



Land Use in England Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Land use in England

Monday 14 March 2022

4.35 pm

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Members present: Lord Cameron of Dillington (The Chair); Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville; Lord Borwick; Lord Curry of Kirkharle; Lord Goddard of Stockport; Lord Grantchester; Lord Harlech; Lord Layard; The Earl of Leicester; Baroness Mallalieu; Baroness Redfern; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 5

Heard in Public

Questions 47 - 54

Witnesses

I: David Butterworth, Chief Executive, Yorkshire Dales National Park, and Lead Chief Executive for National Parks England; John Watkins, Chief Executive, National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

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Examination of witnesses

David Butterworth and John Watkins.

Q47 **The Chair:** We now enter our next session, with David Butterworth, chief executive of Yorkshire Dales National Park and lead chief executive for National Parks England, and John Watkins, chief executive of the National Association of AONBs. Welcome to you both.

You have in front of you a list of interests that have been declared by members of the committee. The meeting is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website. A transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the committee website, but you will have an opportunity to make corrections where you feel they might be necessary.

I will ask the first question. How do you seek to deliver your remit in the context of land use pressures and demands, and how do you maximise your capacity to fulfil your objectives? What reforms might be needed to the powers and resources of national parks and AONBs to help them fulfil their respective remits?

David Butterworth: Looking at it in the round and focusing on the key messages that the inquiry seems to be probing, the critical, if not central, issue is the complete absence of a national land use framework for England. It is an issue that has been flagged up in other places, as Members will be aware, notably in food and farming policy circles in the context of the recent Dimpleby review.

Fundamentally for us, what do we want our land to be used for, where and how, and who spatially allocates that land? It seems to me that central government has taken little, if any, interest in this to date. In such a congested and connected country as England, I do not see how or why the issue of land use planning can be left completely to the market or delegated to local authorities. Following that, from a National Parks England perspective, it raises the question: what price or what priority should we put on the outcomes we want to see achieved in national parks and protected landscapes more generally?

Through our designation as national parks, we are guided by our statutory purposes, local management plans and special qualities, but I still feel there is a lack of consistent clarity on the level of ambition for nature in protected landscapes, for example. That means that there is limited follow-through in related and important policies on land use, not the least of which is farm support.

Because of the way we manage land in this country, which is essentially through initiatives for farmers and landowners to encourage "the right things", rather than what you might describe as a more direct approach, the role of land management schemes becomes critical to achieving any policy objectives. For example, the role of ELMS, which I am sure we will touch on a little later, will be of pivotal importance to us in having in place the right incentives to encourage private farmers and landowners to

do the right things, while recognising their legitimate right to own and manage their land as they see fit as long as it causes no harm.

Fundamentally, land use policy is about initiatives. Everything I say today will be on the understanding that that remains the context. It is about finding initiatives for farmers and land managers to carry out the roles we want for public policy. I want to get that out, because for me it is a fundamental aspect of everything we will talk about today.

If you would indulge me for a minute longer, to go directly to the question. In delivering our remit in the context of land use pressures, we:

maximise our capacity by using good evidence and data to make good decisions. We have a statutory management plan process and strategic partnerships to get shared priorities in the areas in which we operate. We have very project-specific partnerships in some cases—in the case of the Yorkshire Dales, catchment-sensitive farming. We are also complementary; by which I mean that there are major peatland initiatives taking place in the Yorkshire Dales. We support the Yorkshire Peat Partnership in doing those, rather than trying to get our elbows in there saying, “No, we’ll do that”. We are trying to avoid the competition that sometimes takes place in these areas between environmental bodies.

Lastly, we use the tool of external funding where it is available, which is increasingly critical for national parks. In the dales, 60% of our entire funding comes through private sources rather than government funding, and that will be increasingly important in the future. I will stop there. I am aware that you might have indulged me a little more than you intended, but I wanted the opportunity to set out that broad framework.

John Watkins: By way of context, for clarity, AONB designations so far cover 15% of England. Sometimes the immediate thing that comes to mind is that these are faraway landscapes, yet 60% of the population are within half an hour of an AONB. In particular, they are the nearby nature, if you like, in the Surrey hills, the Kent downs and the high Weald, and through that comes a lot of pressure on the national designations. Building on what David said, one of the key things is that these are national designations but managed locally. It is in that forum, and through the power to convene that comes with the designation, where a lot of the issues we are looking at on competing land uses get resolved and we try to find a way through, because much of it is not answered structurally; it is through creative partnerships on the ground.

The powers and resources for national parks and AONBs are particularly critical for AONBs and AONB teams. There are 34 AONBs in England, and they share between them funding from Defra equivalent to a medium sized single secondary school, of around £6 million. The issue of resources is particularly critical, with a typical AONB team being four full-time equivalent staff, so they punch well above their weight in that regard. As David was saying for the parks, they are very creative in

channelling and getting in resources to get some activity on the ground. In spite of that success, the issue of resourcing is particularly critical.

Similarly, on powers, beyond a soft power to convene and the duty to produce a management plan, some of the strong-arming cannot be done by AONBs and AONB teams; it is down to negotiation and partnerships. There is scope in the landscapes review and the proposals on which the Government are currently consulting to strengthen some of that, and that would be welcome.

The Chair: Having served on the Glover review, I congratulate all the AONBs on the work they do with almost no money at all. As you say, it is all done through partnership, which may be the right way to do it. Do you have the right data to play your part in the 25-year environment plan goals, nature recovery, biodiversity targets, et cetera?

John Watkins: Generally, the evidence is patchy. There is plenty at national level through Natural England and others. Any more locally derived data tends to be project based and what can be derived in that regard. It is a mixed picture. Sometimes there is a wealth, but it is difficult and resource-intensive to access, and at other times you find there is a gap just where you need it. There is some work to be done assisting in how some of the data is collected and cut, if you like, particularly on AONBs. A lot of negotiation has to be done to get various data that is within government or planning bodies prepared and provided on the footprint of an AONB and its setting; there tends to be ongoing negotiation on it.

The Chair: It takes time. I remember that some of the AONB programmes were sometimes six years in the making. I do not think we have that time in this biodiversity agenda.

David Butterworth: The Government are talking a good game on data, but we are not there yet. We certainly welcome the proposals for a new Outcome Framework for national parks and AONBs. This is being set out at the moment, and we are working with Defra on this. I strongly agree with John's last point. On the data that is around at the moment, we would benefit from having national datasets that are cut to the boundaries of national parks and AONBs. I cannot tell you how much time and money that would save if it were available; it is huge.

The Chair: What about work with other agencies such as Natural England, the Environment Agency, local authorities and others? Does that all go very well?

David Butterworth: Nationally, I would describe our engagement as limited but improving, if I had to come up with one sentence. Generally, we work well with the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Forestry Commission, the RPA and Historic England, but in all the years I have worked in this area I would have to say that it relies far too much on personal and individual relationships, which I suppose is life, but you

might expect a more systematic and planned approach. That is certainly what I would like to see.

John made the point in answer to the earlier question that we rely so much on persuasion to achieve more effective support from those arm's-length bodies than possibly we ought to do. Going off message for a moment, I always feel that there are so many bodies still walking up to the farm gate that from the farmer's and landowner's perspective they must think, "Oh, dear. It's Tuesday. It must be Natural England". That must be an horrendous state of affairs. A radical solution—being a little parochial—would be to fund the ranger services in national parks as the first point of contact, because they have a relationship with the local farmer and local landowner and could represent national bodies. Therefore, you would bring together the fantastic policy expertise of the national bodies and a local way into the minds and hearts of farmers and landowners.

John Watkins: Putting it in the form of a shipping forecast, I think we would describe the relationships as moderate or good, but, as David said, they are improving. We have made efforts and strides to enter into a tripartite agreement with National Parks England and Natural England to try to codify areas where we should be working better together and where it is sensible collectively to share resources, effort and knowledge.

It is early days. Initially, it tends to be an audit of a lot of things that we are already doing, but we are increasingly moving towards stronger shared working on areas that we have in common. The local partnership structure means that there is usually a very good relationship between some of the teams and the local representatives of the national bodies, but sometimes the challenge is to get the national voice to filter through its own organisation and down to what happens locally. There is room for improvement, but it feels as if we are heading in a good direction. As David said, often it comes down to building relationships with the right kind of people.

The Chair: Thank you.

Q48 **Lord Curry of Kirkharle:** When we see the state of nature reports and the review, the Climate Change Committee challenge, et cetera, the scale of the challenge we face is huge. How do you ensure that the right thing is being done in the right place at the right time to deliver the right outcomes from the point of view of nature and conservation? Could it be done better?

John Watkins: The main vehicle we have as areas of natural beauty is the preparation of the management plan for the area. You could say that in a way it is the closest we have to a land use strategy on that scale. It is a collaborative, partnership and consultative approach to producing the plan, which takes the national context and sets it out in the issues facing individual AONB. That is the nearest we have got in setting out our priorities for a particular area.

The difficulty is that there is then no duty on anyone to implement anything in that plan. There is a duty on public authorities and statutory undertakers to have regard to the purpose of the AONBs when making decisions about land and land use in that area. We feel that could be strengthened to a duty to further the delivery of the management plan. In that sense, it makes it easier for other plans to gel with it better, because we are not short of plans that set out priorities for particular places.

Lord Curry of Kirkharle: Who would the duty to deliver fall on?

John Watkins: It would be a shared duty for decisions that impact on land in the AONBs between public bodies and statutory undertakers. You have a potential issue where, let us say, an investment plan for a water utility may not always be compatible with what is in the management plan, which is an indication that the duty of regard may not be robust enough to maintain the integrity of the AONB.

David Butterworth: The context in which we are operating is that, essentially, the land is privately owned. In the Yorkshire Dales, over 95% of the land is privately owned, so we cannot 'ensure' anything. As to improving it or making it better, I have four quick points. We need, first, sufficient investment in national parks to convene and drive partnerships; secondly, bespoke and sufficiently resourced land management schemes within protected landscapes; thirdly, and John touched on this, a stronger commitment by other public authorities to align with and deliver what is in the management plan once they have agreed to it, following the principle of public money for public good—it is too easy to sign up to something and say, "I'll put my name to that", and then worry about it again in another five years. That is not good enough; and, lastly, we need resources to harness the evidence and data, to set baselines for driving performance and encouraging prioritisation so that we know whether what we are doing is working or not. Those are my four asks.

Lord Curry of Kirkharle: On the third—engaging with other bodies to ensure that they are aligned with the plans—do you have examples of where it is working well?

David Butterworth: There are more examples of where it is not working well, to be frank. The problem, which we may touch on a little later if we talk about the Landscape and Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) is that, if you are working with local authorities, the environment and nature will understandably never be at the top of their priorities. It is quite easy for them to get a junior officer to come along and agree a set of priorities in a national park or AONB for a five-year period, but then go away and not have the weight or 'oomph' to deliver on it. Having said that, it is improving. In North Yorkshire, the local enterprise partnership, with its devolution deal with government—

Lord Curry of Kirkharle: That is very recent, is it not?

David Butterworth: It is very recent. Hopefully, it will be going through it in the coming months. The absolute core of that is the environment and recognising that in an area like North Yorkshire its contribution to net zero through peatland restoration, tree planting, et cetera is on a nationally significant scale, so a whole economy can be built around that. That is quite unusual in my experience in dealing with LEPs, which tend to see a new road or big shed as something that drives economic development. I think there are some encouraging noises in parts of the country for the future.

Lord Curry of Kirkharle: To go back to your earlier statement that you cannot ensure because you do not control the landscape, there are levers you can help to pull. There are government agencies or bodies, whether it is Defra policy, ELMS, or the Environment Agency. There are levers that can help to deliver that, but it requires all of them to buy into the plan.

David Butterworth: It does. If I had one ask of some of the national bodies we are talking about, whether Natural England, the Environment Agency or the Forestry Commission, let me pick Natural England because I am more familiar with it. It is called Natural England; it is not called Natural England (With a Particular Emphasis on Protected Landscapes). I would like it if that was the case, because, in order to achieve the policy objectives of the Government, you have to get it right in the protected landscapes first.

To leave you with one statistic, 40% of the entire land holding of national parks in England is not in a SSSI; it is not in any agri-environment scheme and it is not being managed correctly. That equates to 170,000 hectares. We have no chance of delivering 30x30 and a whole range of other government priorities unless we get it right in those areas first. There needs to be bespoke priority for protected landscapes, but I would say that, wouldn't I? I represent National Parks England, but I genuinely believe that, and 20 years in this business has not caused me to change my mind.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: In that respect, if birthday and Christmas were rolled into one for both of you, of the things that the Government are currently consulting on what would be the two or three ace improvements to your powers that you would have? Even if they are not consulting on them, what would you have liked them to consult on?

David Butterworth: I think government is talking a really good game here. In the response to Glover on potential changes to statutory purposes there is some good stuff coming out. They are talking about enhancing or revising the statutory purposes to make them fit for the 21st century, and to have more emphasis on climate and nature in them, which I absolutely agree with. They are talking about potential changes to the second purpose and to have more regard to greater diversity and the health and well-being of the nation. I strongly concur with that.

Touching on earlier questions, they are talking about putting a duty on public bodies, not to have regard to national park purposes, because that

is easy—they just say, “I have had regard to it but I’m doing what I was going to do anyway”—but to further national purposes. That would be fantastic. That would be the third one that I’d put forward. It looks like we might get there.

Could I add just one more thing, which goes much broader than that? For me, ELMS is particularly important in protected landscapes for land management. We need something bespoke for protected landscapes as we work towards the introduction of ELMS in 2024. If we had that Christmas, birthday, Boxing Day or Easter present, it would say a lot; it would be a real statement of intent from the Government.

John Watkins: From the AONB perspective, in the landscapes review, proposal 24 was the “sum of” proposal. It was to strengthen AONBs “with new purposes, powers and resources”, and rename them “National Landscapes”. The emphasis for us is on purposes, powers and resources and, linked to that, changes in governance as well. As David said, we would say that the sum of those parts is the opportunity for government to look at AONBs and introduce a package of reforms that is in effect then a statutory designated landscape by design. They could take this opportunity to have a proper step change, and build on the learning and legacy of AONBs and put in place a statutory designated landscape that looks forward to the future.

We would certainly want purposes that reflect the contemporary priorities for AONBs. At the moment, AONBs have the single purpose of protecting and enhancing natural beauty. The two conservation boards, in the Chilterns and the Cotswolds, have the second purpose of promoting enjoyment, but that is not a purpose of the AONBs per se. Having said that 60% of the population is within half an hour of them, it is properly recognising that AONBs should have a proper, meaningful role in how people access and enjoy the outdoors. Having a remit for that is right and proper.

When it comes to powers, we have mentioned the links to the status of the management plan and the remit for development management and planning for AONBs. Currently, AONB teams are not even statutory consultees, so when you look at a national designated landscape the question of the point where, from national to local, you start to feel the presence of what is a national and statutory designated landscape in an AONB comes down to whether you should be consulted on an application once it has come in. We feel that we need to push it back up a little bit, so that the presence of what is a national designation is felt a lot higher in the process. That would start as a statutory consultee both for the plan-making process and for individual decisions.

On governance, at the moment there is quite a bit of flexibility, and that is good. We have two conservation boards, joint committees and joint advisory committee-type structures, and even the harbour authority in Chichester, which is the AONB team there. There is some flexibility. It could benefit from being simplified and possibly codified. The proposal for guidance on governance is welcome, but there is also the opportunity to

reflect on why, over 20 years since the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, there have been only two conservation boards out of a potential 38 in England and Wales. Part of that is the difficulties and the barriers, procedurally and bureaucratically, to its being pursued. In some areas, we would welcome looking again at the board structure to see whether it can be done better and more simply.

Clearly, there are resourcing issues. The landscapes review recommended an immediate doubling of AONB funding. The review reported in 2019 and "immediate" is yet to appear, and even the doubling of not very little is still not a lot. We are trying to make as much of a case as we can to government that AONB teams are worthy of the modest increase in resources that they need.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Q49 **Baroness Redfern:** How do national parks seek to use their role as planning authorities to support effective land use policies in their area? What lessons might their approach have for land use in areas outside national parks?

David Butterworth: In law, we are special purpose local planning authorities, with a focus on the rural economy and a thorough knowledge throughout our organisations of the challenges facing the landscape and its communities. We have rangers, countryside officers, ecologists, historic environment officers, et cetera. That allows us to properly get underneath the skin of applications and add value, as well as working positively with developers. Forgive me for producing another statistic: planning approval rates are higher in national parks than outside because we give applications and working with developers, the time they need while working in a protected landscape.

When I see the phrase "effective land use", I am not entirely sure what it might mean, but if it is about safeguarding and enhancing land uses that are beneficial for national park purposes, the planning role is absolutely critical to help us to deliver that. We use it in farm diversifications and supportive development plans to assist farmers and landowners.

I am not sure that I would be impertinent enough to talk about the lessons we might give people from outside, but with my green hat on I would talk about using ecosystem approaches outside protected landscapes and bringing that far more into their thinking; linking land use and land management on some or all types of applications, as long as it is carried out proportionately; mainstreaming the expertise I have talked about in national parks in other bodies; and encouraging localism and engagement. Some national park authorities have many neighbourhood plans that have been developed with local communities. What that means is that, when applications come to the fore, they are much more likely to be sympathetic and to be passed.

Baroness Redfern: What about tensions?

David Butterworth: There will always be tensions in planning inside or outside national parks. I was born and grew up in an urban environment and moved to the Yorkshire Dales when I was a young man—many years ago now. A lot of communities in national parks think that planning just applies to them and does not exist in other parts of the country. That has always struck me as rather strange. I find that the ability for national park authorities to engage with communities is much greater in a rural environment than outside it, because there are quite a number of very able community leaders. You can only manage any tensions in a framework of good land management and delivery of objectives around nature, climate and local sustainability—

Baroness Redfern: Reducing the tensions would help local authorities in bringing people with them.

David Butterworth: Yes. As an example of that, our newest national park in the South Downs, designated in 2010, replaced 13 planning and unitary authorities that were around at the time. In the last 10 years, more homes and affordable homes have been built in that area than in the 10 years when it was under the control of the previous authorities, because they have been able to bring some of the skills and qualities that I talked about earlier to ensure that they delivered. A lot of the turf warfare that was there before has disappeared. I think that success is quite unknown about national parks; they are seen as restrictive of development. I do not think the evidence supports that at all.

Baroness Redfern: Local authorities need a more collaborative approach. Is that what you were saying?

David Butterworth: They certainly do, and it will certainly be the case in North Yorkshire and Cumbria in the next year as the district councils are abolished in favour of the new unitaries.

Baroness Redfern: Yes. That is right. John, do you want to comment?

The Chair: Hang on. There is a question on AONBs.

Q50 **The Earl of Leicester:** The question I was about to ask David has been answered.

Mr Watkins, you, in the AONB, do not have as many powers as they do in the national parks, so how do you work to ensure that effective land use policies are put in place?

John Watkins: It relies very much on discussion, negotiation and making representation at both the plan-making stage and on any applications for which the AONB unit is then consulted. In national policy, national parks and AONBs are, in theory, treated equally under the national planning policy framework.

It is one thing to have equality and be referred to in the same paragraph in a national policy document, but beyond that how it is applied on the ground is not necessarily the same, because then it is open to

interpretation. The one point we would make is about the degree to which within the national planning policy framework there is an understanding that major development should take place only in exceptional circumstances.

The interpretation and application of that has been particularly challenging for AONBs. A number, particularly in the south-east, face significant pressure. We are looking at 120 hectares a year of AONBs being developed for 10 or more housing units, most of them low-density executive homes, which clearly does not address the housing crisis. There is an issue about how planning policy is then applied locally, and what an AONB can do in response to that is very limited. We are asking for statutory consultee status for both the plan-making and the decisions. That in itself is very much the end of pipe, trying to influence it once the decisions have been made.

My other, quick, point is about how exceptional circumstances are interpreted, particularly in relation to a case with regard to green belt. An exceptional circumstance could be a basket of relatively ordinary things. We do not feel that it is necessarily the intention in national planning policy that you can just add up. There should be at least one aspect of the development that is exceptional; that is to say that it could not take place somewhere else outside a protected area. It is about managing. The AONBs and, as David indicated, the national parks are certainly not no-go areas for development; it is about doing it appropriately within the size and scale of the purpose of the designation, recognising that the landscape in those areas delivers huge benefits and different kinds of benefits. It is not the case that, if we are not developing it, it is somehow holding the country back; it is delivering lots of other benefits, be it opportunities for recreation, natural beauty, wildlife, nature and even the supply of water or sequestration of carbon.

The Earl of Leicester: I live in the north Norfolk coastal AONB, and I know that there is very little funding; it comes from three or four district or borough councils along the coast, and they effectively control the meetings. I sat on them for a couple of years, but I came off. I had to make a big play to say, "Listen, the majority of the land along the coast is owned by private landowners. You've got to engage them". They have done very well at engaging the community, but generally it is an old boy or an old girl from a village because they have time on their hands. I do not see the engagement that I would like to see with tourism, agriculture and development.

John Watkins: Part of it is about cutting the cloth accordingly, depending on the level of resource that is coming in. In building relationships with land management, the farming in protected landscapes scheme, which all AONBs are currently delivering, gives an opportunity.

The Earl of Leicester: Yes, I agree. Again, that is very new.

John Watkins: Yes.

The Chair: The Mendip AONB has 1.5 staff, which might explain quite a lot.

Q51 **Lord Layard:** Perhaps we can come back to nature recovery. How effectively do you think the local strategies will support the national nature recovery network? Where local strategies cross administrative boundaries, do you think that national parks or AONBs should be the co-ordinating body?

David Butterworth: The LNRS is potentially a useful tool, particularly, ironically, outside designated landscapes where there might be less focus on nature. So much of the discussion we have had today applies here too, in the sense that it will only be of value if it is backed by resources and funding to deliver, whether that is in ELMS, biodiversity net gain, the Nature for Climate Fund or the private finance initiatives that are increasingly important. I wonder whether it can be made fully effective quickly enough by working through resource-constrained local authorities which, as I mentioned earlier, will never have nature at the top of their priorities, so that will be a real concern for me.

Whether AONBs or national parks should be the co-ordinating body is a good question and a really difficult one to answer. I would answer it in three ways: yes, no and probably not. What I mean by that is that nature does not follow administrative boundaries, so there is no right answer, but we know that government has said that national park authorities and AONBs are part of our national commitment to 30x30, so we need to start treating them like that. To be clear, they are more important for nature recovery than most other places, so it is essential that the assets, needs and opportunities in national parks and AONBs are properly reflected in the forthcoming local nature recovery strategies, and that we have some degree of autonomy and control over the aspects of the strategies that are within AONBs and national parks. We recognise that they are coming through counties and that is just the way it is going to be.

If I were to get off the fence, I would say that, it again comes back to the ambition of government. There is an opportunity for this committee to call out the need for a cross-government commitment to having the highest level of ambition in national parks and AONBs and therefore to play a central role in determining local priorities, which we can then be supported through ELMS and the other schemes we have talked about. Ultimately, we are either in a climate and nature emergency or we are not. If someone wants to say, "Don't worry, we're not", we will go away and do something else.

John Watkins: We will see how local nature recovery strategies pan out. We have already raised questions on resources, capacity and expertise within AONBs. Local authorities will be particularly strapped to come up with the necessary knowledge and expertise to deliver on that. Beyond that, in the role that AONBs play collectively as a network and a family, they can address some of the issues mentioned by David about nature on the whole not being respectful of administrative boundaries. There are

examples where AONBs and national park authorities are collaborating across whole regions to provide, as Sir John Lawton recommended, the backbone of nature being bigger, better and more connected. That is where the real gain will be for nature. We need to make sure that local nature recovery strategies, important as they are for local nature, do not miss the point of being able to join up across boundaries.

Lord Layard: We have heard that developers prefer to fulfil their net gain requirements through on-site activity. Can enough off-site credits be generated to deliver the necessary funds to restore habitats?

John Watkins: It is an emerging picture and, as you say, so far the studies would support that. It is mostly on-site. I think that will be the driver. As to whether the biodiversity credits element will ever generate sufficient impact, I am not convinced at the moment. We will see where it ends up. Having said that, it depends on how it is constructed. If it becomes an easy option to buy your way out of net gain by contributing to credits—it depends on how it is all structured and marketed—it may be more attractive to do so, and then we will come to the argument about nature on people's doorstep as part of development.

Q52 **Baroness Mallalieu:** Both of your organisations have come in for some criticism in relation to bad management. The Environmental Audit Committee in June last year said that you continued to be poorly managed, and the Government now want us to achieve 30% of land use for nature by 2030. The Glover report has called for improvement in the management of your areas. What are the challenges, as you see them, to improving management in both AONBs and the national parks?

David Butterworth: There are two different aspects, one external and one internal. I think we touched on some of the external issues in earlier questions, in relation to what you might call the wider factors. The key challenges externally are resources for us and others who own and manage the land within our national parks; securing sufficient investment in land management through the transition period and beyond; achieving the alignment and commitment of all public bodies and spending within national parks to deliver management plans that theoretically all those bodies have signed up to; and the lack of data and baselines to drive targets, prioritisation and performance.

In summary, there are few bespoke tools, mechanisms or funding streams, except FIPL, which we touched on. There is no requirement for the arm's-length bodies to do more inside protected landscapes than outside and I think that is wrong.

Internally, which I think the question might be getting at, the Glover review recognised and highlighted the issues with national park authority boards—John can speak for AONBs—to which the Government responded in January. The boards are too big; they are too locally focused; they are too white and elderly; they lack diversity; and there is insufficient review of the performance of board members. They are all operated within restrictive legislation. I think all those issues can be tackled and

addressed without losing the crucial importance of local buy-in and engagement with bodies that should and could be empowered to deliver for the nation, their regions and their localities. I think that is a challenge that protected landscapes can rise to.

The Earl of Leicester: I suggest that one of the problems is that too many people are sitting at desks and there are not enough practitioners getting out there. I have met lots of people in these agencies on the ground doing great stuff, but from talking to them they are held back by managers. I would like more go-see from managers, out on the ground, making sure that things are happening and encouraging people, as well as trying to build relationships with landowners and the community.

David Butterworth: I do not think that is the case at all. You and I could spend 10 minutes going backwards and forwards on this issue but let me simply say this. This is an invitation to come to the Yorkshire Dales. You can see our practitioners on the ground, as can any member of this committee, and make your own judgment based on that. I will make sure that the senior managers are not involved, and that you can speak to those people. Believe me, the people who work for my organisation have no difficulty in expressing their views, so if they agreed with that, they would certainly tell you. I do not mean that in an aggressive manner. Please come up and have a look and see the incredible work going on across conservation, nature, the built heritage, access and engagement in education. It is fantastic.

John was talking about some of the funding difficulties in AONBs, which I absolutely recognise. The problem from my perspective is that, across all protected landscapes, as a country we are now spending less than we did in 2010. That is absolutely ridiculous when the issues in relation to nature recovery, climate and public health and engagement have gone so much further up the agenda.

The Chair: John, do you want to come in on the earlier question?

John Watkins: I echo that a meaningful role in environmental land management will make a critical difference. As David said, the AONB teams do not manage the land themselves, but they have a vital role. We undertook part of the tests and trials for the development of the ELM scheme. One of the clear results from that, which has been echoed in other evaluations, is the importance of having good, trusted farm advisers for farmers, which tends to mean that you have better and more ambitious schemes entered into at farm level and the ability to connect across landscapes, resulting in both better outcomes for nature and better payments to farmers themselves. The link between farm and form, if you like, that a trusted AONB team is developing through the FIPL programme and being able to build on that legacy in the ELM scheme will be critical.

My reading of the landscapes review was more that the panel recognised the excellent work that AONB teams do, but they are held back by insufficient resources and the lack of bite in some of the powers. It

recognised that some of the collaborative network approach they adopted was right for the complexity of the issues they were trying to tackle.

Q53 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** There has been sporadic talk about zoning and the three designations that came up in the original consultation on planning change: growth, renewal and protection. Where do you stand, from your respective points of view, on the proposals on zoning? Do you think they are a good or a bad idea, or do they need to be radically changed?

David Butterworth: I thought, and sincerely hoped, that they had been abandoned. There is no planning Bill. If they came back to fruition, I would like to shoot myself in the knee, because that would be more pleasant than having to try to manage them. You can see the simplistic nature and the attraction that some may perceive within this proposed approach, but to my mind it is nonsense.

There were reams of responses from all national park authorities and National Parks England setting out how a simplified three-zone local plan approach was a bad idea in delivering a planning system for us. Protected landscapes are living, working landscapes that include settlements. Therefore, the need for sustainable economic growth and affordable housing is critical, so neither 'growth' nor '100% protection' works for us. It is about gradations, and those judgments and decisions are best taken at local level, so I hope to God we never see the re-engagement of that particular Bill. I am sorry if I was too flummery, Chair, and did not get to the point.

John Watkins: There is something quite attractive about something being simple, but it is also simplistic, as David was saying. My concern is about the perception built up around that on two fronts. One is that, unless land is being developed, it is somehow not benefiting the nation, when in fact lots of other benefits accrue. If the narrative around it somehow creates a belief that, "These are the areas that will drive the country and these are the ones that we have to restrict for some other reasons", it is not a good story to be telling.

It is far more complex. To reinforce the narrative that there is no development within areas of outstanding natural beauty is not correct and not helpful to the living, working landscapes that they are. These areas have huge value culturally and economically, and what is required is proper and sustainable management, not being simplistic about which category they fall within or without. It could also create a perverse situation where a statutory protected landscape is in the same zone as another landscape that does not have that protection, but it still happens to be in a protected area from a planning perspective. All manner of complexity would be added to the simplicity.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: We hope, in the interests of David's knees, that is not the case.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Q54 Lord Grantchester: We have teased out many of the issues already this afternoon in relation to where we are getting to in our final wrap-up question. Both of you could be said to have jurisdiction in certain respects over land use in your areas. David, you started by saying that you had identified the absence of a framework. What organisation or organisations and governance structure would be best placed to plan and decide on the allocation of land use for the various competing agendas for land use in England? Are we missing something?

Perhaps I could quickly go to part two of the question, because we are running out of time. Transferring your specific duties in your own area of designations to a national basis, is it about sympathetic development? I know you have mentioned other benefits. Is it sympathetic development on a national basis? How do you suggest that could be done? John?

John Watkins: I am not sure. It depends on whether such a strategy or plan is developed. It is important to look at the overarching purpose for it at the moment. That is where we end up with competition. There are different motives and objectives depending on where it is. If it emerges from a planning perspective, it is all geared to development. Perhaps one part of Defra might be geared to nature recovery, et cetera, and these issues are then left to be reconciled locally, unless there is an overarching purpose.

The Scottish land use strategy emanates from Scottish climate change legislation, so it has been set up with a particular and long-term goal in mind. If there were to be an organisation or organisations, it would depend on precisely where the overarching goal was. Obviously, from my perspective, I would say that it should be about the protection and enhancement of natural beauty in AONBs, so we would have jurisdiction in that regard. It is about what the higher purpose is. Lots of people are willing to collaborate. Often, you see that the drawing they have made for collaboration has them at the centre of it, and everything else orbiting. That central space tends to be quite competitive, with everything needing to be seen through the lens of whatever issue is drawn in the middle. The critical point is where it should be pitched.

Lord Grantchester: When we are discussing competing development plans and developers come forward, sometimes I tend to think that for the designations of land for which you are responsible, the answer is "No, but", when really we have to say, "Yes, and". Would that be fair?

John Watkins: There is definitely a place for that. In part, it is related to what I said earlier about setting out a forward-looking and progressive landscape designation. It is looking ahead and managing positive landscape change.

The other thing to be mindful of is that possibly the answer will be found in driving for simplicity and the desire to harmonise or rationalise, whatever it is. It will still come down to the fact that these are quite complicated and often subjective matters. It is right that they are subjective and contested decisions. They have to be negotiated and

discussed, and a simplification of structures and plans will not necessarily change human behaviour and how we talk, discuss and sort things out.

David Butterworth: It is such a broad question—insanely broad. There is no formal National Parks England position on it, but I think the country would benefit from a spatial land use strategy for the whole of England, rather than behaving as if in terms of type of land use it is equally appropriate for development anywhere unless it is restricted. I think that is wrong. The Henry Dimbleby report that I referred to earlier touches on this and may have created the first steps in moving towards it, because it considers food, nature and climate alongside diet and nutrition.

Touching on an earlier point, I wondered whether devolution might assist because, generally speaking—this may not be the forum in which to say this—local leaders know their patch better, and how to forge relationships better, than national government. They deal with issues of development better in the regions than they do at national level. I come back to the Yorkshire and Cumbria examples. That might well offer a way forward to deal with conflicting areas of government policy.

Like John, I would like to see what lies at its heart. What is government policy trying to achieve? I do not think we will ever get, “Well, it’s this. It’s climate or it’s nature”. It is all those things; it is climate, nature, sustainable economic development, health and well-being. I think that protected landscapes are in a good position to achieve those for their particular areas, but they need to be lifted out of the maelstrom of authorities that exist across England. That is still my hope, and it is the thing I will continue to work for until I end my professional career, or it ends me.

The Chair: Thank you both very much for this very good session. Good luck with your trips back to wherever you are going.