



FOREST OF BOWLAND

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Background

A short online survey was carried out (over five weeks during April & May 2018) to gather some basic information from respondents on what they most value about the AONB, what might be improved and offer thoughts on the priorities for the on-going review of the AONB Management Plan.

The survey and accompanying background information (see Appendix A) were placed on the AONB website and respondents were required to complete a series of six short questions, including two 'tick-box' questions, as follows:

- 1. Are you responding on behalf of an organisation or group? If yes, please state.**
- 2. What do you most value about the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)? Please tick the top three things that you most value about the AONB.**
 - A protected landscape
 - Scenic views
 - Wildlife habitats and species
 - Wild open spaces
 - Attractive villages
 - Thriving local economy and communities
 - Farming and land management
 - Recreational opportunities (e.g. walking, cycling, birdwatching)
 - Visitor attractions
 - Heritage and historic environment
 - Places to stay and eat
 - Peace and quiet
 - Dark skies
- 3. Is there anything else that you particularly value about the AONB that is not listed above?**
- 4. Please tick which of the key interests you think the AONB Partnership should particularly focus on during the review of the Management Plan (see Appendix A).**
 - Landscape-scale conservation
 - Moorland management
 - Woodland creation and management
 - River catchment management
 - Development and planning in the AONB
 - The future of farming in the uplands
 - Visitor experience and information
- 5. Are there any other key interests you think we've missed? Please state below and where possible give reasons why?**
- 6. Is there anything you think could be improved in the Forest of Bowland AONB? Please state below and where possible give reasons why.**

Survey results and analysis

The survey received **285 responses**, which is significantly higher than any previous surveys carried out for a review of the AONB Management Plan.

Question 1

Most respondents declared themselves as individuals, rather than representatives of organisations or groups. Nevertheless, analysis of the responses showed there were similarities in the wording of answers to some of the questions suggesting it is likely that campaign or lobby groups had responded to the survey, in particular focusing on concerns around the issue of bird of prey persecution.

Question 2

Table I below shows the numbers of 'votes' received for the qualities or characteristics of the AONB that respondents most valued:

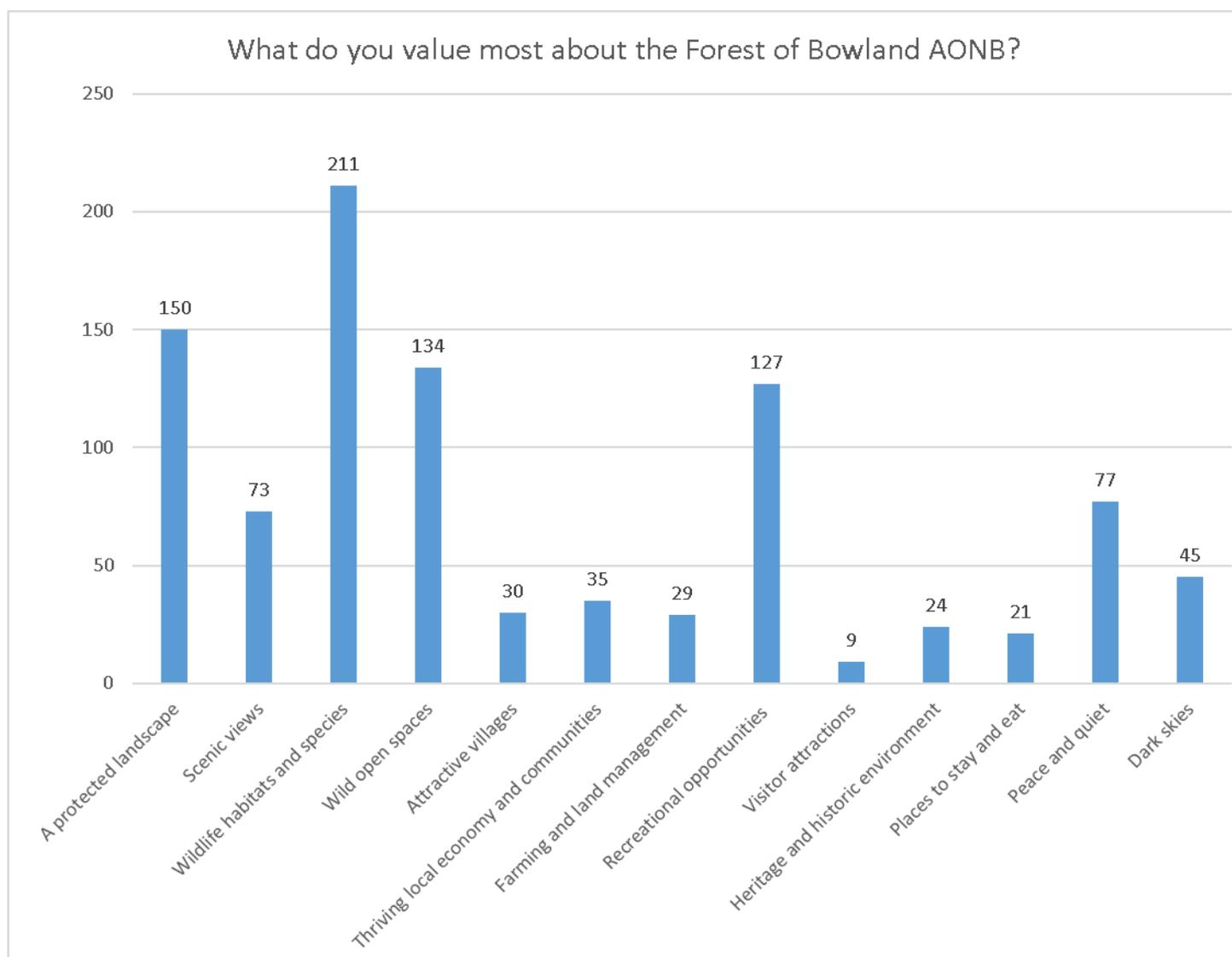


Table I

Question 3

This question was open and allowed respondents to identify anything else (not listed in Q2) that they particularly valued about the AONB.

Almost half of the respondents to this question identified 'Birds of Prey' and in particular the hen harrier as something they especially value in relation to the AONB.

Other qualities or characteristics mentioned on several occasions included:

- Countryside access, including access land, access for all and public rights of way
- The Forest of Bowland's unique and long-standing sense of place
- Game shooting, particularly for its conservation and economic benefits
- The designation providing 'protection' from inappropriate development
- Local community spirit

Question 4

Table 2 below shows what survey respondents think are the most important key interests from those identified by the AONB Partnership as its focus during the review of the Management Plan:

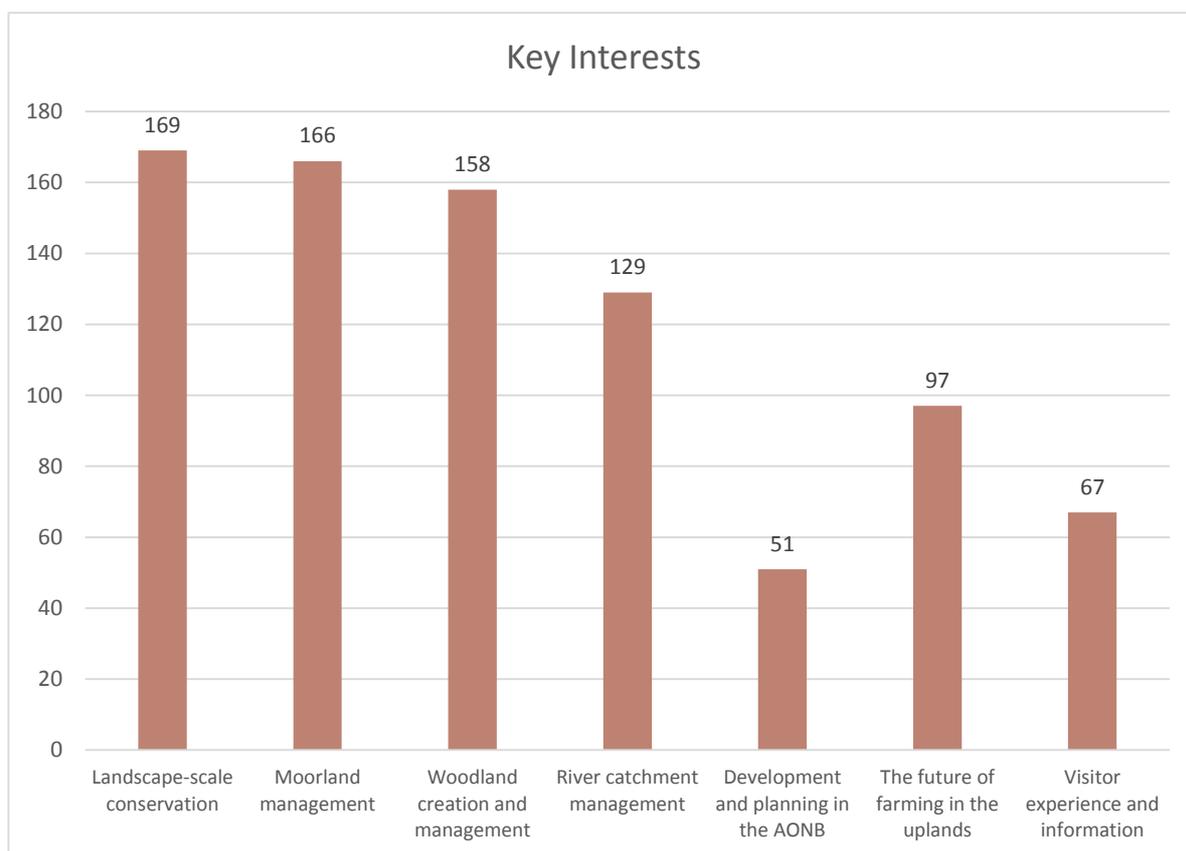


Table 2

Question 5

Again, this question was open and allowed respondents to identify anything else (not listed in Q4) that they felt the AONB Partnership should focus on in the Management Review. Many of the respondents echoed or re-emphasised their choices made in Q4, or made comments on topics which are likely to be covered in focusing on the key interests identified in Q4.

Other suggestions respondents felt had been not identified in these key interests are as follows:

- Birds of prey conservation
- Addressing wildlife crime, in particular raptor persecution
- Encouragement of sustainable and/or nature-based tourism
- Protection of dark skies
- Soil health and conservation
- Natural flood management
- Provision of social/affordable homes
- Historic environment

Question 6

The final question offered respondents the opportunity to identify anything they felt could be improved in the AONB. Table 3 below provides a summary of the topics/issues identified:

Encouraging and supporting high nature value farming, post-Brexit
An AONB that supports a greater diversity of landscapes and habitats
Sustainable moorland management
Sustainable game management, in particular 'rear and release' of pheasant and partridge
Birds of prey conservation and addressing wildlife crime (particularly raptor persecution)
More trees in the landscape, through woodland creation, regeneration or 're-wilding'
Improvement of public rights of way and widening 'access for all' e.g. easy access and family friendly routes.
Delivering natural flood management measures within the landscape
Highway condition and maintenance, particularly minor roads
Better management and information for people walking with dogs
Visitor-related traffic management, especially for organised events
Extension of AONB boundary to include area around Blacko and Stansfield Tower

Other information

Respondents were also asked to provide their postcode. Table 4 & 5 below and overleaf show the geographical spread of responses from across much of the UK:



Table 4

However, the majority of responses came from the Lancashire, South Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire:

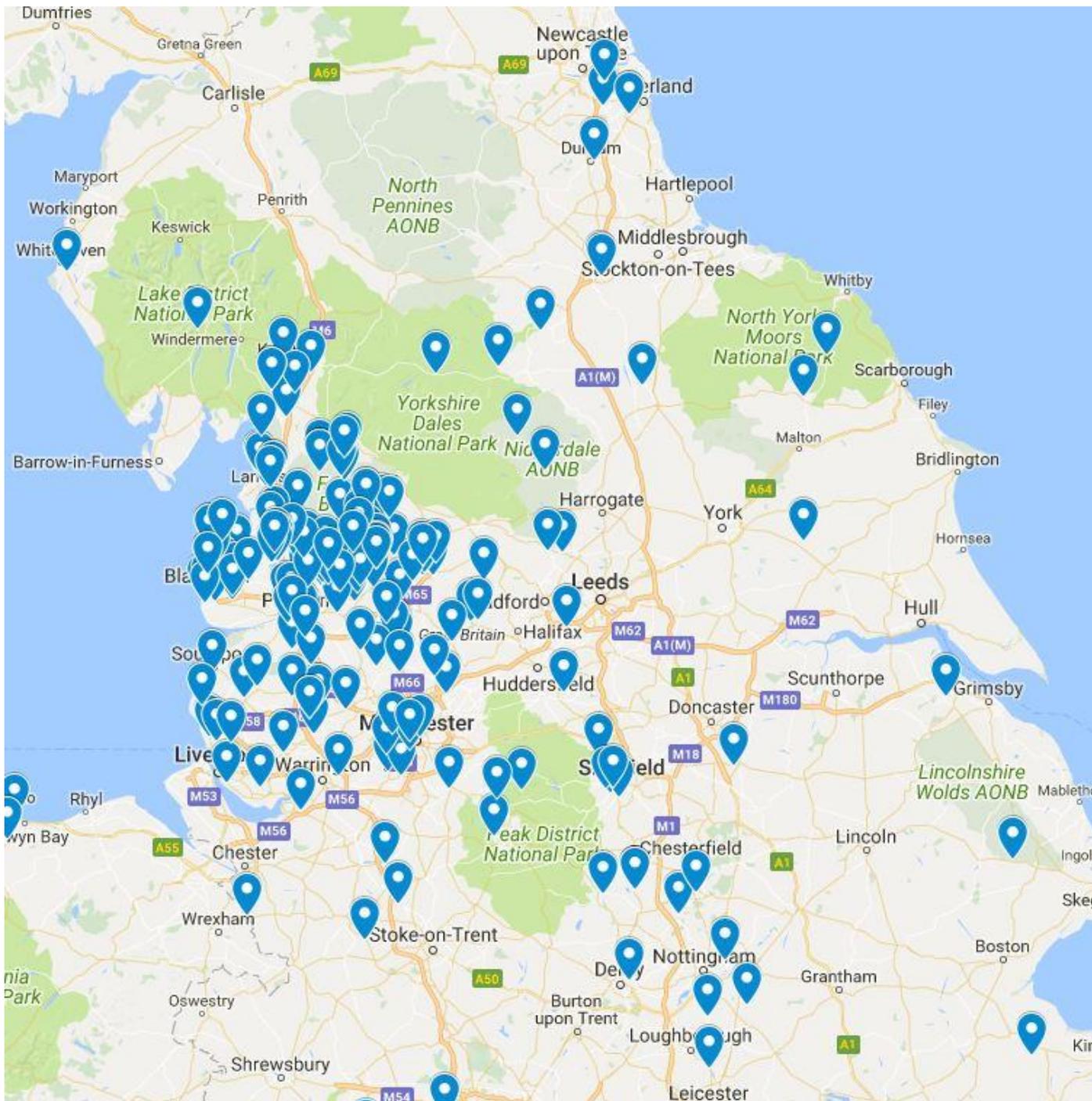


Table 5

Appendix A

Whilst the Review of the Management Plan will consider all areas of the existing Management Plan, the AONB Partnership have identified a number of key interests they would like to focus on during the review. These are set below:

Landscape-scale conservation

Climate change and continued loss of biodiversity mean we need to create dynamic and resilient natural systems. The Government's 'Biodiversity 2020' strategy sets out a number of targets towards this, including having '*at least 17% of land and inland water conserved through effective, integrated and joined approaches to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services*'.

In Forest of Bowland, during the last plan period our biggest contribution to this target has been working in partnership to restore and enhance important habitats such as blanket bog, upland heath, upland hay meadows and wet grassland.

Moorland management

One of the principal reasons that the Forest of Bowland is designated as an AONB is in recognition of its important heather moorland and blanket bog habitats. Much of the Bowland Fells are also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Protection Area for upland bird species.

The predominant land uses for these upland areas are sheep and beef farming enterprises, alongside management of moorland for grouse shooting.

Woodland creation and management

Just over 8% of the Forest of Bowland is woodland (broadleaved, conifers and mixed). This is below the national average for both England (10%) and the UK (13%). In 2015, the Government set out an ambitious target to plant 11 million trees by 2020. This target has proved difficult to achieve via existing Countryside Stewardship woodland creation schemes, with a relatively limited number of new woodland creation schemes locally within the AONB.

In addition, 36% of existing woodlands within the AONB are under-managed or not managed at all. Lack of management can often result in a loss of woodland biodiversity.

River catchment management

Since the establishment of Catchment Partnerships in 2011, there has been a much stronger focus on improving river habitats through better land management practices and habitat restoration. Whilst the ecological condition of over 65% of rivers within the AONB have a status of 'Good' or 'High', a target has been set of reaching 100% in Good or High status within the AONB by 2027.

In addition, flooding incidents within Lancashire and North Yorkshire in recent years have resulted in a renewed focus on how improved catchment management in the uplands can help to reduce downstream flood risk. The implementation of natural flood management techniques, such as riverside and wider catchment tree planting, in-stream habitat improvements and peatland restoration can complement more traditional, hard-engineering solutions to address flood risk.

Development and planning in the AONB

The fundamental principle underlying planning and development management in AONBs is that any new development within the AONB that has a materially adverse impact can only proceed where it is demonstrated that it satisfies an over-riding national need. All development is expected to conform to high standards of design, to be in keeping with landscape character and local distinctiveness and should conserve and enhance the AONB's natural beauty.

The AONB Partnership also wants to continue to support a resilient local economy and sustainable communities within the Forest of Bowland and therefore recognises the importance of remaining open to proposals for development within the AONB; particularly where these help deliver the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

The future of farming in the uplands

The Forest of Bowland has a predominantly farmed and managed landscape. Its character is the result of generations of human activity. The high quality of this landscape provides various public goods for wider society including biodiversity, carbon storage, water quality, flood resilience and recreational and educational opportunities enjoyed by thousands of people each year. Farming also has a significant social and cultural impact. Whilst difficult to quantify, the value that it has on landscape character, and the subsequent impact this has on sense of place and identity is significant.

The UK's planned exit from the EU has created major uncertainty for the agricultural sector as a whole, both in terms of future trade arrangements and how- and to what level government (and domestic taxpayers) will support agriculture in future. This uncertainty is perhaps even more keenly felt within the uplands, such as the Forest of Bowland, where running a profitable sheep and beef operations can be particularly challenging. A significant number of farmers in Forest of Bowland rely on the existing Basic Payment Scheme and Agri-Environment Schemes to supplement their income and to continue to farm the fells.

Visitor experience and information

The Forest of Bowland is a popular visitor destination for the surrounding urban settlements of the North West and Yorkshire. Its relatively 'undiscovered' character is highly valued and generates loyalty amongst residents, day visitors and increasingly staying visitors. The AONB is a great destination for walkers, cyclists and wildlife enthusiasts. Although walking is the main recreational activity within the area, there are many opportunities to enjoy other activities such as mountain biking, horse riding, fishing, canoeing, gliding and paragliding.

Over the last decade, the AONB Partnership has led the way in supporting the development of sustainable tourism that takes account of its economic, social and environmental impacts. The AONB Partnership seeks to continue this work and, where possible, provide infrastructure (e.g. promoted routes, information and facilities) that can deliver against visitors' expectations.