

Press release: Strengthened protection for Essex and Suffolk countryside

- Proposals to extend Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Parts of Essex to be recognised for its natural beauty for the first time
- Public invited to have a say on new protections

Parts of Essex and new parts of Suffolk could be recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for the first time under plans outlined today.

[Natural England](#) has put forward proposals to extend the [Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB](#), the first extension since it was designated in 1970.

The move would see approximately 15 square miles brought within the protected area, including the Stour Estuary, Samford Valley and Freston Brook Valley, increasing the AONB by nearly 10% – a size equivalent to 3,800 international rugby pitches.

The UK's 46 AONBs represent some of country's finest countryside, spanning from Cornwall to the North Pennines, offering a wealth of opportunities for both people and wildlife to benefit from the countryside.

Interim Chief Executive of Natural England Marian Spain said:

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty represent some of the country's most valued landscapes, designated to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

The extension of Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB would ensure magnificent estuary, valley and woodland views in this part of Suffolk and Essex are given added protection. The support and input from the public and stakeholders has been vital in developing these plans, and we look forward to working closely together as we hopefully see them become a reality.

Included in the proposed extension are:

- The Stour Estuary including much of the estuary itself, the northern estuary valley slopes at Brantham and the majority of the southern estuary valley slopes between Mistley and Parkeston
- The Samford Valley, a tributary of the Stour Estuary, which extends further inland from the existing AONB boundary at Stutton Bridge and includes some areas of neighbouring Shotley Peninsula Plateau; and
- The Freston Brook Valley, a tributary of the Orwell Estuary which extends inland from the existing AONB boundary westwards and includes

surrounding plateau woodlands. The move would bring significant benefits to the local area, enabling local businesses and tourist sites to promote the area as an AONB and access relevant grants.

The proposals come as Julian Glover leads the government's ongoing [review into protected landscapes](#), the first evaluation in 70 years of whether England's National Parks and AONBs meet the nation's needs in the 21st century and whether there is scope for the current network to expand.

The designation would also complement existing wildlife management measures in the area, with the Stour Estuary designated as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and a special area of conservation (SAC).

Copies of the draft order to designate these areas, including maps of the areas affected, have been made available for public inspection locally. A notice period will run from 12 February 2019 to 22 March 2019 where the public can respond to proposals, before the designation can be formally confirmed, amended or rejected by Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

About the designation:

Natural England has a power under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 to designate land as an AONB if it meets the statutory designation criterion of outstanding natural beauty.

A comprehensive consultation process ran for a three month period from 26 January to 20 April 2018. The statutory consultees are local authorities with land in the proposed extensions and those with land in the existing SC&H AONB. In line with good practice, Natural England decided to widen the consultation to engage with stakeholders and the wider public.

During the Notice Period, copies of the draft Order will be available for public inspection for 28 working days between 9.30 and 16.30 Mondays to Fridays: in the following locations:

- Natural England offices in Cambridge and Norwich,
- Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty office
- Manningtree, Harwich, Ipswich and Capel St Mary libraries (see their websites for opening hours).
- The documents are also available for [download online](#)