



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Lord Benyon
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

T 03459 335577
defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

07 July 2022

Dear colleagues,

I am writing to confirm a decision by Defra, effective today, to give you and your partners an option to delay the publication of upcoming Management Plans by up to 1 year from their original planned review date, after new Management Plan guidance and new Protected Landscapes outcomes are published.

I am addressing this letter specifically to those Protected Landscape Management Plan Partnerships (hereafter: "Partnerships") that are required by law to review their next Management Plan in 2023 or 2024. For awareness, I have copied this letter to Protected Landscapes bodies who will not be affected by this option to delay and can proceed with their current review timetable as planned.

Please allow me to explain the rationale for this, and to reassure you that you are under no obligation to delay the publication of your next Management Plan if you would prefer not to and/or if a delay is unsuited to your management planning cycle.

The government committed to strengthen Management Plans in its [response to the Landscapes Review](#). We have already begun work to implement non-legislative change during 2022. For example, we are working with Natural England, National Parks England, and the National Association of AONBs to update the Management Plan guidance for both National Parks and AONBs. We are also working to ensure that new ambitious outcomes are agreed for the role of Protected Landscapes in delivering on the government's goals, aligned with the revised 25 Year Environment Plan and interim environmental targets under the Environment Act 2021 and the Net Zero Strategy.

We recognise the scale and significant implications of these reforms for management planning. We have also listened carefully to those of you who have voiced support for a more flexible and less prescriptive approach to management planning during our consultation on the Landscapes Review Response, which ended on 9 April.

We have therefore decided to grant you an option to delay publication of your next Management Plan. In practice, this option to delay will only apply to Partnerships that are required by law to review their next Management Plan in 2023 or 2024 and will therefore apply to Partnerships who currently find themselves in the middle or nearing the end of their five-year Management Plan cycle. Protected Landscapes that are due to publish their next Management Plan from 2025 onwards will not be affected by the delay and will work to the same timelines as planned.

The purpose of this optional delay is to give Partnerships time to digest new outcome-based targets (due to be published in January 2023), new Management Plan guidance (due to be published in Spring 2023), and new policies outlined in the government's response to the Landscapes Review, and to embed these more easily into their Plans.

Defra considers that that any Partnerships wishing to delay their next Plan would still need to respect their five-year review cycles as stipulated by the Environment Act 1995 (for National Park Management Plans) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (for AONB Management Plans). In order to comply with the law without compromising the integrity of future Management Plans, Defra judges that Partnerships could simply produce a light-touch review in which they commit to produce a new Management Plan after the new guidance is published.

Defra has considered what a light-touch review might look like and advises the following: Partnerships would agree and publish one page of text setting out their intentions for the next Management Plan. This could include a brief vision statement, a summary of how the Management Plan will be structured, and a summary of the Partnerships' objectives over the next five-year review period (carrying forward actions and/or adding new ones for the year affected by the delay). Producing a light-touch review of this nature would allow Partnerships to carry over their existing Plan by demonstrating they have considered the next Plan, in compliance with the law. Partnerships would not need to consult extensively to produce this light-touch review, as we expect it would be pitched as a continuation/extension of the current Plan.

We remain committed, however, to ensuring substantive Management Plan reviews are conducted. We therefore ask all Protected Landscapes electing to delay their next Management Plan to complete a review of that Plan no later than 31 December 2025. We will consider any requests for an additional, exceptional extension on a case-by-case basis. Although we are committed to ensuring the management planning process is more flexible going forwards, we envisage this being a one-off delay in light of the wide-ranging and significant reforms we are proposing to make.

Let me be clear that any Plans that have recently been published will remain valid and effective for their current cycle in full (that is, five years from the date of publication). We recognise the considerable work that has gone into these Plans and want to assure you that any new targets, guidance, or policies can be embedded at a later stage, either during your current cycle or as part of the next five-year review.

Once again, I would like to reassure you that this delay is optional; it is entirely up to you, as Partnerships, whether to exercise it.

I hope that this option to delay can help to ensure a smooth and flexible transition as we roll out reforms to strengthen Management Plans. As we begin this process of longer-term reforms to Management Plans, we would like to explore how we can better harmonise Management Plan cycles so that we can promote partnership working and coordination of plan implementation across the 44 Protected Landscapes, while respecting local circumstances. I look forward to your input as we develop this work.

Management Plans are vital strategic documents and I am grateful for your tireless work to draft, develop and deliver them. My officials and I look forward to continuing to work with you on multiple programmes of work linked to Management Plans, including updating the new Management Plan guidance, setting new targets for Protected Landscapes, and developing the National Landscapes Partnership and the National Landscapes Strategy.

I would be grateful if you could share this letter among your Partnerships and wider networks to ensure they are informed.

I have also copied this letter to Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, Philip Hygate, Chair of the National Association of AONBs, and Andrew McCloy, Chair of National Parks England.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Benyon." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

THE RT HON LORD BENYON