



SOLWAY COAST AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Management Plan Initial Consultation Report

August 2019

Report Compiled by Cumbria Action for Communities on behalf of
Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

www.solwaycoastaonb.org.uk
info@solwaycoastaonb.org.uk

Contents

Executive summary	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Consultation.....	5
3. Results.....	9
3.1 Online survey.....	9
3.2 Public events.....	13
3.3 Parish Council	14
3.4 Special Qualities	15
4. Appendix.....	17

Executive summary

- Awareness of the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and of the Management Plan process was generated with just over 150 individuals, via face-to-face conversations, and 239 individuals were engaged through an online survey. A combination of both local residents and visitors were consulted, with local residents comprising the majority of those consulted.
- Parish Councillors from 11 out of the 14 parishes in the area attended a consultation event aimed specifically at facilitating parishes taking ownership of planning priorities in their local area, as well as fostering stronger linkages with the AONB and its management. All 14 parishes received feedback minutes from the event.
- Overall people are engaged with and interested in the Solway Coast AONB and the work it delivers.
- In general, people are highly passionate about the area; the views, landscape, history, habitats and wildlife.
- People appreciate the AONB area for different reasons and consequently have different, sometimes polarising views on how it should operate and look, and how it should be managed.
- In terms of the 13 special qualities, the top three most valued special qualities are: 1) Estuary seascape: beaches, mudflats & sandbanks with huge numbers of wading birds & overwintering geese; 2) Views across the Solway Firth & to the Lakeland Fells & Pennines; and 3) Wide open landscape with a strong feeling of remoteness & tranquility.
- Although there is a wide range of perceived threats and concerns, there are some common threads amongst them. The greatest threats over the next five years are regarded as: 1) Loss of habitats and wildlife; 2) Climate change; and 3) Deterioration of sand dunes, peatlands and soil quality.
- In terms of improving understanding and enjoyment of the Solway Coast landscape the following three actions were regarded as top priorities: 1) More wildlife-focused activities (e.g. bird watching, events, butterfly surveys, talks); 2) More engagement with schools and educational groups; and 3) More landscape-focused activities (e.g. guided walks, photography workshops).
- There are some misconceptions as to what the AONB is responsible for. The objectives in the 2015 – 20 Management Plan may have a role to play in this. It is important that going forward the Management Plan, and subsequent communication and awareness work streams, are clear on what the AONB can *impact* on and what the AONB has an *interest* in.

1. Introduction

Background

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) requires local authorities to prepare, publish and review, every five years, a Management Plan for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in their area. In the case of the Solway Coast AONB the plan is undertaken and led by the Solway Coast AONB staff team on behalf of Allerdale Borough Council, Cumbria County Council and Carlisle City Council and with support from Natural England and DEFRA.

The Plan is a statutory document, setting out a vision for the next 20 years, outlining the issues facing in this area and how a wide range of partners and stakeholders will manage them to conserve and enhance the area for future generations.

The current Solway Coast AONB Management Plan runs 2015 - 2020 and the preparation of the next five year plan commences during the financial year 2019 - 2020 with the Plan to be completed by 31 March 2020. The responsibility for the production of the Plan lies with the Solway Coast AONB staff team with input and governance from the AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), partners and communities across the area.

The Solway Coast was designated as an AONB in recognition of the area's special qualities and the updated 2020 – 2025 Management Plan will be strongly focused and structured around these special qualities.

In March 2019 the Solway Coast AONB advertised for specialist assistance consulting with the wider community and the parish network to influence the development of the Plan. ACTION with Communities in Cumbria (ACT) successfully bid for; which extended from March 2019 until August 2019.

Objectives

- To consult with all 14 parishes within and bordering the Solway Coast AONB area - to raise awareness of the AONB Management Plan, and encourage them to feed into the process.
- To host, run and promote 4 events across the AONB area which can be attended by members of the public, gathering opinions and ideas about the AONB Management Plan.

Outputs

- To contact all 14 of the parish councils in or bordering on the AONB and brief them on the new management plan production and how they can respond- sending back comments or attending a workshop.
- To host, run and promote 4 fun, friendly and interactive events across the AONB area which can be attended by any member of the community including PCs and community groups to look at what the objects, actions and priorities should be within the AONB Management Plan and open discussions on updating or preparing a community / parish plan.
- Collate all feedback received from phone calls, emails and workshops into a report.

Outcomes

- To raise awareness of the AONB and what the Management Plan is with local communities.
- To ensure the AONB Management Plan is relevant to the local communities who live and work there, and they feel ownership of the Management Plan process.
- To facilitate parishes taking ownership of planning priorities in their local area.

2. Consultation

A web-based community and visitor survey was designed by the AONB with some guidance from ACT, and hosted by online survey software SurveyMonkey. The online survey remained open for almost 11 weeks from 21st May to 2nd August 2019.

Visually appealing A5 postcards introducing the management plan update and highlighting the online survey were delivered to all 4800 addresses; both households and businesses within the AONB area. The postcard also contained a link to the recently refreshed Solway Coast AONB website and highlighted the opportunity to subscribe to their newsletter and to get involved with events and volunteering opportunities.

Three public consultation events were held in locations across the AONB area (see Figures 1 - 3):

- Silloth Vintage Rally - Saturday 8th June
- Mawbray Village Hall Open Day - Sunday 7th July
- Solway Coast Marathon at Kirkbride - Sunday 21st July

In addition, a Parish Council consultation evening was held at Mawbray Village Hall on Tuesday 23rd July with 11 Parish Council attendees, representing 9 out of the 14 Parish Councils in the area (see Figure 4). All 14 of the Parish Councils were invited to contribute their views via the online survey, regardless of whether they could attend the meeting. All 14 Parish Councils also received minutes of the meeting.

ACT encouraged everyone we engaged with at these four events to get involved with the online survey, and handed out postcards to facilitate this.

Alongside the online survey, an informal vote on 13 identified special qualities was conducted at these four events. The vote comprised of a washing line of pictorial representations of each special quality and gave each 'voter' the opportunity to register their support for their top five special qualities (see Figure 5). The technique served as a quirky conversation starter, was accessible to all demographics and gives us an additional insight into the results of Question 2 of the online survey which explored which special qualities respondents valued most to least. Leaflets and publications on the AONB and related activities were also available at all four events.

Consultation in numbers:

- 239 individuals responded to the online survey
- c.140 local people and visitors spoke to us at the three public events
- 63 residents and visitors voted on the special qualities 'washing line vote'
- A further 11 Parish Councillors voted on the special qualities 'washing line vote'
- 9 out of the 14 Parish Councils attended the Parish Council event



Figure 1: Talking to local residents and visitors at the Solway Coast Marathon.



Figure 2: Local residents at Mawbray Village Hall Open Day engaging with the display.



Figure 3: ACT Volunteer dressed as a viking and demonstrating net making at Silloth Vintage Rally.



Figure 4: The Parish Council consultation event at Mawbray Village Hall.



Figure 5: The 'washing line vote' on special qualities.

3. Results

3.1 Online survey

The full data set can be found in the Appendix. The key themes and messages are discussed below.

3.1.1 Who responded to the survey? (Q1)

A total of 239 individuals completed the online survey. 84% of respondents were local residents, representing 200 individuals; a small number of these were also special interest groups (e.g. birdwatching, heritage and geology groups) (eight); farmers/landowners (six); local businesses (five); and AONB volunteers (four). A further 8% of respondents (20 individuals) were regular visitors (visiting more than six times per year) and 4% (nine) described themselves as infrequent visitors (visiting less than six times per year). So overall, as may be expected, the voices are that of local residents to the Solway Coast AONB.

3.1.2 Which of the AONB's special qualities do people value most? (Q2)

Table 1 illustrates the 13 special qualities of the AONB ranked from perceived most valued to least valued by respondents to the online survey.

The top three special qualities are: 1) *Estuary seascape: beaches, mudflats & sandbanks with huge numbers of wading birds & overwintering geese* ('Estuary seascape'); 2) *Views across the Solway Firth & to the Lakeland Fells & Pennines* ('Views'); and 3) *Wide open landscape with a strong feeling of remoteness & tranquillity* ('Open landscape'). *Maritime & fishing heritage* was ranked in the lowest position.

It is however worth noting that these top three special qualities also contain amongst them the most words per special quality. It could be argued that more descriptive adjectives or references to specific wildlife may have increased the relative ranked positions of special qualities such as *Saltmarsh; Sand dunes or Bogs or "Mosses"*.

Themes	Special Qualities	No. of votes*	Ranking
Estuarine landscape	Estuary seascape: beaches, mudflats & sandbanks with huge numbers of wading birds & overwintering geese	149	1
Estuarine landscape	Views across the Solway Firth & to the Lakeland Fells & Pennines	112	2
Mosses & wetland landscape	Wide open landscape with a strong feeling of remoteness & tranquillity	111	3
Estuarine landscape	Saltmarsh	48	4
Settlements & heritage features	Distinctive historical imprint stretching from the Roman period to WWII	41	5
Settlements & heritage features	Dark night skies	39	6
Estuarine landscape	Rich intertidal marine life	38	= 7
Mosses & wetland landscape	Bogs or "Mosses"	38	= 7
Estuarine landscape	Sand dunes	36	8
Settlements & heritage features	Historic buildings, villages & hamlets	34	9
Farmed landscape	Pastoral landscape with small fields, "kested" hedges & ditches	28	= 10
Settlements & heritage features	Network of historic routes & byways including lonnings & sunken lanes	28	= 10
Settlements & heritage features	Maritime & fishing heritage	15	11

*Number of votes within respondents top three highest valued special qualities.

Table 1: Special qualities of the AONB ranked in order of their perceived value from most to least by online survey respondents.

3.1.3 What are the major threats and challenges to the Solway Coast over the next five years? (Q3)

The perceived major threats and challenges to the Solway Coast over the next five years in order of greatest threat to least threat are detailed in Table 2. Additional suggestions by respondents that were cited more than once are summarised below with the number of citations in brackets.

Major threat or challenge	No. of Votes*
Loss or decline of wildlife and habitats	171
Climate change	153
Deterioration of sand dunes, peatlands and soil quality	134
Pollution (water/air/land/light/noise)	119
Transport pressures/issues	111
Inappropriate development of buildings and structures	101
Loss or decline of fishing	75
Loss or decline of farming	63
Tourism pressures/issues	56
Loss of views	55
Pressure from recreational activities	45
Loss or decline of historic features	43

*Number of votes within respondents top three highest priorities.

Table 2: Major threats and challenges to the Solway Coast over the next five years ranked in order of their perceived level of threat from greatest to least by online survey respondents.

Additional threats and challenges:

- Litter/plastic waste/rubbish/illegal dumps/lack of bins (8)
- Energy Coast/Solway Barrage Scheme/Wind turbines/Pylons/Nuclear waste (6)
- Housing/developments/poor planning decisions (4)
- Inappropriate/poor land management on environmentally sensitive areas (3)
- Traffic (3)
- Coastal erosion (3)
- Overly restrictive access (2)
- Large scale/industrial agricultural practices/expansion (2)
- Dog mess/dogs/irresponsible dog owners (2)

3.1.4 How should the AONB prioritise their responses to the greatest threats and challenges to the Solway Coast over the next five years? (Q4 & Q5)

How the AONB should prioritise their responses to the perceived major threats and challenges to the Solway Coast over the next five years are detailed in Table 3. Additional suggestions by respondents that were cited more than once are summarised below with the number of citations in brackets.

Priorities	No. of votes*
Protecting and enhancing wildlife and habitats	164
Protecting natural landscape features eg. sand dunes, peat bogs, watercourses	155
Promoting nature friendly farming	85
Protecting historic landscape features eg. hedgerows, buildings, heritage sites	79
Promoting sustainable transport	57
Improving access within the AONB eg. footpaths, waymarking	53
Maintaining views within and from the AONB	43
Ensuring sensitive and appropriate housing developments	42
Promoting sustainable tourism	39

*Number of votes within respondents top three highest priorities.

Table 3: How the AONB should prioritise their responses to the greatest threats and challenges to the AONB over the next five years according to online survey respondents.

Additional priorities:

- Litter collection/emptying bins/plastic waste/recycling/fly tipping (10)
- Supporting traditional fishing methods (shrimping and haff netters) (3)
- Involve local residents in decision-making/more consultation/listening to locals (3)
- Preventing constructions of large scale wind farms/impact of wind farms on landscape (2)
- Educating dog walkers/dog mess/dogs disturbing breeding birds (3)
- Educating farmers on environmentally sound management techniques (e.g. avoiding watercourse pollution/promote sustainable farming practices (2)
- Protect coastline against coastal erosion/improve sea defences (2)
- Restrict development (2)
- Improve access for walkers and cyclists (2)
- Conserve heritage and history (2)
- Provide local employment opportunities/support local businesses (2)
- Hunting and shooting wildlife (2)
- Securing investment into the area/drawing down national funding/raising awareness of value of area worth investing in (2)
- Education of next generation/working with schools (2)

3.1.5 What practical actions should the AONB Partnership prioritise over the next 5 years? (Q6)

This was an open text response question intended not so much to inform the AONB Management Plan but rather the AONB team practical work programme planning. The question prompted a wide range of actions respondents would like to see.

The AONB team will be carefully analysing these responses and where possible prioritising actions through the team work plan.

3.1.6 What should be prioritised to improve understanding and enjoyment of the Solway Coast landscape? (Q7)

Table 4 illustrates what the AONB should prioritise in order to improve understanding and enjoyment of the Solway Coast.

Priorities	No. of votes*
More wildlife-focused activities (e.g. bird watching, events, butterfly surveys, talks)	108
More engagement with schools and educational groups	106
More landscape-focused activities (e.g. guided walks, photography workshops)	92
More support for community projects	78
More signage and information boards	72
More public events and activities	70
More history-focused activities (e.g. archaeological digs, history walks/talks)	70
Continue to develop web and social media content	50
More volunteering opportunities	40
More leaflets and publications	31

*Number of votes within respondents top three highest priorities.

Table 4: What the AONB should prioritise to improve understanding and enjoyment of the Solway Coast landscape according to online survey respondents.

The top three priorities for the AONB are: 1) More wildlife-focused activities (e.g. bird watching, events, butterfly surveys, talks); 2) More engagement with schools and educational groups; and 3) More landscape-focused activities (e.g. guided walks, photography workshops).

3.1.7 Do respondents want to keep in touch with the AONB? (Q10)

Of the 239 respondents, 65% (155 individuals) are interested in updates on the AONB Management Plan. This is an impressive statistic that suggests interest in the AONB and its work is relatively highly regarded and that a good proportion of respondents are engaged with the AONB to some level. It is recommended that the AONB ensure these 155 individuals are contacted within the next 6-12 months regarding developments on the Management Plan.

36% of respondents (87 individuals) are interested in volunteering opportunities. It is recommended that the AONB add these contacts to their volunteering opportunities email circulation list. Similarly, 48% (114 individuals) are interested in becoming a 'Friend of the Solway Coast AONB'. Again, the AONB could usefully add these contacts to the Friends of the Solway Coast AONB newsletter circulation list.

3.2 Public events

A key component of the public events was initiating conversations about the Solway Coast, the AONB and what the Management Plan is. As part of the conversation we encouraged

everyone we spoke to to engage further via the online survey. Aside from the results from the special qualities 'washing line vote' (as discussed in section 3.4 overleaf) there is no additional quantitative data collection from this component of the consultation, instead the key themes and messages will be outlined.

As alluded to in the online survey, and to a lesser extent echoed at the Parish Council meeting, there are some misguided perceptions on what the AONB's responsibilities and remit actually is. Although the AONB has an interest in issues such as: road maintenance, development, planning issues, town/village amenities sustainable transport and affordable housing, the AONB does not lead on issues such as these, but this is not universally understood.

It would be worth the AONB attempting to address these grey areas of understanding. For example via an article about the AONB Management Plan consultation process in their 'Friends of the Solway Coast AONB' newsletter and via the Solway Firth Partnership 'Tidelines' newsletter that thanks everyone for their input, highlights the messages taken onboard by the AONB and reiterates the core responsibilities of the AONB. It might also be worth highlighting what the AONB does *not* do, but signposting who should be contacted on such issues.

3.3 Parish Council

The full meetings notes can be found in the Appendix. A flavour of the key messages and themes discussed will be outlined here.

Parish Councils were unanimous in their desire to improve two-way communication between themselves and the AONB. Biannual, or even quarterly, reporting or a newsletter by the AONB to the Parish Councils was suggested as a possible way of keeping the Parish Councils better informed. Equally it was stressed that Parish Councils could approach the AONB if they need advice or support on issues, they might not be able to directly help, but indirectly they might be able to lever support or signpost to an organisation that can.

Some clarity on the AONB's role within planning decisions and a gauge on how much weight the AONB feel they have, might be usefully shared amongst Parish Councils.

Area specific concerns:

- Rockcliffe Parish Council were keen for the AONB boundary to be extended to include Kingmoor
- The proposed Coastal Path and riverbank erosion in Beaumont affecting the Village Hall and Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site
- Termination of dredging by the Environment Agency
- Gate-less gate stoops (e.g. Bowness Hall road to Brackenrigg and near Drumburgh) - why?

The general theme of the conversation was that Parish Councils would like to be consulted more, rather than feel like 'things are done to them' without forewarning. They have felt like

they are “kept in the dark”, though it was noted that “things seem better since management at the AONB changed”.

One Parish Councillor noted “[The AONB] do a good job, transformed [the area] over the years. Lots of visitors are impressed. Everyone is doing lots of little bits, AONB, Parish Councils, Cumbria County Council”.

3.4 Special Qualities

The AONB’s 13 special qualities were voted on at all three public events, at the Parish Council event and through the online survey and the results are shown in Table 5. Interestingly, *Estuary seascape: beaches, mudflats & sandbanks with huge numbers of wading birds & overwintering geese*; and *Views across the Solway Firth & to the Lakeland Fells & Pennines* both featured within the top three of all three voting groups.

Curiously *Saltmarsh* was ranked in last place (13th) at the public events, 11th place by the Parish Councils and 4th place in the online survey. Similarly *Bogs or “Mosses”* 11th at the public events, joint 9th (last place) by the Parish Council and joint 7th in the online survey. This demonstrates not all special qualities were ranked consistently between the different voting groups.

It is important to note that the methodology used to explore preferences within special qualities is not statistically robust, rather it yields us a broad flavour of opinions. There may be an element of image bias from respondents to the washing line votes, since the online survey did not have images to aid decision making. Also, as previously described in section 3.1.2, there may also be an element of wording bias as those special qualities ranked higher contain more adjectives and words than those ranked lower.

Themes	Special qualities	Public events	Parish Council	Online survey
Estuarine landscape	Estuary seascape: beaches, mudflats & sandbanks with huge numbers of wading birds & overwintering geese	1	1	1
	Rich intertidal marine life	= 7	= 7	= 7
	Sand dunes	3	8	8
	Saltmarsh	12	= 9	4
	Views across the Solway Firth & to the Lakeland Fells & Pennines	2	3	2
Mosses & wetland landscape	Bogs or "Mosses"	11	= 9	= 7
	Wide open landscape with a strong feeling of remoteness & tranquillity	5	6	3
Farmed landscape	Pastoral landscape with small fields, "kested" hedges & ditches	10	= 9	= 10
Settlements & heritage features	Historic buildings, villages & hamlets	= 7	= 5	9
	Network of historic routes & byways including lonnings & sunken lanes	9	= 5	= 10
	Maritime & fishing heritage	8	2	11
	Dark night skies	6	7	6
	Distinctive historical imprint stretching from the Roman period to WWII	4	4	5

Table 5: Special qualities of the AONB ranked in order of their perceived value from most to least - comparing public events, Parish Council and online survey respondents.

Anecdotal feedback from the consultation events suggests that awareness and appreciation of 'lonnings and sunken lanes' was patchy. Similarly the term 'kested hedges' was queried numerous times. The question 'what exactly is saltmarsh?' was also asked on a number of occasions. Non-locals were surprised by the historical connections of the area. A number of individuals queried whether the area was or would ever be designated as a Dark Sky Reserve - a route that the North Pennines AONB have explored. The AONB might wish to consider future awareness and education work around demystifying these lesser understood special qualities.

4. Appendix

- Solway Coast AONB Community & Visitor Survey (Full data set)
- Special Qualities Vote Results (Raw data set)
- Parish Council Consultation Meeting Notes

Special Qualities Vote Results (Raw data)

Themes	Special qualities	Ranking	Silloth Vintage Rally	Mawbray Village Hall Open Day	Solway Coast Marathon	Parish Council Meeting
Estuarine landscape	Estuary seascape: beaches, mudflats & sandbanks with huge numbers of wading birds & overwintering geese	1	6	2	1	6
		2	5	0	2	0
		3	5	4	8	1
		4	0	1	2	1
		5	1	1	2	1
	Rich intertidal marine life	1	1	0	1	0
		2	2	0	1	2
		3	5	1	2	1
		4	2	0	3	0
		5	1	1	3	0
	Sand dunes	1	7	1	0	0
		2	4	2	2	0
		3	5	0	0	1
		4	1	1	3	0
		5	3	0	1	1
	Saltmarsh	1	3	0	0	0
		2	1	0	1	0
		3	3	0	2	1
		4	1	0	1	0
		5	0	0	1	0
	Views across the Solway Firth & to the Lakeland Fells & Pennines	1	9	6	3	1
		2	7	1	2	0
		3	2	3	0	2
		4	0	1	3	4
		5	1	0	1	0
Mosses & wetland landscape	Bogs or "Mosses"	1	0	0	4	0
		2	2	0	1	1
		3	2	0	1	0
		4	2	0	0	0
		5	3	0	0	0
	Wide open landscape with a strong feeling of remoteness & tranquillity	1	1	2	0	2
		2	4	2	0	2
		3	2	3	2	0
		4	3	1	1	0
		5	3	1	0	0
Farmed landscape	Pastoral landscape with small fields, "kested" hedges & ditches	1	2	0	1	0
		2	1	2	1	0
		3	2	1	0	0
		4	1	1	0	0
		5	1	0	3	1
		1	1	3	2	0

		2	1	2	3	2
	Historic buildings, villages & hamlets	3	2	3	0	2
		4	1	1	0	0
		5	0	3	1	1
		1	0	1	3	1
	Network of historic routes & byways including lonnings & sunken lanes	2	2	2	0	2
		3	0	2	0	0
		4	3	0	0	2
		5	2	1	2	0
		1	1	0	1	1
		2	4	3	1	2
Settlements & heritage features	Maritime & fishing heritage	3	0	1	1	1
		4	3	2	2	1
		5	2	1	0	3
		1	1	2	2	0
		2	1	2	1	0
	Dark night skies	3	5	0	2	1
		4	3	0	0	1
		5	3	0	2	1
		1	5	1	0	0
	Distinctive historical imprint stretching from the Roman period to WWII	2	1	2	3	0
		3	3	0	0	1
		4	2	1	3	2
		5	5	1	2	3

Parish Council Consultation Meeting Notes

Mawbray Village Hall
7pm - 9pm 23rd July 2019

The following questions were asked by the Parish Councils (PCs) and answered by AONB Deputy Manager Chris Spencer:

What relationship does the Environment Agency (EA) have with the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB)?

- EA is represented on the AONB's Joint Advisory Committee (JAC).
- The JAC has representatives from Cumbria County Council, ACTION with Communities in Cumbria (ACT), Natural England, Environment Agency, Allerdale Borough Council, Carlisle City Council, Town Councils, most PCs (some have not been attending), RSPB, Friends of the Lake District, etc.

Can AONB boundaries be changed alongside the ongoing Glover review?

- Process currently goes through DEFRA and is lengthy and expensive. Glover review may have some impact on this, but there are no firm proposals. It was noted that Rockcliffe PC are keen for the boundary to be extended to include Kingmoor. AONB already aware of this and will take this away.

Are there plans to extend existing cycle paths?

- This has been included in the Coastal Communities plan, which is separate to the AONB.

What progress has been made on extending the England Coast Path beyond Allonby?

- Next portion to be approved is through to Gretna, there have been delays following 'People Over Wind' case, but it is hoped that submission to Secretary of State will be made in the Autumn.

Did the AONB have any input into the decision to route the England Coast Path through Burgh-by-Sands?

- That decision followed the brief that the path should be in sight of the sea wherever possible.

The following questions were asked by ACT and answered by the PCs (no AONB staff were present in the room):

Do you have a relationship with the AONB? Have you ever discussed any issues (positive or negative) with the AONB before? If so what?

- It is a standing item on at least one PC agenda.
- Some PCs felt that they don't know what the AONB are doing; ACT highlighted that there is room for representation on the JAC.
- ACT emphasized that the AONB would like to have a better relationship with PCs.
- PCs were unanimous in their desire to improve two-way communication between themselves and the AONB.
- Biannual, or perhaps even quarterly, reporting or a newsletter by the AONB to the Parish Councils was suggested as a possible way of keeping the PCs better informed. Equally it was stressed that Parish Councils could approach the AONB if

they need advice or support on issues, they might not be able to directly help, but indirectly they might be able to lever support or signpost to an organisation that can.

- The general theme of the conversation was that Parish Councils would like to be consulted more, rather than feel like 'things are done to them' without forewarning. They have felt like they are "kept in the dark", though it was noted that "things seem better since management at the AONB changed".

Do you engage with the AONB on planning issues?

- Would consider it if something major came up (e.g. pylons)
- Two PCs reported doing so in the past, for example, Rockcliffe got in touch regarding the Sellafield pylons.
- One PC questioned "does AONB's support add weight to a planning decision?"
- One PC advised that the "AONB must have impact on wind turbines" - Belief held by some PCs that the AONB have a big influence on wind turbines, other PCs disagreed.

Do you engage with the AONB on any maintenance issues?

- Yes, the AONB have supported one PC in clearing of overgrown plants. Community are hoping to take over management of dunes and greens. Worked with Allerdale BC, the partnership has worked. Hope to work more closely on grass cutting too.
- Residents have asked one PC if boardwalks can be replaced, appreciate it is expensive, question whether the AONB could help?
- Discussion around the relationship between the AONB and the Highways Agency
- Sometimes, it's not always the AONB that are best placed to offer advice. For example, issues around becks, rivers, tarns and lakes are best directed at your local Rivers Trust (West Cumbria Rivers Trust or Eden Rivers Trust in this area) or the Environment Agency, but remember the Rivers Trusts are locally based. For example, Rockcliffe got practical advice on Himalayan Balsam removal from Eden Rivers Trust.
- Some becks reportedly choked with vegetation and Environment Agency no longer regularly dredge them like they used to, just cut once late in the year. Could the community doing anything to help clean out the ditches?
ACT advised it was worth contacting West Cumbria Rivers Trust
Website: <https://westcumbriariverstrust.org/>
Tel: 017687 75429
Email: info@westcumbriariverstrust.org

Have there been any environmental improvements relating to the AONB?

- Erosion of riverbanks at Beaumont is not being addressed. Dangerous for Hadrian's Wall walkers. A meeting was held May 2018 but nothing has happened since. It's located behind the village hall and is eroding away the riverbank. The PC have photos. Can the AONB do anything? Another PC suggested that a plan needs to be made, by the PC and/or community? Funding can then be applied for, there are lots of opportunities out there.
- What is going on with the unused gate stoops? There's a few dotted about – Bowness Hall road to Brackenrigg been in 2 years but no sign of any gates, two near Drumburgh too, which also look out of place. Why are they there? Were they free?

Have you any ideas for developments you would like to work with the AONB on? And any other issues not already covered?

- Hadrian's Wall is a World Heritage Site, but Natural England want to route their National Coast Path through it, how is this allowed?
- ACT encouraged the Parish Councils to write Parish Plans and noted that Gareth Douglas-Brown is the West Cumbria Development Officer for ACT that can support them with this.
- ACT advised that Cumbria County Council have launched a new 'Working Together' scheme that aims to support communities to work on local improvement and maintenance tasks focusing on low-medium risk highways activities (e.g. sweeping, verge maintenance) and other services in time will be incorporated to improve and further enhance local communities across the county.
Website: <https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/yourcommunitysupport/workingtogether.asp>
Email: workingtogether@cumbria.gov.uk
- The 'Cumbria Exchange' is another fairly new initiative for community organisations and businesses to connect with each other to offer free or in-kind support for mutual benefit.
Website: <https://cumbriaexchange.co.uk/>
- One Parish Councillor noted "[The AONB] do a good job, transformed [the area] over the years. Lots of visitors are impressed. Everyone is doing lots of little bits, AONB, Parish Councils, Cumbria County Council".