



# Proposed Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty:

## Consultation Document

A Proposal for a new Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding  
Natural Beauty (AONB)

# About Natural England

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide.

Within England, it is responsible for:

- Promoting nature conservation and protecting biodiversity
- Conserving and enhancing the landscape
- Securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
- Promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation
- Contributing in other ways to social and economic wellbeing through management of the natural environment

To find out more about Natural England's work visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>

This document contains useful information that will help you to comment on a proposed Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

We recommend that you read it before completing the response form.



# Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction	2
What are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?	3
Who looks after Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?	3
How are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty designated?	4
Applying the approach to the proposed new Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	9
The Proposed Extent of the new Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	10
■ Proposed Inland Area	13
■ Proposed Coastal Area	19
The area proposed for designation as a Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	24
What happens next?	26
Implications of designation	27



View south from Langton across Birdsall Estate to the chalk scarp

# Foreword

Landscape is how many people come to understand the scale and richness of the natural world around them, whether it is through the view from their window or the majesty of distant mountains. It helps them to appreciate nature's diverse habitats, distinctive species and a whole range of public benefits such as carbon storage, clean water and opportunities for recreation. But it is beauty in the landscape that draws and holds the eye. We are very fortunate to have some fantastic landscapes across the north of England, many of which are already legally protected as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) were re-branded to National Landscapes last year to recognise the importance and ambition of our nationally significant landscapes to deliver for nature, climate, people and place. However, when designating, legally they remain 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty'.

For some years there has been discussion about whether the Yorkshire Wolds, an area of upland chalk landscapes, should be recognised in relation to their outstanding natural beauty. Natural England has now produced proposals for a new Yorkshire Wolds AONB and this formal consultation seeks your views about these proposals. I'd like to recognise the amount of work that has been undertaken via early informal engagement on the draft Candidate Area and I thank all who have contributed to date.

We are now keen to hear from everyone who has an interest in the area and cares about its future. If you would like to have your say, please spend some time reading this consultation document and send us your views by completing the separate response form.

The consultation ends at midnight on 13 January 2025, and you can send us your comments any time before this date. If you would like to speak directly to the team working on this project then please drop in at one of the events we are holding locally in the area (see local press or visit the website for details): <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/yorkshire-wolds-designation/>. We will keep everyone informed of progress by publishing the outcome of this consultation following the consultation analysis period.

We look forward to receiving your responses to this important consultation.



**Tony Juniper**  
Chairman of Natural England



# Introduction

Natural England is the public body responsible for conserving and enhancing the natural environment in England. One of Natural England's responsibilities is to decide whether an area should be given special status and protection by designating it as a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance an area's natural beauty. AONBs are designated by Natural England using statutory powers in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000.

For many years there has been a local desire for a new Yorkshire Wolds AONB to include areas covered by local landscape designations and areas of wider countryside. These proposals have been supported by the local authorities in the area and in 2013, following a period of discussions, a formal request was put to Natural England by East Riding of Yorkshire Council, based on work it had carried out to support the proposal. The proposal was placed on hold until other Natural England national landscape designation work was completed.

In May 2021 the Natural England Board approved the commencement of a new programme of landscape designation projects. In June 2021 a written ministerial statement by then Secretary of State, George Eustice (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)) announced that Natural England "will be taking forward the government's commitment to designate additional landscapes and is currently considering the designation of four new areas". This included the possible designation of a new Yorkshire Wolds AONB.

Subsequently Natural England established a project Management Advisory Group (MAC) in order to include statutory local authorities in project governance and improve engagement. An Area of Search was defined collaboratively between Natural England and the MAC, and used as a starting point for the assessment process. A consortium of specialist consultants was appointed to undertake the technical assessment and stakeholder engagement work.

An initial call for evidence ran from March to April 2022, followed by a period of analysis and commencement of natural beauty assessment. An extensive early stakeholder and public engagement exercise was held once a draft area considered likely to qualify for designation emerged. The results of this engagement were then taken into account as the assessments progressed.

Assessments to determine which landscapes meet the legal requirements for inclusion in an AONB have now been completed and proposals have been developed to designate specific areas. We would now like to give all those with an interest in the designation the opportunity to express their views.

The purpose of this consultation is to seek your views on whether these areas have the qualities required for designation as AONB, whether they should be designated and if so, where the boundary should be.

A separate response form is provided for you to express your views, but please read this Consultation Document first – it contains important information that you will find useful in making your comments.

Further information, expressing the detailed analysis which led to these recommendations, is also available as separate Supporting Documents. Copies of the Supporting Documents can be downloaded from <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/yorkshire-wolds-designation> or by emailing us at [YorksWoldsDesignationProject@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:YorksWoldsDesignationProject@naturalengland.org.uk) or by writing to: Yorks Wolds Consultation, PO Box 295, HOLMFIRTH, HD9 9FS.

**The closing date for comments to arrive is by midnight on Monday 13 January 2025.**

# What are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are designated for the purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty. There are 34 AONBs in England including the Howardian Hills AONB which lies adjacent to the area proposed for designation. Designation as AONB means giving an area special legal protection. It also requires funding from the local authorities in the area and a grant from Defra and additional funding may be sought from other sources.

Once an area has been designated by Natural England, activities relating to the purpose of AONB designation are coordinated and led by local authorities, who also have a legal responsibility to produce a Management Plan for the area. In carrying out their duties they often form wider partnerships with other organisations. Any public body taking a decision or undertaking activity that affects land in an AONB must seek to further the purpose of the designation when carrying out its work.

AONBs were recently rebranded as National Landscapes, however when designating Natural England still legally designates an AONB. To avoid confusion, this document thus refers to AONB throughout. If an AONB is subsequently designated then it would be branded as a National Landscape.

## Who looks after Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

Most AONBs have a management team whose role encompasses the management of the staff team and its finances. This would be set up following any new AONB designation. The AONB team is hosted by relevant local authorities (in the case of a Yorkshire Wolds AONB this would comprise East Riding of Yorkshire Council and North Yorkshire Council (formerly Ryedale District Council and Scarborough Borough Council)). Individual posts within the AONB team would include an AONB Manager, and may also typically include project officers offering advice and grants to farmers, landowners and community groups. It may also include officers dealing with heritage, nature recovery, planning and communications as well as finance and administrative staff.

Section 89 (2) of the CROW Act 2000, places a duty on relevant local authorities to prepare and publish a plan which formulates policy for the management of an AONB and for the carrying out of functions in relation to it and a further duty to review the plan at “intervals of not more than five years”. An AONB Management Plan therefore sets out the policy for the management of an AONB and includes an action plan for carrying out activity in support of the purpose of designation. The AONB Team co-ordinates, facilitates and delivers certain countryside management functions as set out in the Management Plan.





The local authorities whose area wholly or partly includes land in the proposed designation, and to which the statutory powers and duties relating to AONBs would apply include the councils of East Riding of Yorkshire and North Yorkshire. Planning and development control in an AONB would remain the responsibility of these local authorities.

## How are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty designated?

Natural England is responsible for considering which areas in England meet the criterion, set down in law, for being included in an AONB, and also whether to proceed with their designation. To do this Natural England carries out assessments, consults local authorities and stakeholders (including the public) and undertakes the legal process that results in an area being designated. The final decision however lies with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. An area only becomes part of an AONB when the Secretary of State confirms a legal order made by Natural England.

### What is the legal criterion for designating an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

Natural England has a power under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 to designate land as AONB as set out in Section 82(1) of the Act. In summary this states that Natural England can designate an area in England as AONB if it is satisfied that it has such outstanding natural beauty that its designation is desirable for the conservation and enhancement of its natural beauty.

Natural beauty is more than just “beautiful scenery.” The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 clarified that the wildlife and cultural heritage of an area as well as its natural features can contribute to the natural beauty of landscapes. For example the presence of particular wildlife or visible archaeological remains can make an appreciable contribution to an area’s sense of place and heighten perceptions of natural beauty. Natural beauty can also be found in landscapes that have been altered by humans through agriculture, forestry or parkland.

### How are landscapes assessed for designation?

The approach used for the Yorkshire Wolds Designation Project follows Natural England’s approved “Guidance for Assessing Landscapes for Designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England” (2021) (also referred to in this document as the Natural England Guidance). The Natural England Guidance is available to view as a Supporting Document and is accessible via <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/yorkshire-wolds-designation>

To designate an area as AONB, Natural England must answer the questions below:

- Does this landscape have outstanding natural beauty?
- Is it desirable to designate this landscape as an AONB for the conservation and enhancement of its natural beauty?
- Where should the boundary be drawn?



View southwest down Langdale and across Cotton Dale and North Dale

Only if it is considered that there is sufficient natural beauty, will an assessment of the desirability of designation be warranted and only if the conclusion of this is positive, will detailed boundary proposals be developed. Having reached this conclusion, the legislation also requires Natural England to consult the relevant principal tier local authorities.

Each of these stages is described briefly below. The full assessments are available as Supporting Documents and accessible via <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/ne-landscape-heritage-and-geodiversity-team/yorkshire-wolds-designation>

### Identifying an Area for Assessment

Once a decision has been made by the Natural England Board to start the designation process, an area of search is defined. This is in order to make the assessment manageable and to ensure that resources are concentrated on areas which are likely to have potential for designation. This process is guided by Natural England and the MAG and refined through stakeholder/public engagement, and initial assessments of an area.

### Stakeholder Engagement

This involves participative evidence gathering utilising a 'Citizen Space' approach to enable stakeholders (including the general public) to contribute their 'local knowledge' and to comment on emerging areas likely to qualify for designation. This is facilitated through the creation of a website where people can access information, upload evidence and annotate a map to highlight different areas. Communication and support mechanisms which are used during this process include drop-in centres in and around the Candidate Area and online webinars.

### Describing the character of an area

Landscape character is defined as a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse. Landscape character assessment is the tool used to define areas of differing landscape character and to describe them in a neutral way. Local landscape character assessments relevant to the Area of Search are used as a basis for defining Evaluation Areas. The definition of Evaluation Areas are at a scale to assist with the collation of data and decision making and sometimes involve the combination or division of character areas or types.



Dramatic cliffs and coastal hinterland at Speeton and Buckton Cliffs

### Evaluation stage

The **Evaluation Areas** identified are then tested against the single statutory criterion of 'outstanding natural beauty'. The outcome of this stage is the identification of areas which are considered likely to meet the outstanding natural beauty criterion and which can then be considered as a **Candidate Area** for further consideration in relation to the desirability of designation.

### Making judgements about natural beauty

Once an Evaluation Area has been defined, it is evaluated to establish whether it has sufficient natural beauty for it to be designated. Natural beauty is a subjective characteristic of a landscape and ultimately involves value judgments. In deciding whether an area has outstanding natural beauty, Natural England must consider the merits of an area in comparison with ordinary countryside.



In order to make this judgment in a transparent and consistent way, Natural England uses a set of factors which have long been considered to contribute to natural beauty. These are set out in Table 1. A more detailed version of this Table can be found in Annex 1 of the Natural England Guidance.

**Table 1** Factors Related to Natural Beauty

**Landscape Quality**

This is a measure of the physical state or condition of a landscape.

**Scenic Quality**

The extent to which a landscape appeals to the senses (mainly, but not only, the visual senses).

**Relative Wildness**

The degree to which relatively wild character can be perceived in a landscape and contributes to its sense of place. (NB all of England's landscapes have been influenced by human activity over time, which is why we use the term relative wildness).

**Relative tranquillity**

The degree to which relative tranquillity can be perceived in a landscape (ie whether an area appears quiet, remote and relatively free from human influence or development).

**Natural Heritage Features**

The influence of natural heritage on people's perception of the natural beauty of a landscape. Natural heritage includes features formed by natural processes, wildlife, wild flowers and geological features.

**Cultural Heritage**

The influence of cultural heritage (such as buildings, archaeology and designed landscapes) on people's perception of the natural beauty of a landscape and the degree to which associations with particular people, artists, writers or events in history contribute to such perception.

Not every factor listed in Table 1 needs to be present in a landscape in order for it to have outstanding natural beauty. By considering all the factors together a judgement can be made as to whether an area meets the criterion for designation overall. Applying this analysis enables the extent of land likely to meet the statutory criterion to be more precisely defined. These refined areas are called Candidate Areas for designation.

Once an area has been identified as qualifying for inclusion in a Candidate Area, Natural England must determine whether designation of the area is desirable.

**Deciding whether it is desirable to designate**

An area of land that satisfies the natural beauty criterion is capable of being included in an AONB. However, designation does not follow automatically: it is for Natural England to exercise its judgment as to whether a Candidate Area, which meets the natural beauty criterion should become part of an AONB in order to achieve the statutory purpose of the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

To establish whether it is desirable to designate an area as an AONB, Natural England asks the five questions set out in Table 2:

**Table 2** Is it Desirable to Designate?

Is there an area which satisfies AONB technical criterion?

Is the area of such **significance** that the AONB **purpose** should apply to it?

What are the issues affecting the area's **special qualities** and understanding and enjoyment?

Can AONB purposes be best pursued through the **management mechanisms, powers and duties** which come with AONB designation?

Are there **other relevant factors** which tend to suggest whether it is or is not desirable to designate the area?

Having considered these questions and relevant evidence, it is for Natural England to decide whether or not a particular area is of such national significance that it should be designated as AONB and managed to achieve the statutory purpose.

### Identifying a suitable boundary

A detailed boundary is drawn for the proposed new AONB designation to show where it is desirable for a particular designation to begin and end. Natural England develops proposed boundaries using a suite of principles, including those in Table 3 below, which are set out in more detail in Appendix 4 in the Natural England Guidance.

**Table 3** Boundary Setting Considerations

**Transitional areas:** Natural beauty often changes gradually over a sweep of country rather than suddenly from one field to another. In these 'areas of transition,' the boundary should be drawn towards the high quality end of the transition in a manner that includes areas of high quality land and excludes areas of lesser quality.

**Types of boundary:** Wherever possible, a clear physical feature should be chosen.

**Other administrative boundaries:** Administrative boundaries (such as county or parish boundaries) are often unsuitable because they are hard to see on the ground or do not correspond with the area of high natural beauty. Similarly, land ownership is not itself a reason for including or excluding land from designation – there will often be instances where part of a landholding sits within the designated area and part sits outside.

**Inclusion of settlements:** Towns and villages at the edge should only be included if they are within and part of a sweep of qualifying countryside.

**Splitting of settlements:** Towns or villages should not normally be cut in two by an AONB boundary where it can be avoided.

**Incongruous development:** Unsightly development on the edge of an AONB should generally be excluded unless it is of a temporary or transient nature.

**Proposed Developments:** Land at the edge of a proposed designation that is identified for development in development plans, or has existing planning permission should normally be excluded. Land should not be included merely to seek to protect it from specific development proposals.

**Features of interest:** Areas and features of wildlife, geological, geomorphological, historic, cultural or architectural value should be included where practicable.



Patchwork fields and woodland on the western escarpment and undulating foothills





Wavy landform and rounded slopes typical of the chalk farmland southwest of Langtoft



# Applying the approach to the proposed new Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

This Consultation Document presents only outline information on the process undertaken for this project and about the proposed designation of a new Yorkshire Wolds AONB. If you would like more detailed information about the proposed area or about the initial identification of the Area of Search, Evaluation Areas or Candidate Area or the assessment of the desirability of designation or development of the proposed boundaries then please refer to the Supporting Documents.

## Defining the Area of Search

The Area of Search was initially defined by Natural England and the MAG and was loosely based on the extent of the existing Yorkshire Wolds National Character Area (No. 27). A call for evidence was undertaken with the local authorities to seek evidence of natural beauty and issues affecting the area. This information was used to refine the Area of Search.



Ridge and furrow in the small scale pastures near Kirby Underdale on the western scarp



### Characterisation stage

The East Riding Landscape Character Assessment (2013 and updated 2018), North Yorkshire and York Character Assessment (2011) and Scarborough Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2013) provided information on landscape character for the Study Area and assisted in the definition of the Evaluation Areas for assessment. Landscape character areas and types were amalgamated to create Evaluation Areas as a framework for assessment and in order to make assessment more manageable.

### Evaluation stage

Twelve discrete Evaluation Areas were defined and used during evaluation.

Each Evaluation Area was tested against the factors outlined in Table 1 on page 6. The evaluation included in-depth assessment of published information and data on a wide range of relevant issues. The relevance and significance of this information was also further tested in the field.

A provisional Candidate Area was then consulted on with stakeholders (including the general public) as part of a 'Call for Review' and to determine the degree of consensus over the area most likely to qualify for AONB designation. The 'Call for Review' resulted in 239 representations from stakeholders, including local communities, and provided valuable information, which was used to inform and plan site work, supplement the collation of information in relation to natural beauty factors and inform professional judgements. Further assessment, including extensive field assessment, was carried out and resulted in the definition of a Proposed Candidate Area.

### Defining a Candidate Area

The evaluation process resulted in the identification of two discrete areas considered to meet the statutory natural beauty criterion, these are called the 'Candidate Area' for designation. The extent of the areas which are considered to qualify for AONB designation is illustrated below and on the enclosed maps, as well as in the Supporting Documents. They include an **inland area** comprising the north and west chalk scarps and foothills, as well as the High Wolds and main incised valleys, and a separate **coastal area** where the underlying chalk geology meets the sea and gives rise to dramatic coastal scenery.

## The Proposed Extent of the new Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The proposed extent is illustrated below and in the enclosed maps. Taken together the land within the proposed boundary comprises the areas for designation and includes:

- Inland area - High Wolds and Valleys
- Coastal area - Reighton and Sewerby Cliffs

Each area is considered separately below. The text summarises the case for designation for each. It sets out the extent to which the natural beauty criterion is met, the desirability of designation and the proposed boundary. For more detailed information, please refer to the Supporting Documents, particularly the reports on the assessment of natural beauty, desirability of designation and the boundary considerations.

[illegible]







# Proposed Inland Area

## Context

The Inland area forms an arc of elevated chalk wolds and valleys extending from Goodmanham in the southwest round to Folkton in the northeast and stretching from the Howardian Hills AONB, along the Derwent Gorge, to the valleys of Langtoft in the east. It is defined by strong topographic features such as the scarp and foothills and the concentration of complex and sinuous dry valleys which reflect the underlying chalk geology, influence land use patterns and which give rise to high scenic quality and compositions.

## Extent to which the natural beauty criterion is met

The parts of the Yorkshire Wolds which are considered suitable for inclusion within the proposed designation include:

- The northern chalk scarp which rises from the Vale of Pickering
- The western scarp and foothills which rise from the Vale of York
- The Jurassic Limestone Hills east of the Derwent
- The High Wold farmlands which are dissected by a concentration of complex sinuous dry valleys
- The eastern dip slope where it forms the fringes of the High Wolds and includes strongly defined dry valleys

Collectively these areas form a landscape which is considered to be exceptional within the national context.



Traditional limestone cottages in the village of Langton

## Significance

The proposed Inland Area forms the most northern outcrop of chalk in England and reflects a classic karst landscape, containing a complex arrangement of dendritic periglacial steep sided, dry valley systems, and is defined to the north and west by a dramatic escarpment. The close juxtaposition of its elevated broad interfluvies and deeply incised valleys, manifest in a landscape of contrasts - open rounded tops of arable farmland offer panoramic vistas and wide domed skies which quickly descend into narrow, winding,



secluded pastoral valleys offering intimate enclosure. The sequential experience of these contrasting landscapes gives rise to the area's unique scenic qualities and outstanding and often simple curvaceous compositions, which provide artistic inspiration. Lightly settled and away from major infrastructure, this landscape has an emptiness and scale - disorientating valleys and dark night skies adding further to perceptions of remoteness and tranquillity. Scattered throughout are vestiges of the past including field enclosures, earthworks, vernacular buildings in chalk and Jurassic limestone and ecclesiastical and parkland estates. These features, where visible, frequently express a strong connection to the landscape and reinforce an appreciation of geology, topographic drama, and natural resources, imparting a sense of longevity, continuity and a tangible connection to the land. Areas of chalk grassland and hawthorn scrub on steep slopes and wet flushes, meadows and spring-fed fens at the foot of slopes and scarps, are especially valuable habitats, which contribute to visual texture and colour throughout the seasons.



Exposed white cliffs in former quarry at Burdale Warren

### **Key Issues affecting the area's special qualities**

Due to the high scenic and landscape quality, its tranquillity and important views, this area is highly vulnerable to major or large-scale development such as masts and wind turbines (commercial and domestic), and national infrastructure, as well as the cumulative effects of smaller scale change such as new housing which does not reflect the local vernacular styles, road widening, and introduction of kerbs and signage.

Landscape condition is generally good, but locally it is affected by intensive agriculture which in places has led to the ploughing of valley grasslands, introduction of small mixed plantations, and field boundary loss. Calcareous grassland across this chalk landscape is also now limited in extent and affected by the application of fertiliser, inappropriate grazing, spread of Tor grass and establishment of scrub and woodland. Biodiversity interest in this landscape would benefit from being addressed long term along with improvement to soil structure, and the reduction of soil run off which can result in sedimentation of rare chalk streams.



Cultural heritage is also highly valued in this landscape but susceptible to lack of long-term management, for example, loss of parkland landscape and erosion or disturbance of upstanding and buried archaeological sites.

Visitor pressures which result in increased traffic causing verge erosion, congestion on narrow lanes, noise and activity, and disruption of farming activity are already being experienced in some parts of this area.

Natural England considers that the strategic management of this area as a whole would be beneficial and would help to deal with the issues noted above. Designation as AONB would ensure more consistent forward planning and decision making and the assistance of a dedicated AONB team would provide support to land managers and others, including access to additional funding and advice.



Incised valleys at Langtoft with village nestled in the folds of the landscape

### Other relevant factors

#### **Separate AONB designation from the Howardian Hills AONB:**

Separate AONB designation for the Yorkshire Wolds will recognise the distinctiveness and difference of its landscape when compared to the Howardian Hills, even if the boundary is drawn contiguously. A separate AONB would ensure that both the Howardian Hills and Yorkshire Wolds retain their individual identity, and a separate management plan is prepared to tackle the different issues and priorities in each area.

#### **Management of the Wider Yorkshire Wolds:**

The natural beauty assessment revealed that only part of the Yorkshire Wolds National Character Area (NCA) landscape merited designation as AONB for its outstanding natural beauty. This would leave a part of



the NCA outside of the AONB designation. Much of this wider landscape (but not all) has been recognised as a valued landscape by East Riding of Yorkshire Council and the former Ryedale District Council through identification of areas of local landscape value. Designation of a more discrete area of the NCA as AONB would not prevent the local landscape designations remaining in place, so long as there is sufficient robust evidence to support their continued definition.



Church at Nunburnholme with the rising slopes of Burnby Wold behind

Furthermore, existing AONBs can, and often do, work beyond their designation boundaries in landscapes which share similar characteristics and suffer similar issues and pressures. In these circumstances the expertise and access to resources that an AONB can bring can ensure that positive land management and decision making occurs in land beyond the AONB boundary, where such activity positively benefits the AONB.



Rounded slopes of Cans Dale from the adjacent historic green lane with floristic diversity and interest in the verges



### **Transitional Landscapes:**

A key consideration in defining the extent of the qualifying area and boundary has been making judgements in transitional landscapes. In these areas the natural beauty of the landscape is changing gradually, linked to a decline in distinctive topographic variation and the drama of the landscape, declining condition as a result of land management and/or incongruous features, and reduced scenic qualities. The main areas of transition occur within the Great Wold Valley and across the eastern dip slope. Great care and detailed assessment has been undertaken to define a suitable boundary within these areas. In accordance with Natural England Guidance, boundaries are drawn conservatively within transitions ie at the high quality end of a transition.



Settrington Beck within the estate village of Settrington

### **The proposed boundary**

The proposed boundary has been drawn to include the northern and western escarpments and the area of the High Wolds which is deeply incised by a high concentration of complex dry valleys. Factors which particularly affected the extent of the area proposed for AONB designation are set out below.



**Important topographic features:**

The distinctive ridges and knolls found between the western scarp and edge of the Howardian Hills AONB have been included as have the complex dry valleys surrounding Fordon in the northeast and Langtoft in the east. Where valleys lie close to the edge of the qualifying area the boundary has been defined closely to their outer edges.

**Easily Distinguished Features:**

The boundary follows easily distinguished features where ever possible and especially in areas of transition. For example, across the Great Wold Valley the boundary adopts the road east of West Lutton. Along the eastern scarp south of Huggate the boundary follows roads and green lanes.



Elevated view from the western scarp looking across Jubilee Plantation

**Inclusion of settlements:**

Settlements have been considered individually and on their merits. Where they make a particular contribution to the natural beauty of the wider area and sit primarily within an area of qualifying land, and where it is possible to define a boundary which does not split the settlement, they have been included. These issues were particularly significant for spring line settlements along the northern and western scarps.

**Splitting of features on the edge:**

Wherever possible features of interest on the edge of qualifying land have been included. However some features, especially those which are linear in nature, and extend into areas of non-qualifying landscape, are often split by the proposed designation boundary. These include archaeological sites such as the scheduled monuments along Harper Dale and Cow Dale and Londesborough Avenue which forms part of the Registered Park and Garden of Londesborough Park.



# Proposed Coastal Area

## Context

This area includes the striking peninsula of the Flamborough Headland and its immediate hinterland stretching from The Speeton Hills around Reighton in the north to the Sewerby Cliffs in the south. This area forms a single coastal landscape focused on the cliffs and foreshore and including the adjacent elevated, exposed farmland from which the drama of the coast is perceived and which supports areas of coastal grassland and contains contrasting wooded ravines.



Coastal geomorphological features include sea stacks and caves

## Extent to which the natural beauty criterion is met

The parts of the Yorkshire Wolds coast which are considered suitable for inclusion within the proposed designation include:

- The undulating Speeton Hills in the north
- The high chalk cliffs of Bempton and associated farmed hinterland
- The indented lower cliffs between Cat Nab and Sewerby Cliffs which contain an exceptional variety of geomorphological features, backed by coastal grasslands and incised wooded valleys.

## Significance

This Coastal Area forms the most northern outcrop of coastal chalk in England, the striking peninsular geology giving rise to towering rugged sheer white cliffs up to 50m in height, with stunning vantage points and sea views. Windy and exposed, this coastal area has a wild quality, providing a unique cliff



environment for seabird colonies whose cacophony, along with the changing weather patterns and light conditions, contribute to a stunning seascape and fascinating natural environment. Natural processes are manifest in the complex geomorphology of the indented coastline, rockpools, sea caves and sea stacks, wave cut platform and high cliffs, and this combined with the contrasting colour of white chalk overlain with red sand and gravels, contribute significantly to the scenic qualities of the area. The gently undulating, exposed coastal fringe farmland that buffers the cliffs provides exhilarating, elevated views along the vertical cliff edge and out to sea, while the lush vegetation of the steep wooded valleys provide contrasting seclusion and shelter. Evidence of past defence structures add time depth and points of interest, reflecting the strategic importance of this peninsula.



Northern Marsh Orchid within the coastal grasslands on the fringes of the chalk cliffs



Red Campion within the coastal grasslands with wave cut platform below

### **Key Issues affecting the area's special qualities**

The open, exposed, coastal landscape which forms the setting to the cliffs and foreshore is a popular destination. As a result, it is sensitive to tourism related development including car parking facilities and caravan parks which have both individual and cumulative effects due to the openness of the landscape. High visitor numbers to honey pot sites may also cause erosion and reduced tranquillity as well as disturbance of wildlife/bird colonies.

The natural qualities of this coastline are in good condition, with notable areas of coastal grassland and scrub backed by farmland, free from tourism related development. Nevertheless, the erosion of the cliffs coupled with intensive arable land use inland, has resulted in the squeezing of coastal grassland habitats. Furthermore, the invasion of bramble, scrub and bracken and tall ruderal vegetation undermines species richness, with the dumping of garden waste on cliff tops leading to a spread of invasive species in places.

The coastal scenery is vulnerable to vertical man-made features which break the skylines including on and offshore wind farm and other tall masts/vertical structures. Introduction of large-scale features, or uncharacteristic planting (ie conifer plantation) which draw the eye may also undermine the primacy of historic landmark features such as lighthouses or reduce the legibility of more subtle historic features such as Dane's Dyke.

Natural England considers that the statutory designation of this area as AONB would enable the relevant statutory powers and duties to apply. The inclusion of this area within the Yorkshire Wolds AONB Management Plan would strengthen the future conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of this coastline and would place a statutory duty on all public bodies to seek to further the purposes of designation ie conservation and enhancement of the area's natural beauty.

### **Other relevant factors**

The area proposed for designation as AONB is smaller in extent than the existing Heritage Coast and would comprise a separate outlier as part of the wider Yorkshire Wolds AONB. These factors have been carefully considered, as outlined below.

### **Heritage Coast:**

A Heritage Coast is not a statutory designation, but an area defined through an agreement between Natural England and the relevant local authorities. Although a management plan was prepared for the Flamborough Headland Heritage Coast (2003-2005 Heritage Coast Action Plan) by East Riding of Yorkshire Council, a decline in funding means that management is currently pursued through the Flamborough Coast European Marine Site (EMS) Management Scheme. As a result there is currently no other designation or partnership directly managing the natural beauty of the landscape in an integrated manner or which gives this aspect of landscape great weight in planning decisions. Given the pressure on the coast from recreational and other types of development, designation of the coastal area as AONB would give it additional statutory status and would provide stronger emphasis on conservation in planning decisions which would be a distinct advantage over the current situation. The area would also benefit from the requirement to develop a statutory management plan, and from the fact that the duty to 'seek to further the purposes of designation' placed on public bodies and statutory undertakers, would also apply to approximately half of the Heritage Coast area. It would also offer a distinct advantage over the EMS as it would have an inland focus as well as seaward focus, ensuring that the role of the clifftops, fringing farmland and wooded gullies are given consideration both in terms of management and development.

Designation of part of the area as AONB would not have any implications for the current Heritage Coast designation which would remain in place. This is the case in other AONBs which coincide with a Heritage Coast eg Northumberland Coast. This precedent (and others) demonstrates that there is no need for the AONB to be continuous or the same as the Heritage Coast. Natural England does however encourage AONBs to work throughout Heritage Coast areas, including any areas that lie outside an AONB, in order to help deliver objectives and to conserve and enhance the setting of the AONB.



Speeton Hills comprising inland low undulating hills of glacial deposits at the northern end of the chalk cliffs

### **Outlier:**

The proposed Coastal Area does not include built-up areas such as Flamborough and holiday parks such as Reighton Sands Holiday Park in the north and Thornwick Holiday Park near Flamborough, both of which have encroached on the immediate setting of the coastal cliffs. The area identified for designation



is therefore narrow, especially between the North Landing and the headland due to development and fragmentation. However, taken in the context of other coastal AONB landscapes in the UK, the proposed area would not be the smallest, and like other coastal AONBs the narrowness of the designation, when considered in the context of the open sea and visual connection along the indented coastline, is consistent with the treatment of such area in other designations. The proposed outlier would lie 6.2km from the wider inland part of the proposed Yorkshire Wolds AONB.



White cliffs and sea caves at North Landing

### **The proposed boundary**

The proposed boundary has been drawn to include the foreshore and dramatic chalk cliffs of the Flambrough peninsula as well as the immediate farmed hinterland. Factors which particularly affect the extent of the area proposed for AONB designation are set out below.

### **Extent of the Inland boundary:**

The farmland which forms the fringe to the coastal cliffs is in transition as it moves inland and becomes less influenced by the presence of the coast. Distinctive but subtle hills within this fringe (e.g. Speeton Hills, Metlow Hill and Sixpenny Hill west of Thornwick Holiday Village and Starling Hill and Mill Hill south of the B1259), help to define those areas most strongly influenced by the coast. Natural England Guidance makes it clear that visual association may be used to help define the extent of land for inclusion where there is a transition. These factors have been taken into account when defining the inland boundary.





White cliffs and wave cut platform looking east from cliff tops east of Dykes End

### **Complexity of boundary around settlements:**

The natural beauty assessment noted the development which has occurred inland of the cliffs and in places visually intrudes e.g. Reighton Sands Holiday Park. Therefore, when defining the boundary care has been taken to include land which relates closely to the coast/hills whilst also excluding incongruous development.

Furthermore, consideration has been given to finding clear features on the ground for the boundary to follow and avoiding an overly complex boundary, especially around settlements. In the case of the eastern side of Reighton a decision was reached to use the Conservation Area boundary around the settlement and in the case of Speeton to use the Development Limits as defined in the former Scarborough Local Plan.

### **Fragmentation of Landscape by Tourism Development:**

Between Thornwick Holiday Village and Flamborough Head, the landscape is open and lower lying. As a result, the transition from coastal farmland to inland farmland is less evident and the area has become fragmented visually and physically by tourism related development including Thornwick Holiday Village, North Landing car park and visitor facilities, and the Flamborough Head car park and visitor facilities, as well as linear development along North Marine Road and Lighthouse Road. This results in an area of coastal landscape which is not regarded as meeting the natural beauty criterion and the boundary has therefore been drawn close to the edge of the cliffs, in this section, in order to exclude non-qualifying land.



# The area proposed for designation as a Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

In summary, the area proposed for designation as a new Yorkshire Wolds AONB comprises an inland area and a coastal area.

The Inland Area is considered to be representative of chalk landscapes found within England and Europe alongside the Lincolnshire Wolds, Chilterns, Surrey Hills, and Kent Downs AONBs and the South Downs National Park. The fact it is also the northern-most outcrop of chalk nationally and contains a rare concentration of dramatic, narrow, dry sinuous valleys, make it unique within the family of chalk landscapes nationally. This and the resulting distinctive scenic quality that results, add weight to the judgment that this area should be represented within an AONB. Furthermore, the area includes c.67% of the good quality semi-improved grassland habitat and c.90% of the lowland calcareous grassland habitat found within the wider Yorkshire Wolds NCA. In other words, these valued habitats, which contribute to the distinctiveness and qualities of the area, are concentrated within the area proposed for designation and this adds further weight to the conclusion to designate this area.



Rural village of Thixendale set down within the complex pattern of converging dales



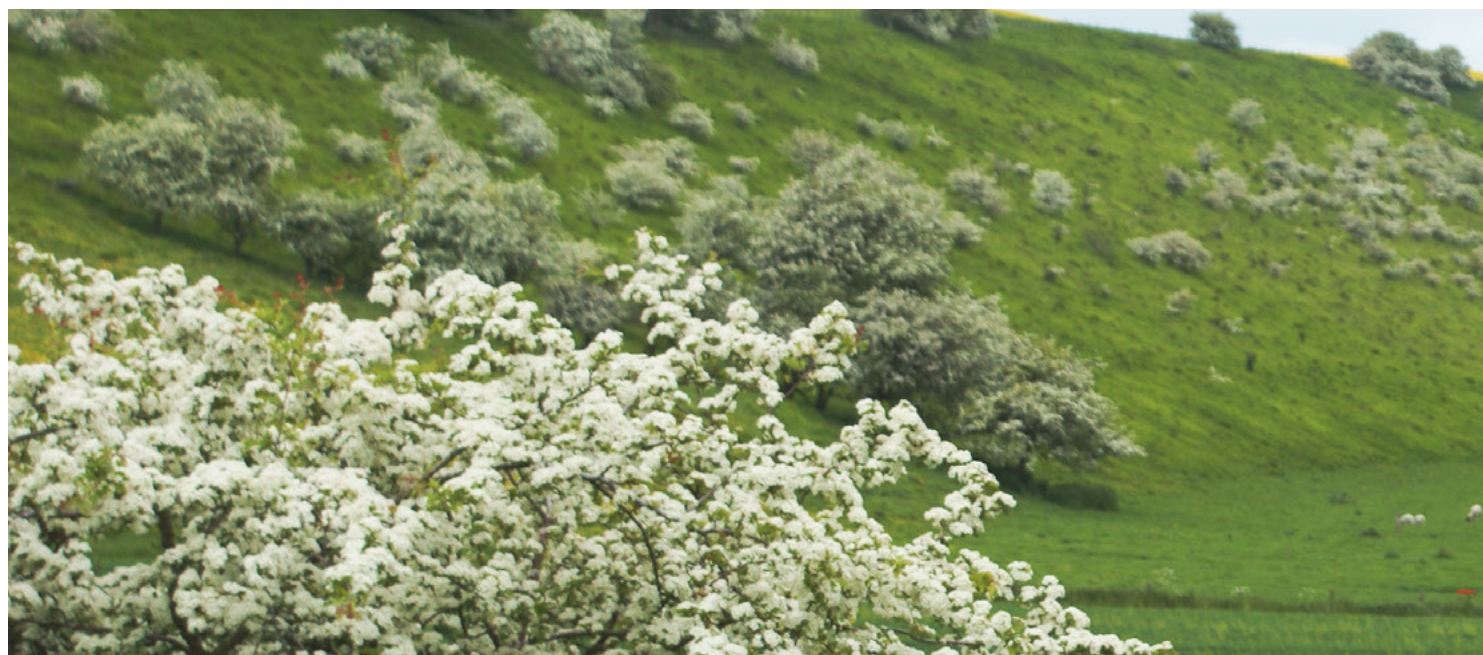
The Coastal Area is considered to be representative of coastal chalk landscapes found within England, including the chalk cliffs of the South Downs National Park and Dorset Coast. The protruding form of the peninsula, on an otherwise straight section of coastline is distinctive, and the complexity of the indented coastline and its concentration of geomorphological features, formed by sea erosion and weathering, is unique within the family of chalk landscape nationally. Here there are a larger number and wider range of cave habitats than at any other chalk site in Britain. This adds weight to the judgment that this area should be represented within the family of national landscapes.

The ultimate decision to designate the new Yorkshire Wolds AONB is not taken on the basis of the two areas individually, but rather on the total area of the proposed designation. Natural England must stand back and consider the area as a whole to satisfy itself whether it is desirable to designate the qualifying areas as part of the new Yorkshire Wolds AONB.

Collectively the two areas comprise outstanding chalk landscapes. Their special qualities are rare in the national context and this is reflected in the local consensus regarding the value of much of this landscape over many years.

The special qualities of the area proposed for designation as a whole, its national significance and the pressures impacting on the specific qualities of the qualifying areas, are such that the legislative provisions provided by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, combined with the particular focus given to these qualities in planning management, the application of specific integrated management initiatives and increased access to a broader range of specialist skills and other resources, including additional funding, make the inclusion of these areas within the new Yorkshire Wolds AONB desirable. This is particularly important with regard to the issues noted above in relation to each of the areas and particularly threats of loss of habitats including chalk grassland and visual intrusion from tall vertical and moving structures, large agricultural buildings and tourism-related development at the coast.

Designation would provide a more robust and defensible recognition of the special qualities of qualifying areas. Conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty would be possible via direct engagement in management activity and through influencing the work of other organisations with responsibility for activities relevant to the area.





The area would also benefit from the specific additional planning protection in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) relating to AONBs. Designation would also impose the duty to seek to further the statutory purpose of AONB on the many authorities whose responsibilities encompass the area, such as the local authorities, the Environment Agency, Natural England and the utilities companies.

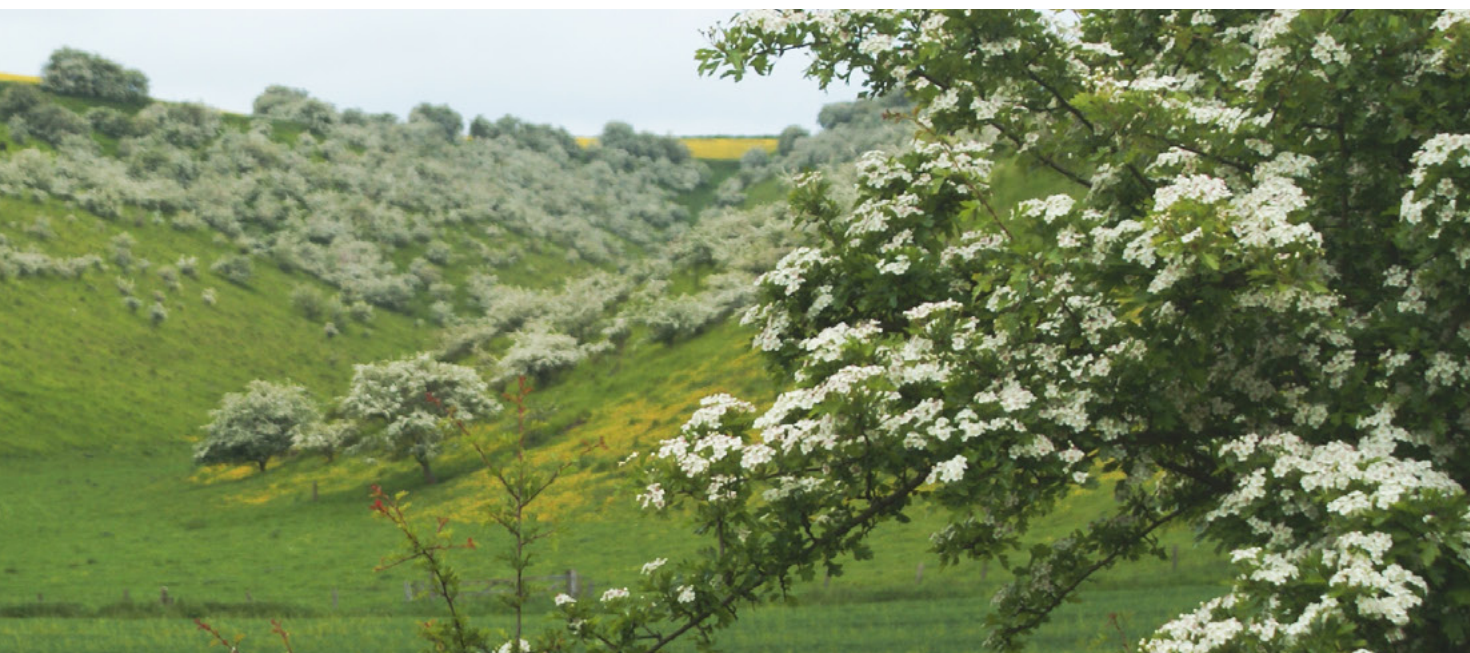
Designating a new Yorkshire Wolds AONB would ensure a more consistent approach to this nationally important landscape in accessing resources, forward planning and decision making and through the focus provided by the statutory duties and powers which would apply, and in particular through the delivery of the statutory AONB Management Plan and its associated action plans.

Natural England has concluded that the areas proposed for designation as indicated on the maps accompanying this consultation document have outstanding natural beauty and that it is desirable that they should become part of a new AONB and that the proposed boundary should be subject to statutory and public consultation.

## What happens next?

Natural England is required by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 to consult the principal tier local authorities affected by the proposed new AONB. In addition, this consultation is being extended to allow everyone with an interest in the proposed AONB to comment on the proposals. At this stage, evidence can be submitted objecting to, supportive of, or proposing amendments to the proposals; including the addition, or omission, of land within the areas being considered for designation. This could include the provision of evidence supporting the inclusion of land currently considered to be within a transitional area.

At the end of the consultation, we will analyse all the responses and review the proposals and if necessary, amend them to take account of any further relevant evidence provided. Depending on the number of responses received this is likely to take around six months. If no fundamental objections arise, and assuming no significant areas of additional land need to be included as a result of the consultation, the next stage will be to seek Natural England Board approval of the final technical assessments, a draft designation Order, and to publish Notice of the Order in the London Gazette and other papers as required by Section 83(2) of the CROW Act.



Hawthorn in flower creating a confetti of white on the dale sides in William Dale near Thixendale

The Notice Period allows anyone who wishes to do so, to make representations to Natural England, objecting to, supportive of, or proposing amendments to the Order, and stating the grounds on which they are made.

If however, as a result of the consultation, significant areas of additional land need to be included within the proposed AONB, an additional statutory consultation will also be required in relation to this additional land only, prior to the Notice Period.

Following the Notice Period, a further period of response analysis will be required, and any further consequent changes made to the draft legal designation Order. Natural England approval would then be sought to allow the Order to be 'made' (signed and the Natural England seal approved) and submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation. If there are any unresolved objections, these will be submitted to the Secretary of State with the Order, who has discretion to call a Public Inquiry to consider such objections further, before deciding whether or not to confirm the Order.

The Secretary of State may or may not confirm the Order, with or without amendment. This decision is not made to any specific timescale.

## Implications of designation

Designation as AONB would provide formal statutory recognition of the national importance of the natural beauty of the area concerned, and as a consequence, would provide the basis for a more coordinated and integrated approach to management which would give specific focus and priority to the natural beauty of the area. The proposed area, if designated, would then formally come within the ambit of a statutory AONB Management Plan and benefit from the incentives, powers, duties, responsibilities and resources that designation brings.

The benefits can be summarised as follows:

- Statutory application of an AONB Management Plan across the proposed area, which sets out the area's special qualities and a focused action plan for the AONB Team and wider partnership, to provide for integrated management in order to achieve the AONB purpose of conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- Full access to an AONB Team with specialist skills and expertise, providing an integrated focus on conserving and enhancing the area's special qualities through partnership working.
- Formal inclusion of East Riding of Yorkshire and North Yorkshire Councils on the AONB Partnership, such that the powers and duty 'to seek to further the purposes of AONB designation' would extend to both local authorities in this area.
- A statutory duty on all public bodies, statutory undertakers and holders of public office to seek to further the purposes of designation ie the conservation and enhancement of the area within the new AONB.
- Additional recognition in planning terms through the application of NPPF provisions relating to AONBs, inclusion of relevant policies in Local Plans related to the delivery of the AONB purposes, and withdrawal of some Permitted Development Rights.
- Long term funding for conservation work from Defra with contributions from relevant local authorities, and access to additional sources of funding not available to non designated landscapes.





Wild garlic understorey in woods at Kilwick Percy



Front cover image:  
View of the Western Scarp near Kirby Underdale

All images: © Natural England



**Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.**

ISBN 978-1-78367-401-5

Catalogue Code: NE 814

[www.gov.uk/natural-england](http://www.gov.uk/natural-england)

Natural England publications are available as accessible pdfs from [www.gov.uk/natural-england](http://www.gov.uk/natural-england). Should an alternative format of this publication be required, please contact our enquiries line for more information: 0845 600 3078 or email [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk).

This publication is published by Natural England under the Open Government Licence v3.0 for public sector information. You are encouraged to use, and reuse, information subject to certain conditions. For details of the licence visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3).

Please note: Natural England photographs are only available for non-commercial purposes. For information regarding the use of maps or data visit [www.gov.uk/how-to-access-natural-englands-maps-and-data](http://www.gov.uk/how-to-access-natural-englands-maps-and-data).

© Natural England 2024