

## **MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

### **8 NOVEMBER 2019**

## **A SUMMARY OF THE LANDSCAPES REVIEW**

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### **Recommendation**

1. **The Committee is recommended to:**
  - a) **Note the publication of the Landscapes Review report;**
  - b) **Raise and discuss any issues pertinent to the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership and to its work moving forward, including in the short and longer terms.**

### **Background**

2. Following a year long, independent review of the National Parks and AONBs of England a Final Report entitled Landscapes Review was published on Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019, an important date coinciding with the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act - the legislation which brought these designations into being.
3. The report was produced by its principal author Julian Glover at the request of the previous Environment Minister, the Rt Hon. Michael Gove and in furtherance of a commitment in the Government's 25 year Environment Plan. Julian was supported by a panel comprising Ewen Cameron, Sarah Murkherjee, Jim Dixon, Fiona Reynolds and Jake Fiennes. Sarah visited the Malvern Hills AONB earlier in the year, meeting with a number of staff and key partners and visiting a variety of local sites. The local 'Mondays up the Malverns' project supported by our Sustainable Development Fund features in the Landscape Review report (page 79) as a case study. Our Partnership's (Malvern Hills JAC) submission was one of 2,500 responses received as part of the formal call for evidence. The Malvern Hills AONB Unit has also responded to further information requests over the past six months (made to all national landscapes), including queries in respect of financial and administrative matters. This work has helped the review panel to base its findings on empirical/qualitative observations and scrutiny.
4. Government has not yet indicated when it expects to make a full response to the review report.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

5. The full report runs to 168 pages but is well written, accessible and easy to read. Members have previously received an email containing a link to it:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf)

6. What follows is an attempt to summarise some key points and messages. A list of all the 27 key proposals made in the report can be found at Appendix 1.

### **Aspiration...**

7. The review makes the case for wanting our national landscapes to work together with big ambitions so they are greener, more beautiful and open to everyone. It states that 'our system of national landscapes (44 in total) should be a positive force for the nation's wellbeing and must find innovative ways to collaborate to become more than the sum of their parts'.

8. The review highlights that our national landscapes are just that; 'they are England's soul and we should care for them as such'.

### **What has been working well?**

9. The review recognises that there has been huge energy, enthusiasm and examples of success across our National Parks and AONBs. This has included farm cluster networks, school engagement, volunteer schemes and all sorts of joint working and dialogue on a diverse range of topics including wildlife conservation, tourism, planning and design, supporting local landowners and businesses, whilst also dealing with all of the complexities of local and central government. The panel recognises that activities like these happen every day, not much thanks is given for them and yet much of it is done well for relatively small sums of money. The panel reports that 'AONBs have become good at partnership working; lacking any resources of their own they have had to be'.

10. The report demonstrates the many good examples of the way sympathetic farming practices can help support nature and states that well-managed farming systems, particularly in those national landscapes in the uplands, should be viewed as good in themselves.

### **What has not been working so well?**

11. The Review has been hard-hitting in several areas stating for example that there is currently limited evidence of a wider common ambition; and that the national zeal of the founding mission for landscape protection has been eroded over time. The panel believes that the national landscapes culture has not kept pace with the changes and demands in our society, nor responded with vigour to the decline in the diversity of the natural environment.

12. The review highlights an apparent disconnect with the wider public. Our National Parks and AONBs are national landscapes for the benefit of all, receiving tax-payers money, yet much of UK's society has little engagement, knowledge, or appreciation of these areas. The governance frameworks for National Parks especially were found to be deeply unrepresentative of the country's diverse communities.

13. The review found that partnerships need to be strengthened and more representative of our diverse rural and urban communities. The current system of governance for both National Parks and AONBs requires substantial reform; the way

that we protect and improve our landscapes need to change radically to take far greater account of modern pressures and the pace of change. The report evidences a general lack of urgency in responding to the decline in the diversity of the natural environment and the climate crisis citing critical commentary from organisations such as the RSPB, and the National Trust, and the continuing downward trajectory in the condition of what should be exemplar areas, including for example our Sites of Special Scientific Interest – SSSIs. Often it has been shown that there has been a lack of sufficient data; ‘until we know what we have got, and what we have lost, efforts at landscape-scale work on nature will be incremental’.

## **Key Proposals:**

14. The review sets out its findings and proposals across five themes:
  - Landscapes Alive for Nature and Beauty
  - Landscapes for Everyone
  - Living Landscapes
  - More Special Places
  - New Ways of Working.

### Chapter 1: Landscapes Alive for Nature and Beauty

15. The report argues that National Parks and AONBs should be leading the way in terms of the delivery of key government targets, as promoted through Professor Lawton's Review and the new 25 Year Environment Plan. The panel highlights that from all of the responses received, more than any other thing, the strongest call was for our national landscapes to do much more for nature. Despite some achievements the negative trends affecting wildlife across the UK have not been reversed in our national landscapes, this must change. Nature recovery requires greater strategic leadership and greater government commitment; the report recognises the challenges and the reality that a huge amount of what happens in our landscapes has been shaped by things over which our landscape bodies have had little control. The report repeatedly stresses the important and positive role farming can play in nature recovery, the enthusiasm for coming together with wider partners is growing and should be encouraged; this includes recognising and carefully balancing legitimate shooting interests.

### **The report lists 6 key proposals (Proposal 1- Proposal 6) focused on "Landscapes Alive for Nature and Beauty":**

16. Proposal 1 is especially significant for AONBs, setting out the case for a renewed mission to recover and enhance nature, not simply relying on protecting and enhancing natural beauty. Performance should be assessed through a new, and independent, National Landscapes Service.

17. Proposals 2-5 cover the importance of nature, natural capital and climate change audits, strengthened Management Plans, and maximising the opportunities of Nature Recovery Networks and the (new) Environmental Land Management Schemes (NELMS). There is a recommendation that protected landscapes need to look beyond their boundaries to help ensure we have the most robust landscape and wildlife networks. Future Management Plans need to set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery and the response to climate change (notably tree planting and peatland restoration as and where this can be applied).

18. Proposal 6 makes the case for strengthening our national landscapes within the planning system, especially our AONBs, who should be given statutory consultee status and encouragement to develop local plans.

## Chapter 2: Landscapes for Everyone

19. The report provides a powerful narrative on the value and importance of landscapes. Glover recognises the widely held view, that is so hard to quantify, that our landscapes and their natural beauty matter in themselves and that our green and pleasant land makes more people proud of their country than anything else, even above the NHS and the royal family.

20. Today our National Parks and AONBs provide a constant backdrop for a plethora of activity, not just walking, cycling and horse riding but fresh activities such as mass all-night walks for charities, volunteering, music festivals, scuba diving, glamping, arts trails, competitive triathlons etc. The report found that significantly more people visit AONBs (estimated 170 million) than our English National Parks (estimated 100 million) - there are more AONBs and many are within 30 minutes' drive from sizeable conurbations.

21. Despite the wide recreational opportunities and the undoubted popularity for our national landscapes, the review found that many communities in modern Britain feel that these landscapes hold no relevance for them. Evidence from Natural England (2018) studies for example, serve to highlight that particular groups frequently disconnected from our natural landscapes are the older, the young – especially adolescents, those from lower socio-economic groups and weaker educational backgrounds, and black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. The panel are firm in its belief and desire that our national landscapes should be open and accessible to all - regardless of age or background. Whilst there is excellent engagement work taking place across our National Parks and AONBs the panel found that this was uneven.

22. The panel were highly critical of the lack of diversity within the governing bodies of National parks and AONBs management/governance boards, for example highlighting the imbalance between male and female (68:32), the lack of youth with an average age of 64 in NPs and 54 in AONBs. Black, Asian and minority ethnic board members are extremely rare (<0.8%).

23. The review recognises the strength and value of volunteering, but again found continual inconsistencies in the coverage and opportunities provided. AONBs were deemed to do their best, even though they are currently not charged with the 'people' purpose, nor funded to deliver it.

24. The review recognises the mounting evidence for clear and powerful correlations between access to open space and enhanced quality of life, including the benefits to our physical and mental wellbeing - these include lowering blood pressure, increasing cardio-vascular health and improving mood. There is a huge opportunity to utilise our natural landscapes more fully, through for example growing social prescribing programmes to help aid the wider public purse.

25. The review is critical of the general support for visitors provided by our national landscapes with a need to improve on the basics, such as information, websites and

signage and on-the-ground help. The review acknowledges that they have heard from many of the friction that can be caused by some visitor activity, and there is a need for better education and information provision to help rectify this, including effective dispersal from "honeypot" sites.

26. The review makes a strong case for the future development and expansion of ranger services, for National Parks (currently with 177 rangers) and AONBs (currently with 24) which the panel has identified as invaluable for providing links between visitors, land managers, local people and place. The review is critical of the lack of training opportunities for ranger services.

**The report lists ten proposals (Proposal 7 – Proposal 16) focused on "Landscapes for Everyone":**

27. Proposal 7 calls for a stronger mission to connect all people with our national landscapes, supported and held to account by the new National Landscape Services. The review calls for a clear second legal purpose applied to all of our national landscapes to:

- *'actively connect all parts of society with these special places to support understanding, enjoyment and the nation's health and wellbeing'.*

28. The Sandford Principle should remain in place, and be extended to AONBs, to ensure the primacy of the first purpose.

29. Proposals 8-13 are aspirational in reaching out to new visitors and audiences through ambitious activity programmes focusing on children (a night under the stars for every child), ethnic diversity (new long-term engagement plans) and other marginalised groups (reviewing and revitalising a new version of the National Parks MOSAIC programmes). There is a call for the expansion and enhancement of ranger services and volunteering opportunities across all of our national landscapes (both with clearer national consistencies and a more structured approach). There should be a greater 'enabling' role to foster a very wide and inclusive volunteer base, especially focusing on under-represented groups. The review would like to see 1,000 rangers in place across our national landscapes, acting as ambassadors and the friendly and welcoming face of our national landscapes to visitors, school groups, land managers and residents.

30. There should be enhanced information and signs to guide visitors, and landscapes that truly cater for and improve the nation's health and wellbeing. The latter includes both national conversations with key health bodies and development of local partnerships with local public health teams, clinical commission groups etc. Rights of way should be enhanced to include a network of accessible, hard surface, stile-free paths that are disabled and wheelchair-friendly, with RADAR key gates and provision of all-terrain mobility scooters and routes. AONBs should embrace close working with local highway authorities to ensure they receive the priority they need in our protected landscapes.

31. Proposals 14-16 focus on further access and visitor provision recommending that national landscapes should be supported to become leaders in sustainable tourism (including possible 'tourism zones' under the new Tourism Sector Deal), link better with our family of National Trails and consider further expansion of open

access rights. The review is not supportive of charging mechanisms to help control visitor numbers or raise funds – ‘our national landscapes do not have entry fees and nor should they’, but rather they should rely on leadership, education and good destination management to help shape who comes, what they do and how they benefit from their experience. Partnership sustainable tourism development plans should be encouraged to help reduce environmental impacts and help counter claims that certain places were being overwhelmed.

### Chapter 3: Living in Landscapes

32. The review highlights the importance of the IUCN Category V classification for the UK's national landscapes, recognising the very special relationship and the challenge of combining people and nature. It found that many of our longstanding communities within our protected landscapes are feeling under great pressure, stressing particular anxieties in respect of local house prices and employment, the increasingly limited opportunities for the younger generation, and concerns with limited public transport and the issues of second-home ownership. The review poses critical questions for those who love and shape our landscapes – not 'how do we conserve them?' but 'how do we make sure both natural beauty and society benefit from change rather than suffer? The panel are optimistic for the future.

#### **The report lists 3 key proposals (Proposal 17 - Proposal 20) focused on "Landscapes Alive for Nature and Beauty":**

33. The review finds the current duty in relation to local communities to be vague so Proposal 17 calls for a revised statutory purpose to be applied equally to both National Parks and AONBs to:

- *Foster the economic and community vitality of their area in support of the first two purposes.*

34. The review calls for positive action, ‘our landscapes should be encouraging the kinds of economic and social activity that promotes renewed purposes of national landscapes. There's a real future in good jobs in our rural areas (*and most precious landscapes*) including growing and processing local food, sustainable tourism, nature recovery and land management, and many more sympathetic enterprises connected with their purposes’.

35. Proposal 18 seeks a new National Landscape Housing Association to focus on building affordable homes. This recognises the need to further the often good work undertaken by rural housing associations and local authorities. The review highlights strongly the need for greater clarity in the application of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in particular in terms of the 'exceptional circumstances' for major development, which clearly should not be contravened for large housing schemes under the argument that there are no other available sites outside the protected landscapes. The review recommends that the NPPF is amended to allow greater flexibility to deliver affordable homes in national landscapes generally.

36. As in the wider countryside, car use is the dominant mode of transport in journeying to and from our national landscapes, however **Proposal 19** advocates a new approach to coordinating public transport piloted in the Lake District, and new,

more sustainable ways of accessing national landscapes. Whilst unrealistic to reverse car use, there should be more encouragement for joint-funded initiatives to help secure more sustainable transport, with improved integrated non-car services to help reduce the carbon impact of the visitor economy. In terms of carbon reduction, there should be a much greater push for suitable e-charging points, national landscapes need to collaborate and push for this – urban areas (*and motorway service stations*) are leading the way.

#### Chapter 4: More Special Places

37. The review firmly states that it does not want to see protection removed from any landscape which is currently protected, however the terms of reference requested an assessment of new designations.

38. It is widely acknowledged that many of our protected landscapes are deeply rural and distant from our largest areas of population, often located to the west rather than the east, in our uplands not lowlands, and invariably inland. The system of designations has evidently been remarkably static, not responsive - this has enabled some national landscapes, especially National Parks (e.g the Peak District and Lake District) to become very much rooted to the places that they serve, and respected as a result.

39. The panel agree that the division of landscapes into two distinct families, namely National Parks and AONBs is however unhelpful, both should be part of one greater whole, albeit with varied powers and sources of funding. The review acknowledges that some AONBs have been requesting re-designation as National Parks. The panel also found the current process for boundary changes to national landscapes, and new designations and new types of designations requires fresh impetus.

40. The review felt that there was need for greater imagination to help link landscape to people in those areas close to our urban centres and that in some cases this may not necessitate the need for formal designation.

#### **The report lists 3 key proposals (Proposal 20 - Proposal 22) focused on "More Special Places":**

41. Proposals 20-22 call for new designated landscapes and a new National Forest, new landscape approaches in our cities and coast with a city park competition, and a much improved designation process. The review recommends that additional funding be provided to create three new National Parks from some of the larger AONBs, based upon proposals from The Chilterns, The Cotswolds and Dorset (combining both Dorset and East Devon AONBs). The review recognises that there are opponents as well as supporters of a new status for these areas and suggests that Natural England and ministers consider the case for each.

42. The review endorses the growing support for a new landscape designation for the Forest of Dean and acknowledges other persuasive cases in need of further consideration. The review highlights the strengths of the National Forest (NF) programme and makes the case for a NF in the north midlands.

43. The review again makes the case for a more joined up approach with new and enhanced connections between neighbouring protected landscapes – helping to

shape wider management decisions, including for example emerging Environmental Land Management Schemes. The review highlights the value and importance of our maritime areas, off-shore and on-shore ; furthermore the need for connecting with important city initiatives (London – now a declared National Park City, and the West Midlands). The panel specifically highlight green belt planning and the need for more ambitious socially and ecologically beneficial land in the future to benefit wildlife, landscape beauty and access provision, alongside well-designed new city development.

44. There is a summary of the findings in respect of the complexity and length of the designations process. New designations have been slow to materialise; in the last 20 years there have just been two new National Parks created and the further extension of two NPs. The review believes that the process is not itself flawed, but the main reason for the delays has been a lack of national resourcing and prioritisation. The new National Landscapes Service should drive this activity in the future.

## Chapter 5: New Ways of Working

45. The review panel set out not to get heavily caught up in the mire of structures and processes but look strategically outwards at the bigger picture; however there has been a realisation that very often the excellent work accomplished in our protected landscapes has often been in spite of the laws, policies and systems, not because of them.

46. The panel have found that the two-tier system of protection for National Parks and AONBs has not been helpful, reinforcing differences in governance, finance and administration. This has resulted in a misplaced perception that AONBs are somehow second grade – yet they are often indistinguishable on the ground from National Parks. The 34 AONBs cover some 60% of England's landscape, contain just as much important nature and attract more visitors. The review highlights the vital contribution of AONBs in promoting the understanding and enjoyment of their places, achieved without the recognition in law or equivalent support in resources.

47. The review is critical of the general lack of collaboration between the National Parks and AONBs, although there are some notable exceptions.

48. The review argues that national landscapes have not always had the support within Whitehall that they should, with a view that National Parks and AONBs have been failing to punch at or above their collective weight. This has not been helped by changes in central government agencies over the years and associated reductions in support from the centre. Consequently our protected landscapes have collectively often been on the periphery of Defra business, and not at the vanguard of officials' thoughts in achieving the government priorities of the day.

49. National landscapes will receive a total of £55.4 m from Defra for 2019-20. Not a big sum in government terms, with the panel recognising the ongoing significant disparity of funding between National Parks (£48.7m) and AONBs (£6.7m). The original funding agreements are, in the words of the review, 'fossilised and complex' with Annex 3 providing a summary of the different formulas applied. The now dated AONB formula is: (AONB area in Km<sup>2</sup> x £60 per Km<sup>2</sup>) + (number of local authorities x £6,000 per local authority) = total AONB grant. The review is critical in stating that



there is no clear and concise explanation for the funding formula, with the grant income not clearly set according to priorities. The panel are praiseworthy of the work accomplished by AONBs and their ability to be enterprising in delivering with and through others. The National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) and the Rural Development Programme's LEADER programme have been particularly important sources of additional funding to National Parks and AONBs. As a whole however the review concludes that the funding for our national landscapes is not as well-diversified as it could or should be.

**The report identifies 5 key proposals (Proposal 23 - Proposal 27) focused on "New Ways of Working":**

50. Proposal 23 calls for a stronger purpose in law for our national landscapes. As set out in earlier chapters, the review makes a compelling case for the purposes for National Parks and AONBs to be updated and to apply equally to both types of designation.

51. Subject to further debate and legal discussion the review recommends the following three purposes:

1. *Recover, conserve and enhance natural beauty, biodiversity and natural capital, and cultural heritage.*
2. *Actively connect all parts of society with these special places to support understanding, enjoyment and the nation's health and wellbeing.*
3. *Foster the economic vitality of their area in support of the first two purposes.*

52. The review makes it clear that where there is conflict between any of the three purposes, then as applied through an updated 'Sandford Principle' greater weight must be given to the first purpose.

53. Proposal 24 is particularly relevant to the AONB family, recommending that AONBs should be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources and renamed as National Landscapes. The panel feel that this is pressing.

54. Proposals 6, 23 and 27 are all specific to strengthening the position of AONBs, renamed as 'National Landscapes' to help raise their status to that alongside National Parks and remove the shackles of its rambling title, and its acronym that few know and many get wrong.

55. Proposals 25-27 make the case for a new National Landscapes Service, further reformed governance to inspire ambition across our national landscapes and to better reflect wider society, and a new financial model with crucially more money, greater security and increased focus on entrepreneurial approaches. They envisage a small, expert board, appointed by Defra and working to bring our National Parks and AONBs (National Landscapes) together: inspiring collaborative and outward looking approaches, sharing and supporting peer review, and stimulating joint action and initiatives across our 44 most beautiful landscapes to help the nation.

56. There is a recommended overhaul of governance arrangements, especially National Parks, which should have a much reduced main board (between 9 and 12 members), working alongside a wider partnership advisory group representative of

the various interest and specialist groups. There should be a much greater effort to secure diversity - of social background, gender, age, ethnicity, (dis)ability. AONBs should consider adopting similar structures where possible, although in some cases, for smaller AONBs for example, simpler governance models may be more applicable. There should be scope to encourage wider citizenship opportunities and engagement within the main NP and AONB boards. There is a reaffirmation that the primary task of each board would be to prepare and drive ambitious delivery of Management Plans, delivering for nature, people and communities.

57. The review covers the important issue of funding and resources in **Proposal 27**. A compelling argument is made in respect of the continuation of central government funding, and that this should be both extended further and secured across a five-year period. However, the panel are clear in their recommendations that there should not be an over-reliance upon core funding, but rather an ongoing drive to a new funding model – one that can secure diverse, larger and sustainable income. Building on earlier findings the review highlights the need for a simpler, fairer and dynamic system of funding, and that in future this should be overseen directly by the National Landscapes Service.

58. The review proposes that the original funding formulas are revisited for all of our protected landscapes and carefully re-calibrated across a range of criteria and phased in over time. In the more immediate period, it is proposed that AONBs need an uplift in their funding and that the current £6.7m (several million less than the South Downs N. Park alone receives) is raised to £13.4m. The review suggests that the local authority funding element for AONBs should continue.

59. The review reported considerable tensions over various proposals to support our National Parks in developing charitable status, furthering commercial links etc. This the panel found very surprising - with evidently a collective failure of coordination, ambition and expertise. Looking ahead the review makes the case for a far more ambitious entrepreneurial and philanthropic programme of fundraising across the entire protected landscapes family.

## **Conclusions:**

60. The review argues that looking ahead there is a need for big ambitions - much more must be done for nature and natural beauty. Much more must be done for people who live in and visit our nationally protected landscapes. National landscape bodies themselves should do much more to reach out and invite people in. The panel stress that our national landscapes should be alive for people, and places where everyone is actively welcomed and where there are unrivalled opportunities to enjoy their natural beauty - in essence landscapes for all. There is recognition that conservation and farming are partners, and that there should be farming for nature as well as food.

61. The review panel were appreciative of all involved and recognised the excitement and optimism of what can be achieved in the future. 'This moment matters – aspiring to protect and enhance what we have will make England's special places even better'.

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## **Appendix 1 – The Landscapes Review’s 27 proposals**

- 1: National landscapes should have a renewed mission to recover and enhance nature and be supported and held to account for delivery by a new National Landscapes Service.
- 2: The state of nature and natural capital in our national landscapes should be regularly and robustly assessed, informing the priorities for action.
- 3: Strengthened Management Plans should set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery including, but not limited to, wilder areas and the response to climate change (notably tree planting and peatland restoration). Their implementation must be backed up by stronger status in law.
- 4: National landscapes should form the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks – joining things up within and beyond their boundaries.
- 5: A central place for national landscapes in new Environmental Land Management Schemes.
- 6: A strengthened place for national landscapes in the planning system with AONBs given statutory consultee status, encouragement to develop local plans and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 7: A stronger mission to connect all people with our national landscapes, supported and held to account by the new National Landscapes Service.
- 8: A night under the stars in a national landscape for every child.
- 9: New long-term programmes to increase the ethnic diversity of visitors.
- 10: Landscapes that cater for and improve the nation’s health and wellbeing.
- 11: Expanding volunteering in our national landscapes.
- 12: Better information and signs to guide visitors.
- 13: A ranger service in all our national landscapes, part of a national family.
- 14: National landscapes supported to become leaders in sustainable tourism.
- 15: Joining up with others to make the most of what we have, and bringing National Trails into the national landscapes family.
- 16: Consider expanding open access rights in national landscapes.
- 17: National landscapes working for vibrant communities.
- 18: A new National Landscapes Housing Association to build affordable homes.
- 19: A new approach to coordinating public transport piloted in the Lake District, and new, more sustainable ways of accessing national landscapes.

20: New designated landscapes and a new National Forest.

21: Welcoming new landscape approaches in cities and the coast, and a city park competition.

22: A better designations process.

23: Stronger purposes in law for our national landscapes.

24: AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes.

25: A new National Landscapes Service bringing our 44 national landscapes together to achieve more than the sum of their parts.

26: Reformed governance to inspire and secure ambition in our national landscapes and better reflect society.

27: A new financial model – more money, more secure, more enterprising.