

Yorkshire Wolds - Proposed Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Designation Project

Key Take Aways

- Once an area is designated as an AONB, the land is subject to planning and environmental changes in regulations and legislation.
- Area specific schemes to support local objectives are likely to become available.
- Unsure of how schemes like FiPL will continue under the Labour government.
- Planning applications face increased scrutiny.
- Evidenced consideration and mitigation of the landscape is needed in planning applications.
- There will be the loss of Class Q permitted development (converting agricultural buildings into residential dwellings).

What is an AONB?

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is land protected under the Countryside Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. The designation of an AONB means that an area is officially recognised for its national significance and natural beauty.

Currently, there are 34 AONBs in England. As of 1st February 2024, AONBs have undergone a name change to 'National Landscapes'. Legally however, Natural England can only designate an AONB so for the purpose of this guide, we will continue to use the term AONB.

How is an AONB designated?

Natural England are responsible for designating areas as an AONB under the CROW Act.

They consider whether the land has outstanding natural beauty and then whether the designation is suitable for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area.

Outstanding levels of natural beauty are determined through a natural beauty assessment. The natural beauty assessment is subjective and therefore uses the following guide criteria to base the assessment on; landscapes and scenic quality, relative wildness, relative tranquillity, contributions made to natural beauty and cultural heritage features.

How are AONBs managed?

Local Authorities are obligated to create and carry out management plans for AONBs. They work in partnership with each other and external interested stakeholders. Typically, 75% of AONB management is funded by Defra, with the remaining 25% of the costs funded through the Local Authority.

THE YORKSHIRE WOLDS DESIGNATION PROJECT

Why is the Yorkshire Wolds being considered for an AONB?

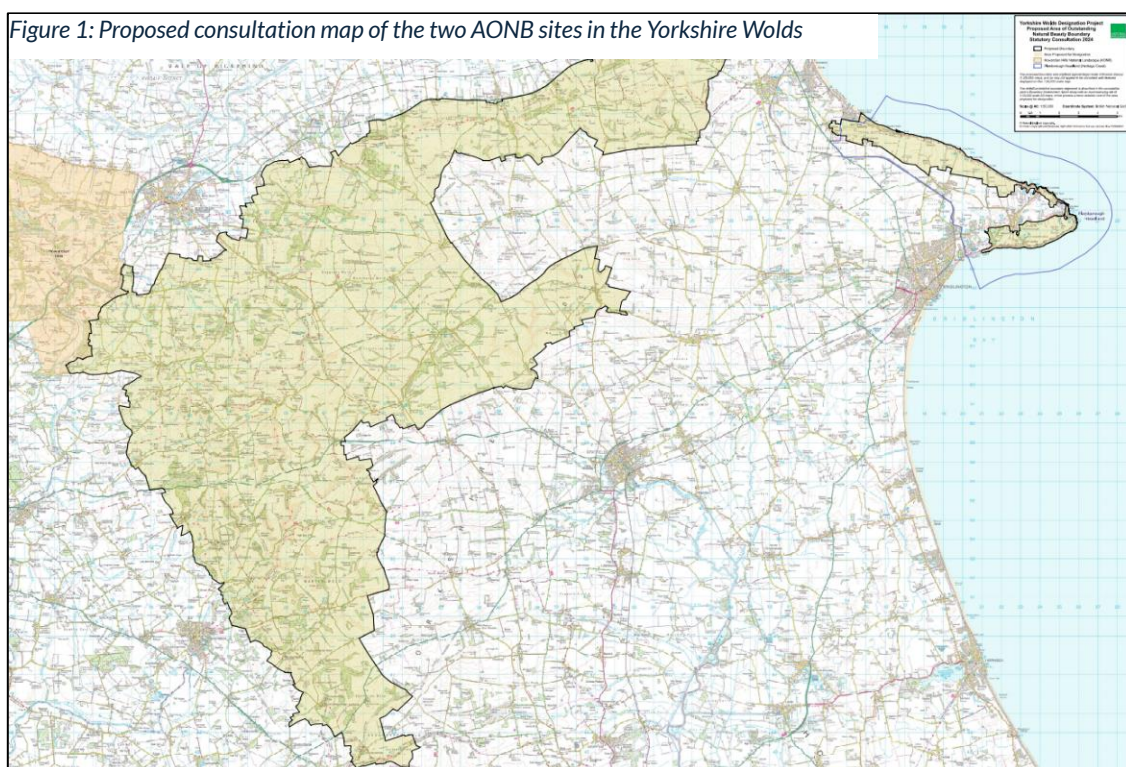
There has long been a discussion amongst Local Authorities whether the Yorkshire Wolds should be designated as an AONB as most of the area has been recognised as either 'Important Landscape Areas' or 'Areas of High Landscape Value'. Following the 'Landscapes Review' (Glover Review) in 2021, Natural England proposed four new AONBs, including the Yorkshire Wolds.

Which areas are being considered?

The natural beauty assessment carried out on the Yorkshire Wolds identified two smaller areas proposed to be the AONBs (See Figure 1 below):

- **Inland Area:** Comprising the north and west escarpment of the Wolds, the foothills south of Malton and the High Wolds and their valley systems.
- **Coastal Area:** Extending between Reighton and Sewerby Rocks.

Natural England have held engagement exercises for the public to express their opinion on this project since 2022. The designation of the Yorkshire Wolds as an AONB is predicted to be submitted to the Secretary of State by Summer 2026.



Yorkshire Wolds Consultation

The consultation closes on **13th January 2025**. The easiest way to respond to the consultation is to complete the [online survey](#).

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS IN AN AONB

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme

Currently, if you are a farmer in an AONB you are eligible for funding through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme. The scheme funds projects such as the restoration of habitats, reduction of carbon emissions, involvement in Open Farm Sundays and investment in rural small businesses, which generate positive climate, nature, people and places outcomes.

Projects can get up to 100% of costs if no commercial gain is made. If the project will benefit the farm commercially, then the programme will fund a proportion of the costs. The amount will depend on how much the project will benefit your business.

There has been large demand for the FiPL scheme, with an additional year of funding secured until March 2025, injecting an extra £40 million into the projects. The FiPL scheme can work alongside the Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes to provide incentives for land managers to farm in an environmental sensitive way. Under the new Labour Government, we are unsure as to the successor schemes following the end of the FiPL scheme and what funding will be available to land managers in Summer 2026.

Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes

Landscape Recovery (LR) is one of the three ELM schemes. It is open to farmers and land managers who want to produce environmental and climate goods on their land at landscape-scale. LR funds large-scale, collaborative, long-term projects that work towards the national targets laid out in the 25 Year Environment Plan, and so are suitable on land in AONBs.

So far there have been two Rounds of this scheme released. The first Round focused on projects that improved biodiversity and water quality, whilst the second focused on Net Zero, protected sites and habitat creation. The majority of projects in both LR Rounds involved land in Protected Landscapes.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and Countryside Stewardship (CS) schemes are also applicable to those farming in AONBs. Currently there is no indication that any changes would be made to land entered into the SFI or CS schemes if they became a part of the Yorkshire Wolds AONB.

Shooting Restrictions

Currently, the designation of an AONB does not bring any specific restrictions relating to game shooting. Speculation regarding increased regulations relating to shooting may put land designated as an AONB at increased risk of being hit first. To date restrictions are in place in SSSIs and conservation areas with consent being required.

PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

What are the planning implications in an AONB?

When submitting planning applications within an AONB, the Local Planning Authority will consider the impact the proposal will have on the landscape. As part of this they will check that all risks are minimised and suitable mitigation measures to reduce the impact on the area have been considered. This can place a greater emphasis on sensitive applications and applications will be subject to increased controls.

The current National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that:

- the scale and extent of development within an AONB should be limited
- development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas
- permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that development is in the public interest.

Permitted Development

Once designated as an AONB land falls under the category of Article 2(3) land which restricts the number of Permitted Development Rights land and homeowners can benefit from. Rights which will be unaffected include:

- Landowners will still benefit from temporary non-agricultural use of land for up to 28 days per annum.
- The Permitted Development Rights afforded under Part 6 Class A for agricultural development and Part 3 Class R allowing change of use from agricultural to commercial use are still permitted.

However, the key change is the permitted development under Part 3 Class Q allowing change of use from agricultural to residential use is lost.

Recommended actions

The changes / restrictions outlined above do not mean that development within AONB's is unachievable, rather, it is subject to increased controls. As such, landowners within the prospective area are encouraged to review their portfolio and any planned future development. It may be advantageous to consider any agricultural buildings which may be suitable for conversion to residential use prior to any changes made to make use of the current permitted development regime.

HELP & ADVICE

If you are concerned about the impact of the designation of your land to an AONB, please contact us on **01423 740 120** and we will be happy to help.