

## **MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 5 APRIL 2019**

### **THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH AND NATURAL CAPITAL CHECKLIST - DELIVERING MORE FOR BIODIVERSITY AND PEOPLE IN THE MALVERN HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB)**

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#### **Recommendation**

1. **The Committee is recommended to:**
  - a) **Note the Government's expectations with regard Natural Capital and the work of AONB Partnerships;**
  - b) **Consider the contents of the checklist completed in draft at Appendix A.**
  - c) **Consider how the organisations they represent, as key members of the AONB Partnership, can best be engaged to participate in and contribute to this process.**

#### **Background**

2. Natural Capital can be defined as the stock or elements of nature that directly or indirectly produce value for people.<sup>1</sup> Ecosystem Services are the benefits people obtain from ecosystems such as food, timber, aesthetic and recreational opportunities including related health benefits, climate, water quality and flood regulation.

3. The Government's 25-year Environment Plan – **A Green Future: our 25 year plan to improve the environment** – has Natural Capital at its core. The plan takes a broad view, encompassing the range of overlapping socio-economic and environmental assets and opportunities. It is also a framework plan, providing an opportunity for all stakeholders to get involved in its ongoing refinement, development and implementation.

4. AONB Partnerships and National Park Authorities are seen as key deliverers of the 25-year plan and there has been encouragement for them to consider how they can be more proactive in delivering more for both people and wildlife. Some AONBs have taken a first step by producing Natural Capital scoping studies to generate an initial picture of the Natural Capital in their areas and how people benefit from it (the Malvern Hills AONB Natural Capital Scoping Study was produced in December 2017). However, few have embedded a Natural Capital approach in their work or their planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Costanza 2008

5. As part of Government's encouragement to help protected landscape bodies to work towards adopting a Natural Capital approach to their work some consultancy support has been made available in recent months. Specifically, (and following a successful pilot with National Park Authorities) a company called Bowfell Consulting has been contracted by Natural England to support 12 AONB Partnerships/Conservation Boards to embed the Ecosystem Approach in their management planning and decision-making. The Malvern Hills AONB is one of those 12 AONB partnerships.

6. A member of staff from the Malvern Hills AONB Unit attended an initial workshop on this topic in London in November 2018. Since then, the Unit has been reviewing its work by answering a series of 6 questions – the Ecosystem Approach and Natural Capital Checklist. This checklist is designed to help AONB partnerships consider the range of Natural Capital within their areas, how they plan to improve it and how they interact and communicate with AONB partners and local communities. Since January 2019 Paul Esrich and Karen Humphries in the AONB Unit have been supported by Bowfell Consulting in considering these questions.

## Summary

7. The aim of the checklist is to review current practice with regards to Natural Capital planning. Following its completion an action plan will be produced which ensures that Natural Capital is at the heart of the AONB's work – both present and future.

8. As a result of the checklist work it is expected that AONB Partnerships will:

- Understand how much they know about the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services in their landscapes – and what the key knowledge gaps are, both in terms of data and qualitative experiences.
- Link actions to improve and expand biodiversity with the benefits this can provide for people – within and beyond the AONB – eventually working through a comprehensive action plan.
- Review the effectiveness of their Management Plans, Action Plans and Partnerships, making sure that partners have a shared vision for Natural Capital management and are working together to achieve this.
- Understand how to communicate these ideas to all their stakeholders and encourage their involvement – putting people at the heart of their work.

## What happens next?

9. The Ecosystem Approach and Natural Capital checklist completed by the AONB Unit can be found in draft at Appendix A.

10. The results from the 12 AONB Partnerships supported to take these first steps in using the checklist and embedding the Natural Capital approach will be scrutinised by Natural England with a view to providing further support and encouragement. It is expected that the work of AONB Partnerships and the reports and documents they produce — Management Plans, State of the AONB reports etc. - will be shaped by this approach in the future.

## **Contact Points**

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