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For immediate release

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) today released the findings of an independent assessment entitled “The Value of AONB partnerships”.

The Report, prepared by Land Use Consultants (LUC) during a period when the role and work of protected landscapes is coming under scrutiny in the run-up to the UK Government’s announcement of its Spending Round 2013 **and** during the current programme of expenditure reductions across government departments and local authorities, shows that

- **AONB partnerships are embedded within, and trusted by, local communities.**
The mix of locally accountable elected members with members of local interest groups and officers from national agencies provides an effective structure for deciding local priorities and co-ordinating shared programmes of action.
- **AONB partnerships excel at using small sums of public money to draw extra money and resources into rural communities**
AONB partnerships are highly successful at using the core funding they receive from central government and constituent Local Authorities to lever other income. The diversity of AONB partnerships’ membership gives them the ability to turn small individual contributions, which would on their own achieve little, into significant shared endeavours. Without core funding the ability of the AONB partnership to lever in money and in-kind support will disappear.
- **AONB partnerships are flexible, adaptable and respond to change**
The work being undertaken by AONB partnerships is of growing relevance to national and local policy objectives. Concepts such as sustainable development, the ecosystems approach and the environment as an economic driver and determinant of health and wellbeing, all of which are core tenets of the AONB purpose, now have widespread acceptance in national and local policy. This has meant that the work of AONB partnerships is of mainstream interest to many partners in a way that would not have been the case ten years ago.

**The National Association for
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

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- AONB partnerships are helping facilitate new ways of working in the public sector**

AONB Partnerships and their staff are actively involved in a range of delivery projects, often taking responsibility for leading projects where there are gaps in the capacity of partners to do so. This is seen as a key strength of the AONB Partnership approach and is increasingly relevant to the way most Local Authorities are operating more as commissioning bodies
- AONB partnerships work together and recognise the benefits of acting together as a Family**

The potential for sharing best practice and using a collaborative ‘action learning’ approach to build the institutional capacity of AONB Units has been shown through the NAAONB Future Landscapes Programme. The 36 Lead Officers that participated in the Programme continue to work together at a national level to address key issues facing AONBs.

Richard Benyon MP, Minister for Food and Fisheries, who had a preview of the Report at the recent Landscape for Life Conference 2013 was impressed with the report and during his presentation highlighted the importance of partnership-working and the key role that AONB partnerships have as intermediaries, facilitating the right conditions and trust.

Howard Davies, CEO, NAAONB said

“LUC’s work has recognised the true value of AONB partnerships and has also highlighted concerns about their future funding. All AONB partnerships are keen to use their influence to support the current drive for economic recovery and growth. The high landscape quality of AONBs, articulated in terms of their natural beauty, is now recognised as a key economic driver and the greatest opportunities for AONB partnerships are likely to lie in those sectors that manage or derive their business from this natural beauty - such as food, drink, forestry and tourism.

He added

“It is important that AONB partnerships are well equipped to continue their important work at a local community level and the NAAONB will continue to work with Defra and Natural Resources Wales to ensure this, and that AONBs remain Landscapes for Life”

Notes for Editors

1. A complete version of the Report can be found [here](#).
2. It looks at AONB partnerships and their structures and highlights their ability to respond to national and local policy priorities at both a strategic and delivery level. It goes on to assess the way in which AONB partnerships use the resources they are given and considers the impact of funding cuts on their operation before drawing out key conclusions and offering suggestions for future consideration.

3. Contact Jill Smith, **Communications Manager, NAAONB** on jill.smith@landscapesforlife.org.uk or 07969 888823 for further information.
4. The **National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB)** was formed in 1998 as an independent organisation to act on behalf of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its membership is largely composed of AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards, representatives from local authorities whose boundaries include AONBs and individuals who are concerned to improve AONB management and funding arrangements. Visit <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/about-the-association.html> for further information about the NAAONB.
5. There are 46 AONBs in the UK. They cover 18% of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Visit www.landscapesforlife.org.uk for further information about the AONB Family.
6. **Land Use Consultants**
LUC is dedicated to conserving and enhancing the environment and promoting sustainable development on behalf of their clients. With more than 45 years' experience, their specialist team of over 100 staff is located across four UK offices. Their work is underpinned by core values of respect, integrity, drive and excellence.