of AONB staff in applying natural capital thinking and the Ecosystem Approach to delivery of 'nature and people' outcomes. This will enable them to contribute more to the Biodiversity 2020 outcomes through delivery of AONB management plans, most of which were finalised in March 2019.

## Project activities

**26 AONBs participated in the programme. The key activities were:**

- ❖ 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 into their planning and delivery for the next management plan period. The workshop focused on Biodiversity 2020 and 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 shared 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 English AONBs have access to these resources.

### 3. Ecosystem Approach Checklist: the AONB experience

#### Doing more for nature and people

*Note: quotations included in this section come from AONBs who participated in the project; their individual feedback has been anonymised.*

#### **Strengthening the management plan process**

For many of the AONBs the Checklist brought a new angle to management planning. It provided a good opportunity to stand back, reflect and consider the benefits that flow from the special qualities and natural capital of an area. Although the management plan is central to AONB activities, the Checklist helped to build stronger links between an area's natural capital and special qualities and the benefits it can provide for people.

“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.”

The wider dialogue with partners on how AONB partnerships plan and deliver provided very useful insight for how future joint working could be enhanced. The Checklist is seen as a tool to help bring partnerships together and work more closely and effectively. 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 appreciate that it could help better align management plans with Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan, prioritising top activities, and showing the 'value' of the landscape in ways that decision makers understand.

### Case Study 1: developing the next Isles of Scilly AONB Management Plan

The Isles of Scilly AONB partners used the Ecosystem Approach Checklist to review and broaden their approach to their next management plan. This was the first time they have used the process to engage with natural capital and ecosystem services:

*“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 the Ecosystem Approach and natural capital principles**, and how they could be practically applied to the Isles of Scilly, including 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 that continued protection, management and/or enhancement of key natural capital assets** provides 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 they provide 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

### Addressing gaps in knowledge

The Checklist process helped AONBs identify and agree to take action on key gaps in knowledge, data and activity.

*“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.”*

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 recognise that gaps in data on natural capital and ecosystem services are a key issue that needs to be addressed. Data is often only available at a national character area or local authority scale, and isn't specifically cut to AONB boundaries or AONB boundaries plus their settings. AONBs that straddle counties and countries, 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 so that it can 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.”

### **Understanding benefits for people**

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 take this further by engaging more with their communities to find out what they valued and discuss 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 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 focus 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 involved is 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 input. All intend to use the Checklist to help engage more staff and partners in the coming months through technical officers' groups and joint advisory committees.

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.

“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, 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.

### Ecosystem Approach Checklist - lasting benefits

The concept of joined-up delivery that achieves a range of outcomes for landscapes, environment and people is not new to the AONBs; they have been achieving through integrated action for many years. The use of the Checklist enables them to consider their current approach through the lens of natural capital, and to see where they could focus future effort to extend this.

“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”

Through use of the Ecosystem Approach Checklist many AONB partnerships demonstrated how they are making good progress with combining delivering more for biodiversity and people. Many AONB partnerships aren't using natural capital and ecosystem services language extensively throughout their plans, projects and wider communication. However, 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 are still able to clearly show the critical linkage 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 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. ”

The Checklist results from the AONBs highlight 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 understand the value that people attach to the benefits that 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.

### **Case Study 2: implementing the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan**

The Shropshire Hills AONB has used the Ecosystem Approach Checklist to review their management plan and develop their thinking on natural capital and ecosystem services:

*“We hadn't come across the Ecosystem Approach before, but found it an easy and powerful tool to use. We have used it to take stock of what we're doing and to help guide action in the future that will deliver more for everyone that lives, works and uses the AONB. We had a good baseline of data for parts of the AONB from the Marches Ecosystem Assessment, but this has enabled us to look more widely across the AONB to see what else we need to do and who we need to work with. It helped us to see that we already have a significant suite of projects planned or ongoing that are delivering more for nature and people. But we won't stop there, we'll find new ways to do more now.”*

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 collate data and improve baseline data on natural capital**, and seek out opportunities to collect data through new projects. Data will be fed into the State of the AONB report.
- **Promote the values and benefits of ecosystem services** with land managers and community groups using existing links and networks, and raise awareness through walks, talks and events. Natural capital and public benefits will be at the heart of the new AONB website and the 2019 AONB Partnership Tour.
- The management plan review will consider the AONB's approach to ecosystem services and find out how they are **valued by communities and stakeholders**.
- **Delivering multiple partnership projects that enhance natural capital and the benefits they provide**, including Unmuddying the Waters catchment project, GIS landowner liaison project, Our Comm Cause commons project, Wildflower verge project, Caring for Caradoc and the Trees outside Woods project.
- **Work with land managers, farmers and agencies** to enhance and improve the resilience of our natural capital via opportunities provided by current and future Agri-Environment schemes.
- **Work with local authorities to demonstrate the value of ecosystem service** and the significant role the AONB has in delivering these for communities outside the AONB.
- Realise the natural capital potential of the AONB **to deliver long-term health and wellbeing initiatives**.
- **Work to develop and reinforce partnerships that have climate change adaptation and mitigation** at the heart of their remit.

From their use of the Checklist each AONB has identified opportunities and gaps for embedding natural capital thinking and the Ecosystem Approach in to their future work. These were collated into brief Action Plans.



As well as identifying where to focus effort to deliver more for nature and people, another key outcome from the Checklist process was to increase understanding and visibility of the natural capital outcomes. The Checklist tool gave the partnerships the method and space to assess their current progress to embed these approaches. Many of the partnerships highlighted the benefits of having time to focus on the 'how' of their work and delivery, rather than just the 'what'.

## 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"

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 and how they can be addressed. 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.

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 consider 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. Data is often only available at a national character area or local authority scale, and 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 so that it can be integrated with national biodiversity and other opportunity maps that are available or in development.

## 4. Next steps

*Note: the quotation in this section comes from an AONB who participated in the project; their individual feedback has been anonymised.*

The AONBs found the Ecosystem Approach Checklist to be a very positive tool to discuss activities and develop delivery plans with partners. It enables a review of current activities across partnerships, the identification of areas where joint working will deliver more, and helps to highlight where to focus future effort and resources for ‘nature and people’ action.

AONBs want to continue to align the Ecosystem Approach with the development or review of future management plans, or landscape scale/partnership projects and embed it in activity. This will have the greatest impact on delivering multiple benefits for people.

### Identifying solutions and addressing barriers

The AONBs commented that the Checklist was an effective tool for assessing 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.

“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”

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 are developed.

**The Checklist helps AONBs identify the key support required to help them achieve greater results for nature and people:**

- 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.
- AONB input to ELMs design to ensure the scheme aligns land management with the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- 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 habitat mapping and 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.
- Support/training on ways to encourage investment from major partners.

## Sharing with others

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 in those 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.

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.

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 key people leading 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

Support networks	Who could help?
<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 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 Natural England 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.