The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as being:

“an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”

Nearly all of the UK’s landscape has been shaped by man and so our landscape heritage is what has been handed down to us from our predecessors.

**What are Protected Landscapes?**

Landscape designations/definitions

Some of our most outstanding landscapes are protected through statutory designation to conserve and enhance their special qualities for present and future generations.

The designations which apply in the United Kingdom are listed below. While common names are used for some designations, the legislation is often tailored to the specific circumstances in each nation. The pages on each designation identify where this is the case and the arrangements which apply.

**National Parks**

There are currently 13 areas designated as National Parks in the United Kingdom with a further designation (the South Downs) at the public inquiry stage:

- * 3 in Wales (Brecon Beacons, Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia)
- * 2 in Scotland (Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and the Cairngorms)
- * 8 in England (Dartmoor, Exmoor, Lake District, New Forest, North York Moors, Northumberland, Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales)

Proposals for a Mourne National Park are also being considered in Northern Ireland.

Although designated under the same name, National Parks in each of the United Kingdom’s constituent countries are designated under different primary legislation (although those in England and Wales use the same Act) with clauses tailored to their specific circumstances.

National Parks in England and Wales are extensive tracts of countryside which are designated on account of their natural beauty and the opportunities that they afford for open air recreation. The legislation provides for the establishment of a dedicated NPA with full planning and development control functions with the following purposes:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park
- to promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park.
Where these two purposes conflict, the former has priority (under the so-called Sandford Principle). NPAs also have a duty to seek to foster the social and economic well-being of their local communities.

In England, there is also the Norfolk & Suffolk Broads, which although established through legislation specially tailored to its individual circumstances, is of an equivalent landscape quality to our National Parks and as such is considered to be part of the National Park family.

It has an additional purpose of protecting the interests of navigation; further, with respect to general duty towards social and economic well-being, the authority also has to have regard specifically to the needs of agriculture and forestry.

**Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)**

There are currently 47 AONB designations in the United Kingdom:

* 35 wholly within England plus the Wye Valley which straddles the England/Wales border (covering approx 15% of the country)

* 4 wholly within Wales plus the Wye Valley which straddles the England/Wales border (covering approx 5% of the country)

* 7 in Northern Ireland with a further 2 proposed

As with National Parks, AONB legislation differs between the United Kingdom countries to allow the arrangements to be tailored to their specific circumstances.

**AONBs in England and Wales**

AONBs in England and Wales are designated for the sole purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty. Local authorities are required through the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 to produce statutory AONB management plans (acting jointly where a designation spans more than one administrative area) which set out a long term vision for the management of the area, agreed policies and objectives, and a short term action plan to address the priority issues identified.

The CROW Act 2000 also allowed for the creation of independent AONB Conservation Boards with the purposes of:

* conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty,

and

* increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the area of outstanding natural beauty

In cases where it appears that there may be a conflict between the two purposes, greater weight will be placed on the first purpose.

Production of, and overview of the delivery of, AONB management plans (click here to go to the Management Plans page) is normally steered by a Partnership of the local authorities, Natural England/Countryside Council for Wales and other key stakeholders.
There is also normally an AONB Unit financially supported by the local authorities and the relevant government agency amongst others to produce the AONB management plan on behalf of the local authorities, develop a vision for the area, provide advice, guidance and carry out activities which help to further the purposes of designation.

**AONBs in Northern Ireland**

The remit of AONBs in Northern Ireland is more akin to that of National Parks elsewhere in the UK. The purpose of AONB designation is to ensure policies and actions are followed which serve to:

* Conserve or enhance the natural beauty or amenities of that area

* Conserve wildlife, historic objects or natural phenomena within it

Promote its enjoyment by the public
Provide or maintain public access to it

**National Scenic Areas**

National Scenic Areas (NSAs) are only found in Scotland. SNH’s website describes them as being “those areas of land considered of national significance on the basis of their outstanding scenic interest which must be conserved as part of the country’s natural heritage.

They have been selected for their characteristic features of scenery comprising a mixture of richly diverse landscapes including prominent landforms, coastline, sea and freshwater lochs, rivers, woodlands and moorlands.”

At first, NSAs were a designation used solely within the Town and Country Planning system, although creation of NSAs can now be effected under primary legislation – the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991.

There are 40 NSAs covering over 13,783 sq km or 12.7% of Scotland.

*For more information:* [http://www.snh.org.uk/scripts-snh/ab-pa03.asp](http://www.snh.org.uk/scripts-snh/ab-pa03.asp)

**Areas of Great Landscape Value**

Another Scottish landscape designation is AGLV. These are defined by local authorities in Scotland, development plans, with a view to safeguarding areas of regional or local landscape importance from inappropriate developments.

A number of other regional and local landscape designations are also used by local authorities in Scotland, including Regional Scenic Area.

**Heritage Coasts**

Heritage Coasts are designated in England and Wales only. Areas awarded Heritage Coast status are defined rather than designated through primary legislation, by local authorities in consultation with the Natural England (for England) and Countryside Council for Wales (in Wales).

They often overlap with National Park or AONB designations.
The purposes of Heritage Coast status in England were re-defined by the Countryside Commission in 1992. They are:

* To conserve, protect and enhance the natural beauty of the coasts, including their terrestrial, littoral and marine flora and fauna, and their heritage features of architectural, historical and archaeological interest

* To facilitate and enhance their enjoyment, understanding and appreciation by the public by improving and extending opportunities for recreational, educational, sporting and tourist activities that draw on, and are consistent with, the conservation of their natural beauty and the protection of their heritage features

* To maintain, and improve (where necessary) the environmental health of inshore waters affecting Heritage Coasts and their beaches through appropriate works and management measures

* To take account of the needs of agriculture, forestry and fishing, and of the economic and social needs of the small communities on these coasts, by promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development, which in themselves conserve and enhance natural beauty and heritage features.

There are currently 32 Heritage Coasts defined in England and 14 in Wales.

**Landscape Heritage - Organisations concerned with Protected Landscapes**


**Wales** – further information can be found on the Countryside Council for Wales website http://www.ccw.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/special-landscapes--sites.aspx

**Northern Ireland**
http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/natural/designated/aonb.shtml

**Association of National Park Authorities**
http://www.anpa.gov.uk

**Brecon Beacons National Park Authority**
http://www.breconbeacons.org/

**Broads Authority**
http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk

**Cairngorms National Park Authority**
http://www.cairngorms.co.uk

**Council for National Parks**
http://www.cnp.org.uk
Dartmoor National Park Authority
http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk

Exmoor National Park Authority
http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

IUCN :
http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/theme/landscapes/landscapes.html

Lake District National Park Authority
http://www.lake-district.gov.uk

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs
http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org

National Association for AONBs
http://www.aonb.org.uk

New Forest National Park Authority
http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk

North York Moors National Park Authority
http://www.moors.uk.net

Northumberland National Park Authority
http://www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk

Peak District National Park Authority
http://www.peakdistrict.org

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (Arfordir Penfro)
http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk

Scottish Council for National Parks
http://www.scnp.org.uk

Snowdonia National Park Authority (Eryri)
http://www.eryri-npa.co.uk

South Downs - Joint Committee Designated, but not yet confirmed as a National Park
http://www.southdownsonline.org/

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk

Best of Both Worlds
http://www.bobw.co.uk/default.aspx