

Comments on the Government response to the Landscape (Glover) Review.

**Burwash Parish Council:**

We are a parish of three small villages in the heart of the East Sussex High Weald (AONB) centred along a prominent ridge-top between the steep-sided valleys of the Dudwell and Rother rivers.

We are acutely aware of the privileges and responsibilities of living in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with two SSSIs, a Local Wildlife Site, ancient woodlands, shaws and ghylls, field systems dating back to mediaeval times and historic routeways. We actively work to protect and enhance our environment, including our Dark Skies status, through a Parish Council Environment working group and local volunteer groups applying policies which are set out in our Neighbourhood Plan (currently at the referendum stage).

We work with and fully support the High Weald AONB in these aims, including endorsement of their Management Plan and the tailored High Weald Design Guide plus taking a stand against large-scale building developments where these are identified as harmful to the AONB and are contrary to the principles of sustainability as set out in the NPPF.

Our rural community is challenged by heavy traffic, inappropriate executive-style building applications, loss of a vibrant economic community and migration by young adults to urban areas where housing is more affordable and work more accessible.

This is the response from Burwash Parish Council on behalf of the residents of the Parish.

**We support the following proposals within the Review and as endorsed by the Government response:**

1. To strengthen AONBs “with new purposes, powers and resources”.
2. To strengthen the role of the AONBs within the planning process / development of local plans / changes to the NPPF by making them statutory consultees.
3. To take immediate action to address the issues of threatened wildlife / biodiversity and climate emergency.
4. To give everyone the opportunity to connect with, appreciate and take responsibility for nature and our protected landscapes.
5. Funding and expenditure should be transparent and governance (in particular of the High Weald AONB) needs to be overhauled to ensure that it is able to deliver the key aims identified in the Review (2 and 3 above).

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**Caveats:**

6. There are too many aspirations in the Review. Some, unless carefully managed, would potentially be counterproductive in protecting threatened biodiversity, landscapes, rural remoteness and tranquillity, nature recovery and climate emergency through increased access, tourism, road traffic and ancillary infrastructure.
7. Funding available from the government is acknowledged within the Review as insufficient but suggested alternative private options may lead to exploitation of the landscapes and rural areas and undermine the intended protections.

8. The single greatest threat to the protected landscapes in our parish comes from the housing targets imposed by central and local government, speculative developers seeking to build executive housing which is neither sympathetic in scale and design nor affordable to the local community and the requirement by Rother District Council (RDC) our Local Planning Authority for there to be a minimum of 6 units in each development for this to count towards our allocated target. The Review and the government response fails to address issues such as these which result in the destruction, not just of fields and habitats, but rural communities from which next generation residents have to migrate in order to find affordable housing
9. Planting new trees does not mitigate against the destruction of ancient woodland.

**Other recommendations:**

10. Education in schools is entirely absent from these proposals and would be a quick win. The need to protect farming as our source of food, rural community identities, iconic landscapes and biodiversity should form part of the curriculum. That would enable inclusive outreach to all levels of society and in both urban and rural areas as an investment for the future.
11. A night under the stars for every child could be more readily available if the practice of Dark Skies were to become 'fashionable'. Turning off unnecessary lighting is the most immediate, universal and cheapest action that can be taken to reduce light pollution, wasted energy and harm to wildlife, as well as human beings whose circadian rhythms and mental well-being are also negatively impacted. Disappointingly, this form of pollution receives very little attention and no mention at all in the Glover Review and yet it is a key feature of remote communities and the many parishes that try to maintain the Dark Skies tradition not simply as an upholding of rural traditions but as an active and meaningful response to the climate emergency and threats to biodiversity.
12. The suggestion of removing reference to the "outstanding natural beauty" in the current term and replacing it with "National Landscape" - an anonymised descriptive - is a regressive step. It does not highlight the nature, wildlife and beauty of the areas. We would suggest wasteful re-branding and associated management consultancy budgets be recycled for use in core, measurable, protection activities.
13. There is no reference as to how to improve availability and uptake of public transport in order to prevent increased car usage with the greater enjoyment of protected landscapes, without which carbon emissions are likely to increase. Many of the lanes in our parish are single track and have no walkway, so additional traffic would also increase dangers to cyclists, walkers, horse-riders who are mindful of their carbon footprint.

7th April 2022