

DESIGNATION HISTORY SERIES

NORTHUMBERLAND COAST AONB

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Origin

1. The Government first considered the setting up of National Parks and other similar areas in England and Wales when, in 1929, the Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, established a National Park Committee, chaired by the Rt. Hon. Christopher Addison MP, MD. The “Addison” Committee reported to Government in 1931, and surprisingly, the Report¹ showed that no consideration had been given to the fine coastline of Northumberland, neither by witnesses to the Committee, nor by the Committee itself. The Cheviot, and the moorland section of the Roman Wall, had been put forward as National Parks by eminent witnesses, but not the unspoilt Northumberland coastline.

2. The omission of the Northumberland coastline from the 1931 Addison Report was redressed in 1945, when John Dower, an architect/planner, commissioned by the Wartime Government “to study the problems relating to the establishment of National Parks in England and Wales”, included in his report², the Northumberland Coast (part) in his Division C List: “Other Amenity Areas NOT suggested as National Parks”. Dower had put forward these areas as areas which although unlikely to be found suitable as National Parks, did deserve and require special concern from planning authorities “in order to safeguard their landscape beauty, farming use and wildlife, and to increase appropriately their facilities for open-air recreation”. A small-scale map in the Report, (Map II page 12), suggests that Dower’s Northumberland Coast Amenity Area stretched southwards from Berwick as a narrow coastal strip, including Holy Island, to Alnmouth.

3. Sir Arthur Hobhouse, Chairman of the National Parks Committee, established by Government in 1945 to follow up Dower’s proposals in more detail, also included in the Committee Report³, published in 1947, the Northumberland Coast, in his list of 52 conservation areas (largely based on Dower’s “Other Amenity Areas”) of high landscape quality, scientific interest and recreational value. The small-scale plan (Map 1 in this history) accompanying the Hobhouse Report showed the Northumberland Coast conservation area covering an area generally identical to Dower’s Northumberland Coast amenity area.

4. Hobhouse’s Northumberland Coast conservation area covered 76 square miles, and was a narrow coastal strip, stretching south some 30 miles from Berwick to Alnmouth, including Holy Island and the Farne Islands. Characterised by long expanses of sandy beach and dunes, low rocky cliffs and castle-topped headlands (many marking outcrops of the volcanic Whin Sill) and small fishing villages cum holiday resorts like Craster and Seahouses, and a largely unspoilt nature, the area was bounded on the west by the main east coast England to Scotland railway line. Only

in the Fallodon Hall area was the boundary of the conservation area drawn west of the railway line*, presumably reflecting the special landscape value of the extensive parkland associated with Fallodon Hall, and, probably, its historic association with Viscount Grey of Fallodon**, Foreign Secretary, from 1905-16, and an acknowledged ornithologist and author, who pioneered the creation of habitat for wildfowl on his estate.

5. As a Hobhouse conservation area, the Northumberland Coast was included in the list of areas, on which, as had been intimated during the passage of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill through Parliament in 1949, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) would be largely (though not entirely) based.

Designation History

6. **Early Steps.** The first priority of the National Parks Commission (NPC) established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949 (the 1949 Act) was to designate the National Parks in its programme which had been adapted largely from the Hobhouse Report. It was not until April 1954, by which time the National Park designation programme was well on the way to completion, that the NPC gave practical consideration to a possible AONB designation programme.

7. However, the Northumberland Coast was first given consideration by the NPC as part of a larger “Northumberland” National Park, much wider than just the Roman Wall National Park proposed by Hobhouse, and also taking in the Cheviot, Rothbury Forest and Kielder Moors conservation areas. Following a visit to Northumberland in July 1954 by a NPC party consisting of Lord Strang (the second NPC Chairman***), Mrs Pauline Dower, (the widow of John Dower, the author of the

* Map 1 clearly shows this extension of the conservation area west of the railway line

** The first draft of this history was completed at the same time (October 2004) as the publication of Angus Lunn’s New Naturalist volume on Northumberland (Angus Lunn “Northumberland” The New Naturalist Library, Collins 2004). Lunn’s references to the Trevelyans, Dowers, and Viscount Grey of Fallodon as important Northumbrian conservationists gave the author a real clue as to the likely reason why the Fallodon estate had been included in the conservation area. Lunn mentions that John Dower spent his last years at Cambo (his wife, Pauline, was the daughter of Sir Charles Trevelyan MP, the owner of the Wallington Estate, and the progenitor of successive Access to the Mountains Bills in Parliament). Sir Charles Trevelyan’s brother was the equally famous Professor George Trevelyan, the conservationist and historian, who just happened to also be the biographer of Viscount Grey. As John Dower was a member (sadly, until his death) of the “Hobhouse” Committee, and was well aware, through the Trevelyans, of Viscount Grey’s innovative conservation work at Fallodon, it seems very likely that he persuaded the Hobhouse Committee to include Fallodon in the Northumberland Coast conservation area. This, of course, is pure supposition by the author, but does seem a likely explanation.

*** As Sir William Strang he had been permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office till retirement in 1953.

1945 seminal report on National Parks), Mr Brunsdon Yapp, Brigadier Acland, and their landscape adviser, L. J. Watson (who, significantly, had also been the landscape adviser to the “Hobhouse” Committee), the NPC, considered, at their meeting on 14 September 1954, the very full report of their visiting party as set out in NPC paper⁴ NPC/G/191. This paper included, as Annex 4, a report on the Northumberland Coast by L. J. Watson, as well as shorter references to the Coast by the Chairman (para 14 of the main paper) and Pauline Dower (Annex 1). After discussion of the full paper, the NPC decided to include in their Northumberland National Park the Roman Wall, Cheviot, Kielder Moors and the “outlier” conservation area of the Northumberland Coast. Despite the September decision to include the Coast in the Park, the discussions over the next few months with the County Council and the Forestry Commission (FC) were dominated by the problems caused by the parallel (and indeed, competing) FC proposal to create a National Forest Park in the Kielder/Border area. NPC Commissioners⁵ (other than the original visiting party) visited in November 1954 the Coast, as well as the Kielder area. Four of the five Commissioners who visited the Coast opposed its inclusion in the National Park, and their views and the similar view against the proposal expressed by the Chairman of the Northumberland Development Control Committee, Alderman Robson⁵, were instrumental to the eventual exclusion of the Coast from the National Park proposal which the NPC agreed at the 14 December 1954 meeting⁶ to go forward for statutory consultation.*

8. The question of the future of the Northumberland Coast conservation area was not raised again until December 1955, when the Chairman of the Parish Council of the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, Mr T. J. Martin⁷, wrote, on behalf of the Council, to the NPC, referring to the earlier rejection of the coastal area of Lindisfarne, and the Farne Islands as part of the National Park, and requesting the NPC to designate the area as an AONB. The NPC considered Mr Martin’s letter at their meeting⁸ on 25 January 1956, and agreed that the area should be considered as soon as the NPC’s other commitments on designations permitted. The letter from Mr Ferguson⁹ (of the NPC Secretariat) to Mr Martin of 27 January 1956 reflected this NPC view, and added that it could be a year or two before the proposal could be formally considered.

9. As a Commissioner with a strong Northumberland background, Pauline Dower was very anxious that a decision on the Northumberland Coast as an AONB should be made as soon as possible, and in June 1956, reported¹⁰ that she and her fellow Northumberland Commissioner, Mr H Wardale, would be visiting the Northumberland Coast with Mr Brunsdon Yapp, another Commissioner (from Gloucestershire), in September 1956. In the event only Pauline Dower and Brunsdon Yapp inspected the Coast, reporting to the NPC meeting¹¹ on 26 September 1956.

* The full history of the Northumberland National Park designation is documented in the author’s “Northumberland National Park Designation History” 2001, produced as an earlier volume in the Countryside Agency’s Designation History Series.

The NPC agreed with the visiting party's recommendation that a narrow coastal strip should be designated, and that action (informal consultation with the local authorities) should commence in November 1956. Brunsdon Yapp's letter¹² of 13 September 1956 described the area which Mrs Dower and himself believed should become an AONB. Whether Pauline Dower agreed with Brunsdon Yapp's views about the coast not qualifying as "outstanding natural beauty" by any high absolute standards is not recorded, but it is certain that she would have agreed with his views that it was one of the least spoilt stretches of coast in the country, and because of this, should be designated to assist it to remain unspoilt.

10. The letter makes it clear that both Commissioners agreed that only a very narrow strip qualified, but that it was "also necessary to avoid, wherever possible, inflation of building site values through using a road with views or easy access to the sea as a boundary". The area proposed was described as beginning at or near the southern limits of Berwick on Tweed, its landward boundary following the railway to Smafield Station, but then (unlike the Hobhouse conservation area boundary which, excepting Fallodon Hall, followed the railway line as its landward boundary) used the road through Elwick, Cragmill, Bamburgh, North Sunderland, Swinhoe, Embleton and Dunstan. Both Commissioners were doubtful whether Howick was to be in or out (but Pauline Dower was to re-examine this, and decided to exclude the area). Their boundary then followed the road through Longhoughton to Lesbury and Alnmouth. Clearly the boundary proposed by Pauline Dower and Brunsdon Yapp was drawn more conservatively than the "Hobhouse" area line, and the question of Hobhouse's Fallodon Hall extension was not discussed.

11. **Informal Consultation.** Mr J. Ferguson (substituting for Harold Abrahams*, the NPC Secretary, who was abroad) started the informal consultation process at officer level, in his letter¹³ of 3 December 1956 to Mr. E. I. Harvey, Clerk of the Northumberland County Council. This letter was accompanied by a map based on the area as described in Mr. Yapp's letter of 13 September 1956 (para 10 above) which Ferguson made clear was a line for discussion, and requested Mr Harvey's informal views on the line or any modifications he might have suggested. The letter also added that the formal consultation with the local authorities would take place after informal agreement had been reached.

12. Mr Ferguson, accompanied by L. J. Watson, the NPC's landscape adviser, visited County Hall, Newcastle on 13 December 1956, to discuss the AONB boundary informally proposed by the NPC, with Mr Higgins and Mr Butler of the Northumberland County Planning Department. The two Northumberland officers reported on these discussions to the County Planning Committee and following consideration of their officers' report the Committee decided that should the NPC decide to designate the area, the County Council would raise no objection. A number

* The famous Olympic athlete had been recruited, in 1950, as the NPC's first Secretary and remained in this post until 1963.

of detailed points did emerge and were referred to in the letter¹⁴ of 14 December 1956 from the Clerk of Northumberland County Council, Mr Harvey, to Mr Ferguson, setting out the Committee's views. The Committee wanted the NPC to consider four additional areas (as shown on Plan No 5 in the rear folder of MHLG file 91808/10/6) – from N to S – (i) an area south of Budle Bay, which was already a Section 23 (notified Site of Special Scientific Interest) under the 1949 Act; (ii) a smaller area to the SW of the village of Bamburgh; (iii) the Howick area, including the Howick Hall parkland, and (iv) a coastal strip running south from Lesbury, across the Aln, and along roads via Birling, to include Warkworth Castle and town. The letter also mentioned that some members preferred the “Hobhouse” boundary, presumably its use of the railway line, and wanted a statement of the reasons why this wider boundary had been largely abandoned.

13. The County Planning Committee's views were reported to the NPC meeting¹⁵ on 19 December 1956, and the four extensions (as described above) were agreed by the NPC. The amended map (with the extensions) was approved as the basis for beginning formal consultation with the local authorities. Mr Ferguson wrote¹⁶ to Mr Harvey on 20 December 1956 informing him of the NPC's decisions to include the four additional areas suggested by the County Planning Committee, and to commence the formal consultation process. As requested by County Planning Committee members he also explained why the NPC had departed from the Hobhouse conservation area boundary. The NPC believed the Hobhouse boundary was too widely drawn to reflect the NPC view that the “outstanding” part of the area was a narrow strip at the coast itself, while its hinterland was just pleasant agricultural land. In drawing the boundary more tightly the NPC were concerned to avoid the inclusion of too much land which was not outstanding, and thus to reduce the possibility of objection by agricultural interests, which could delay the whole designation process.

14. Northumberland CC and the NPC clearly wished to ensure that the map finally used for formal consultation purposes was correct; and on 16 January 1957, Mr. Butler, the Deputy County Planning Officer¹⁷ (whom Mr. Ferguson and L. J. Watson of the NPC had met on 13 December 1956), wrote to Mr. Ferguson about the “invisible” islands of Nun Buoy and Swedeman in the Farne Group. He suggested that to overcome any misunderstanding in future the whole Farne Group of islands might be encircled on the consultation map rather than the colouring of individual islands. The National Trust, which owned the Island Group, entered into the discussion, following a telephone enquiry from the NPC, and stated, in their letter¹⁸ of 8 February 1957 to the NPC, that they believed that no part of Nun Buoy and Swedeman were visible above the sea, even at extremely low water. The NPC therefore decided not to include these two ‘islands’ on the consultation map; and in W. Calvert's letter¹⁹ of 20 February 1957 to Mr. Butler, rejected his idea of encircling all the islands with a boundary, adhering to the NPC's original idea of colouring all the (visible!) islands (see also Map 3).

15. **Formal Consultation.** In the event, formal consultation on the AONB proposal did not commence until June 1957, with local authorities²⁰ being consulted on 5 June and other bodies, by practice rather than statute, on 14 June. Five local authorities, Northumberland CC, Amble Urban District Council (UDC), and Alnwick, Belford and Norham & Islandshires Rural District Councils (RDCs) were affected by the proposal and thus formally consulted under Section 87(2) of the 1949 Act. The other bodies consulted, by practice, were the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE), the National Trust (NT), the Nature Conservancy (NC), the Forestry Commission (FC), the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food (MAFF), the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG), and the Crown Estate Commissioners.

16. The NPC's Committee A considered Paper A/G/459, a summary²¹ of the comments made in reply to the consultation letters, at their meeting²² on 24 September 1957. For the local authorities Northumberland CC, Alnwick and Belford RDCs supported the proposal to designate, while Amble UDC and Norham & Islandshires RDC had no comments to make. For the other bodies consulted by practice, CPRE and the Standing Committee on National Parks (SCNP) had no criticism of the boundary, while the NT, and the NC had no comments or observations. The FC indicated where land was to be acquired or dedicated in the future but, like MAFF, had no other comments. MAFF also stated that it did not wish to raise any objections to the proposal on agricultural grounds. Although MHLG had no formal comments, Mrs M Ward of that Ministry, in her letter of 4 September 1957 to Mr Ferguson did refer informally to some matters²³, which had been raised by MHLG technical officers. They were puzzled by the inclusion of the small area west of Bamburgh village (which had been added at the request of the CC in December 1956), and could see no particular landscape value in the area. Mrs Ward also added that the MHLG officers were doubtful about the area from Warkworth north to the River Aln, (which had also been added at the request of the CC). They believed that there was a case for including a small section in the north of this area, comprising the low land beside the River Aln backed by the rising ground around Alnmouth. Mrs Ward added that further south (in this additional area 4 para 12 above) the narrow valley of the River Coquet immediately west of Warkworth Castle was probably worthy of inclusion, but that the MHLG officers wondered "whether the obvious impracticability of designating a tiny isolated area" was "in itself justification for including a stretch of not very remarkable country". Finally, while emphasising the MHLG views were only tentative and that she was anxious to avoid quibbling, she requested Mr Ferguson's views on these informal comments. Mr Ferguson, for the NPC, replied²⁴ on 24 September 1957 (whether before or after the NPC meeting on that date is not clear). He pointed out that the two areas mentioned were two of the four agreed at the informal stage of consultation with the CC, and that the Bamburgh western extension was put in on "administrative grounds", restoring the boundary at that point to the CC's original draft line. The

coast north of Amble had been added because the CC officers believed that this was the first “good bit” (!) going north along the Coast road, and partly because of that was coming under development pressures, particularly from caravan developments. Mr Ferguson added that he too did not want to quibble about small details of the boundary, especially when the CC wanted such additions to make best use of AONB status to resist such development pressures. A manuscript footnote added to Ferguson’s letter by Mrs Ward made it clear that she did not wish to pursue her colleagues’ views further unless formal representations on these areas from others were made at a later stage.

17. With no formal objections having been received to the proposal, the Committee agreed that the proposed designation should be advertised in accordance with Section 87(2) of the 1949 Act.

18. **Public Advertisement of the Proposed Northumberland Coast AONB (Designation) Order, November 1957.** After preparation of the copies of the proposed designation map needed, making arrangements for advertisement in the local press, and the public deposit of the Order and maps at the relevant local authority offices, the NPC’s notice of its intention to submit the Northumberland Coast AONB (Designation) Order, 1958 to the Minister of Housing and Local Government was published on 18 November 1957. It was advertised nationally²⁵, (in the London Gazette 19 November 1957) and in the local press* (on 19 and 22 November 1957). Copies of the Proposed Order and map were deposited for public inspection at the offices of Northumberland CC, Amble UDC, and Alnwick, Belford and Norham & Islandshires RDCs, the five local authorities affected by the 50 square mile proposed designation. Further copies of the Order and designation map were also made available for public inspection at the NPC offices in London. Representations on the Order and map were invited to be sent to Harold Abrahams, the NPC’s Secretary, not later than 4 January 1958.

19. Copies of the Order, Map and Notice were also sent, as normal practice, to MHLG, so that MHLG could consult with other Government Departments.

20. **No representations** were received following the public advertisement of the Proposed Order etc; and at their meeting on 21 January 1958, NPC’s Committee A²⁶ recommended that the NPC resolve that the Designation Order be signed and sealed. The NPC, meeting²⁷ the next day (22 January 1958) did, indeed, adopt their Committee A’s recommendation, and resolved “that the Commission approve the making of the Northumberland AONB (Designation) Order, 1958, and authorise the affixing of the Commission’s Seal thereto”.

* The Newcastle Journal and the Northumberland Gazette

21. **Submission of the Northumberland AONB (Designation) Order, 1958 to the Minister of Housing and Local Government on 24 January 1958.** The signatures of Lord Strang (NPC Chairman) and Harold Abrahams (NPC Secretary) were duly added to the Order (and the accompanying map) with the Seal on the same day, and on 24 January 1958, the Order and map in duplicate, and a copy of the Notice (dated 18 November 1957) stating the effect of the Order, and a covering letter²⁸, was sent to the Secretary, MHLG, for the consideration of the Minister. With no objections received, neither in response to the public advertisement of the proposed order, nor as a result of MHLG's post-public advertisement consultation of other Departments, the progress of the Order to the Minister's desk for confirmation, was unusually rapid. A departmental minute²⁹ from E. H. Wiltshire, Assistant Secretary at MHLG dated 24 February 1958, indicates just how quickly the Order was dealt with at the most senior level of MHLG. The Minister's (The Rt. Hon. Henry Brooke MP) only concern, in a manuscript note added, and signed H. B. 7 March (with other manuscript notes from his senior civil servants) to Mr Wiltshire's minute, was that the accompanying press notice should make clear that the Minister had confirmed the Order.

22. **Confirmation of the Northumberland Coast AONB (Designation) Order by the Minister of Housing and Local Government on 21 March 1958.**

The Rt. Hon. Henry Brooke MP, Minister of Housing and Local Government confirmed the Order, without any modifications, on 21 March 1958. His Assistant Secretary at MHLG, E. H. Wiltshire signed the Order³⁰, on the Minister's behalf, and a press notice³¹ ("Beauty of the Northumberland Coast to be Preserved") was issued by MHLG on 28 March 1958, indicating that the Order had been confirmed by the Minister. Unusually the Press Notice did not state the actual size of the area (50 square miles or 129 square kilometres), but did state the length of coast – "from just south of Berwick southwards to Amble – some 40 miles of low cliffs and rocky headlands, with active fishing villages". The MHLG press notice also referred to the inclusion of Holy Island, which had the oldest monastic ruin in the country; the Farne Islands, an important breeding ground of sea birds, and many places of historical interest, such as Bamburgh, Dunstanburgh and Warkworth, all with their great castles. A similar short description* was contained in the NPC's 9th Annual Report³², which also included a map of the area (at the scale of 1/4 inch to 1 mile, Map 2 in this history). With regard to the seaward boundary, particularly with respect to the Farne Islands the NPC Report map is generalised, and comparison with the actual designation map (Map 3 of this history is an extract from the designation map showing the Farne Islands), it is clear that the seaward boundary followed the mean low water mark, thus delineating every island and rock, including Knivestone to the NE which had been excluded entirely from the NPC Report map.

* A more comprehensive, and detailed, description of the landscape and seascape of the Northumberland Coast AONB is contained in "The Northumberland Coast Landscape" A landscape assessment prepared for the Countryside Commission by Nicholas Pearson Associates Ltd, Countryside Commission (CCP 489) 1996.

23. The boundary of the confirmed AONB varied in a number of respects from the Northumberland Coast Hobhouse conservation area (Map 1 in this history) originally used as its basis. Although the AONB covered a smaller area, 50 square miles compared with the conservation area's 76 square miles, it stretched some 5 miles further south, from Alnmouth to Warkworth Castle and Amble, than the conservation area. Like the latter its northern coastal boundary stopped just south of the built-up area of Berwick-on-Tweed. Inland (as the author has already noted with respect to the NPC's informal consultation map in para 10 above) the AONB boundary generally followed a road* line well to the east of the main N-S railway line which had been used for virtually the whole length of the inland boundary of Hobhouse conservation area. Hobhouse's inclusion of Viscount Grey's Fallodon Hall Estate west of the railway line was long forgotten.

24. The fourth AONB designation to be confirmed in England and Wales had been dealt with very swiftly by the NPC once they had rejected the area as an "outlier" of the Northumberland National Park in December 1954. From the NPC's consideration of the Holy Island of Lindisfarne Parish Council's request to designate the area in January 1956 to Henry Brooke's confirmation of the AONB Designation Order in March 1958 it had taken only 26 months to go through the various stages, informal and formal, of the designation process. Few issues, and no formal objections, arose in the delineation of the boundary, and where minor problems did emerge, mainly relating to differences in the subjective views of Commissioners, Councillors and officers (from the NPC, other Government Departments and local authorities) they were easily resolved. There seemed to be a general aversion to "quibbling" over the boundary. Remarkably, the local authorities (who clearly saw AONB designation as a ready-made mechanism to restrict development pressures) generally pressed for more land to be included in the designation and were successful in persuading the NPC to extend the AONB, most significantly to the south to take in Warkworth Castle and the coast from Alnmouth to Amble.

25. **AONB Administration.** There were no demands for a Special Committee for the AONB to be established, and the planning, administration and management of the area, were left, in its early days, very much to the County Council and the four district councils. A 1973 response³³ by John Ross, the Northumberland County Planning Officer, to a Countryside Commission** survey about administrative arrangements in AONBs indicated that while the County Planning Committee were "responsible for administering the Planning Acts and directing general policy within the AONB, the (Council's) Countryside and National Park Planning Committee (had) an interest in the provision of recreational projects under the Countryside Act".

* While the road boundary was easily recognisable on the ground the fact that it bisected a number of settlements was to cause a few development control problems in future years (see para 36).

** The Countryside Commission had replaced the NPC in 1968 and although it had a much broader "countryside" remit, it still had specific responsibilities for AONBs, including their designation.

Local Government re-organisation in 1974 meant that the four district councils affected by the AONB were replaced by just two much larger district councils, Alnwick and Berwick-upon-Tweed, though Northumberland County Council still acted as the higher tier of local government. (More recent developments in the administration of the AONB are dealt with in paras 32-35 below.)

26. The proposed Northumberland Coast AONB Extension and the North Northumberland Heritage Coast. In 1971, following a re-examination of their AONB designation policy, the Countryside Commission (by then chaired by their second Chairman, Sir John Cripps) decided to request its officers to undertake a comprehensive review of existing and proposed AONBs “in order to promote a limited programme of new designations designed to remove (present) anomalies and provide greater consistency, without debasing standards”. The review was undertaken by Andrew White, one of the Commission’s planning officers (also a landscape architect) and L J Watson,* as a consultant. Amongst the 32 areas examined as part of the review were nine which had been chosen as “Heritage Coasts”, stretches of unspoilt coast with exceptionally fine scenery and heritage features, by the Countryside Commission (very much influenced by Professor J. A. Steers**) in “The Coastal Heritage” published in 1970. The reason for this derived from the Department of Environment and Welsh Office Circular 12/72 “The Planning of the Undeveloped Coast” where one of the policies stated: “Where a heritage coast does not already have a statutory designation, the Countryside Commission will consider whether it should be designated as an AONB.” The North Northumberland Heritage Coast extended south from the Scottish border (excluding Berwick) to Craster, and thus included, in the stretch from the Border to Berwick an area which had not been included in the Northumberland Coast AONB. The review established that this northernmost section of the proposed North Northumberland Heritage Coast, being an “unspoilt, attractive coastal area of unusual character” although of limited extent, was “acceptable as an extension of the existing AONB”. When the Countryside Commission considered the paper³⁴ on the Review (73/21) and their officers’ recommendations, at their meeting³⁵ in February 1973, they approved the recommendations, and in respect of the Northumberland Coast (AONB) extension (inter alia) instructed their officers to inform the County Council that although they hoped to receive a detailed proposal from them in due course, no action was required until a first phase (of five areas) of designations was nearing completion.

* L J Watson, as mentioned in paragraph 7 above, had been not only the NPC’s landscape adviser but had also undertaken the same role for the Hobhouse Committee. His experience of delineating boundaries dated from 1945 and he was thus as familiar as anyone with the standards used in the past.

** Professor J. A. Steers was an eminent coastal geomorphologist who had been a National Parks Commissioner from 1960 to 1966. His knowledge of the coastline was unrivalled and in the 1940’s he had completed an evaluation of the scenic quality of the coastline of England and Wales which had strongly influenced the Commission’s choice of Heritage Coasts.

27. With slow progress on the first phase of AONB designations, no work was undertaken on the Northumberland Coast AONB extension, and yet another AONB policy review intervened in 1978 – 81. The Commission, following this review, published an AONB Policy Statement (CCP 141) in 1981, in which they stated³⁶, inter alia, their policy towards the future designation of the remaining proposals in the AONB programme. For those proposals, including the Northumberland AONB extension, where the designation procedure had not started, the policy would be to review (!) those proposals. Six areas were examined under this review, which was undertaken in 1982 by a Commission Conservation Branch officer (the author) and officers of the appropriate Commission Regional Office. Paper 82/53 described the review³⁷ and included recommendations which were put to the Commission in December 1982. The officer view on the Northumberland Coast extension was that, apart from the coastal cliffs, the small area, crossed by two major transport routes (the main railway line from Edinburgh to London, and the A1(T)) was not up to AONB standard. This, in addition to the belief of local authority officers that their councils would be unlikely to support the AONB extension, led the officers to make a recommendation that the Northumberland Coast extension should be removed from the AONB programme. This view was approved by the Commission at the December 1982 meeting³⁸, and the author conveyed this decision to the Chief Executive of Northumberland CC, in his letter³⁹ of 12 January 1983. The coastal strip did, of course, remain as part of the North Northumberland Heritage Coast (see para 30 below).

28. No work was undertaken on the Northumberland Coast in relation to the Commission's national programme of AONB boundary reviews, which, although starting in the mid-eighties, came to an abrupt end in 1990 after two of the four reviews completed proved to be very costly in terms of use of staff and financial resources.

29. A small change in the measured area of the AONB did, however, take place in 1991, when as part of the re-measurement of all AONBs undertaken by the Countryside Commission using modern methods, the area of the AONB increased from 129 square kilometres to 135 square kilometres.

30. In 1992 agreement was reached between the Countryside Commission (paper⁴⁰ 92/33) and the local authorities to make the inland boundary (which had not been defined) of the Heritage Coast accord with the inland boundary of the AONB, apart from in the far north from Berwick to the border where the railway line became the inland boundary of the Heritage Coast.

31. However, in 1995, with agreement⁴¹ of the Countryside Commission (paper 95/69) the North Northumberland Heritage Coast was extended to the south (following a proposal in the Northumberland Coast Management Plan in October 1993, para 32 below) to include Coquet Island and Druridge Bay, though with a

tightly drawn inland boundary at Druridge Bay, encompassing just the beach and dunes. A similar Coast Management Plan proposal to include the Tweed Estuary in the Heritage Coast was rejected by the Commission.

32. **Administration 1980 onwards.** AONB policies continued very much to be framed and administered from County Hall, Northumberland; though the Northumberland National Park Officer also continued his informal recreation management functions in the AONB as part of his Department's then wider Countryside role. Specific provision for the AONB was made in the Northumberland Structure Plan 1980, and by the first alteration of that plan in 1988, several planning and generally protective policies were applied to the coastal strip, most of which was both AONB and Heritage Coast. By 1991 a draft Coast Management Plan for the whole coastline of Northumberland had been prepared with full local consultation by the County Council's environment and economic development department which had preceded the plan by a formal study of the Coast and its management issues.

33. In 1993 the Northumberland Coast Management Plan was published by the responsible local authorities prescribing theme-based policies and area-based actions to secure co-ordinated management of the whole of the Northumberland coastline, and this included specific policies for the AONB. A Coastal Advisory Committee with representatives from local authorities and other national and local bodies was established to oversee the implementation of the plan; and an Coastal Management Service, headed by a Coast Officer was appointed to deliver the plan policies and actions.

34. The remaining years of the nineties saw the successful implementation of the 1993 Coast Management Plan and the continuation of the work of Coastal Advisory Committee and the Coastal Management Service, but the strengthening of the protection of AONBs brought about by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act, 2000, required changes in the management and administration of the Northumberland Coast AONB⁴².

35. Accordingly in 2002 and 2003 the AONB local authorities (Northumberland CC, Alnwick DC and Berwick-upon-Tweed BC) undertook a management and governance review which led to the establishment, in September 2003, of the Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership of 19 organisations (including the three local authorities) and individuals, who were either key stakeholders or representatives of other interests in the AONB. The role of the Partnership was to pursue and champion the purposes of the designation of the Northumberland Coast AONB and to assist in the delivery of the Partners' statutory duties and other management actions and policies in the AONB. The Partnership was supported and advised by an Officer Steering Group consisting of the main Partners funding the AONB. An AONB Staff Unit, headed by the AONB Officer, Mary Lewis, was appointed to

serve the Partnership and is currently based at County Hall, Morpeth. The Partnership has already (Spring 2004) produced a new AONB Management Plan (as required by Section 89 of the CROW Act) on behalf of its constituent authorities.

36. **Future Changes.** Although the Countryside Commission rejected Northumberland CC's proposal to extend the AONB north of Berwick at the end of 1982, and abandoned the programme of AONB boundary reviews (which might have led to boundary changes in the Northumberland Coast AONB) by 1990, the Countryside Agency (which replaced the Countryside Commission in 1999) and the Government still have powers, now under Section 83(7) of the CROW Act 2000, to vary AONB boundaries. Official policy is that where there is consensus or where need is established local variations will be considered. Such variations could possibly include – extending the AONB southward to encompass Coquet Island and Druridge Bay, defined in 1995 as an extension of the Heritage Coast; bringing the historic castle town of Berwick-upon-Tweed into the AONB; and, moving the western boundary inland to include more of the coastal plain, thus avoiding the splitting of settlements by the current road boundary. Whether or not these possible boundary changes become firm proposals or, indeed, the proposal to extend the AONB to the cliffs north of Berwick is resurrected, are questions which can only be answered by the AONB Partnership, its constituent local authorities, the Countryside Agency itself, and the Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

References

1. "Report of the National Park Committee", (Chairman – The Rt. Hon. Christopher Addison MP, MD), The Treasury, Cmd 3851, HMSO, London, 1931.
2. John Dower, "National Parks in England and Wales", Cmd 6628, HMSO, London, May 1945.
3. The National Parks Committee (Chairman – Sir Arthur Hobhouse), "Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)", Cmd 7121, HMSO, London, July 1947.
4. National Parks Commission "Proposed Northumberland National Park – Note by the Chairman" Paper NPC/G/191 with its four annexes (ie Notes by Mrs Dower, Mr Yapp, Brigadier Acland and Mr Watson) August 1954 (Reports of the NPC visiting party to the proposed Northumberland National Park, including the "outlier" of the Northumberland Coast.)
5. National Parks Commission – copy of file note summarising both the views of the five Commissioners – Lord Lawson, Mr Lubbock, Mr Morgan, Mr Ritchie and Mr Yapp who visited the Northumberland Coast on 27-28 November 1954 as part of their inspection of the proposed Northumberland National Park, and the views of the Chairman of the Northumberland CC Development Control Committee, Alderman Robson, as given on 30 November 1954. (Folio 6G NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1/336).
6. National Parks Commission "Minutes of the 53rd meeting of the NPC (666) held on 14 December, 1954."
7. Letter from Mr T J Martin, Chairman of the Parish Council of the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, to the NPC, dated 12 December 1955, requesting the designation of Holy Island and Farne Islands as an AONB. Folio 1 – NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1 336).
8. National Parks Commission "Minutes of the 65th meeting of the NPC (897) held on 25 January 1956".
9. Letter from J R B Ferguson, NPC Secretariat, to T J Martin, Chairman of the Holy Island of Lindisfarne Parish Council, dated 27 January 1956, informing him that the NPC would be considering the designation of the Northumberland Coast as an AONB when it became possible. (Folio 8 – NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1/336).

10. National Parks Commission “Minutes of the 70th meeting of the NPC (994) held on 27 June 1956”.
11. National Parks Commission “Minutes of the 72nd meeting of the NPC (1015) held on 26 September 1956”.
12. Copy of letter from W B Yapp to J R B Ferguson, NPC Secretariat, dated 13 September 1956, giving his views on a possible boundary for the proposed Northumberland Coast AONB. (Folio 15A – NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1/336).
13. Letter from J R B Ferguson (NPC Secretariat, to E I Harvey, Clerk of the Northumberland County Council dated 3 December 1956 starting the informal consultation process. (Folio 22 – NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1/336).
14. Letter from E I Harvey, Clerk of the Northumberland County Council, to Mr J R B Ferguson, NPC Secretariat, dated 14 December 1956, giving the County Planning Committee’s response to the informal consultation. (Folio 25 – NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1/336).
15. National Parks Commission “Minutes of the 75th meeting of the NPC (1059) held on 19 December 1956”.
16. Letter from J R B Ferguson, NPC Secretariat, to E I Harvey, Clerk of Northumberland County Council, dated 20 December 1956, giving the NPC’s views on the four additional areas proposed for inclusion in the AONB. (Folio 28 – NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1/336).
17. Letter from W Butler, Deputy Northumberland County Planning Officer, to J R B Ferguson, NPC, dated 16 January 1957 raising a boundary delineation problem over the Farne Islands. (Folio 31 – NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1/336).
18. Letter from Mr G Gibbs, Deputy Chief Agent, NT, to the NPC Secretary, dated 6 February 1957, concerning Nun Buoy and Swadman. (Folio 34 – NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1/336).
19. Letter from W Calvert, NPC Secretary, to Mr W S Butler, Northumberland Deputy County Planning Officer, dated 20 February, 1957 concerning Nun Buoy and Swadman, and informing them that individual islands would be coloured. (Folio 35 – NPC file AB/24/1 – TNA file COU1/336).
20. Letter from Harold Abrahams, NPC Secretary, to R Rothwell, Clerk of Alnwick RDC, dated 3 June 1957 – a similar formal consultation letter on the

proposed AONB was sent to the Clerks of the four other local authorities involved. (Un-numbered folio in MHL file 91808/10/16 – TNA file HLG 92/164.)

21. National Parks Commission Paper A/G/459, “Proposed Northumberland Coast AONB – Summary of Comments”, DPK 20/9/57. (Folio 78 – NPC file AB/24/A – TNA file COU1/337.)

22. National Parks Commission “Minutes of the 51st meeting of the NPC’s Committee A (1144) held on 24 September 1957.”

23. Letter from Mrs M M Ward, MHLG, to Mr J R B Ferguson, NPC Secretariat, dated 4 September 1957, with informal questions about the boundary. (Un-numbered folio in HLG file 91808/10/16 – TNA file HLG 92/164.)

24. Letter from Mr J R Ferguson, NPC Secretariat, to Mrs M M Ward, MHLG, dated 24 September 1957, giving answers to informal questions on the boundary raised by MHLG officers. (Un-numbered folio in MHLG file 91808/10/16 – TNA file HLG/164.)

25. National Parks Commission, “Notice of Northumberland Coast AONB (Designation) Order, 1958, dated 18 November 1957, Harold M Abrahams, NPC Secretary.” (Un-numbered folio in MHLG file 91808/10/16 – TNA file HLG/164.)

26. National Parks Commission, “Minutes of the 54th meeting of NPC’s Committee A (1195) held on 21 January 1958.”

27. National Parks Commission, “Minutes of the 87th meeting of the NPC (1248) held on 22 January 1958.”

28. Letter from Harold M Abrahams, NPC Secretary, to the Secretary MHLG, dated 24 January 1958, covering the sending of the Northumberland Coast AONB (Designation) Order etc for the consideration of the Minister. (Un-numbered folio in MHLG file 91808/10/16 – TNA file HLG/164.)

29. MHLG Departmental Minute from E H T Wiltshire, Assistant Secretary, to Mr Street, Dated 24 February, 1958, but with manuscript notes added from other senior MHLG officers and the Minister, Henry Brooke, leading to confirmation of the Northumberland Coast AONB Designation Order. (Un-numbered folio in MHLG file 91808/10/16 – TNA file HLG/164.)

30. National Parks Commission “Northumberland Coast AONB (Designation) Order, 1958, as confirmed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government and signed on his behalf by E H T Wiltshire, Assistant secretary MHLG on 21 March

1958. (Copy held in safe deposit by the Countryside Agency, John Dower House, Cheltenham.)

31. MHLG Press Release “Beauty of Northumberland Coast to be Preserved”, 28 March 1958, MHLG, Whitehall, London. (Un-numbered folio in MHLG file 91808/10/16 – TNA file HLG/164.)

32. National Parks Commission “Ninth Report of the National Parks Commission for the Year ending 30 September 1958, HMSO, London, December 1958.

33. Letter from J B Ross, Northumberland County Planning Officer, to the Countryside Commission, dated 30 October 1973, describing the administrative arrangements for the Northumberland Coast AONB. (Folio 92 Countryside Commission file V/98A.)

34. Countryside Commission “Paper 73/21 – Review of Proposed Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty” ACS AJW 29 January 1973.

35. Countryside Commission “Minutes of the 49th meeting of the Countryside Commission (2272) held on 6 February 1973.

36. Countryside Commission “Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Policy Statement”, CCP 141, December 1980 (actually appeared in January 1981.

37. Countryside Commission “Paper 82/53 – AONBs Review of Remaining Proposals Where No progress Towards Designation Has Been Made” September 1982.

38. Countryside Commission “Minutes of the 149th meeting of the Countryside Commission (6013) held on 7 October 1982.”

39. Letter from R G Woolmore, Senior Planning Officer, to Chief Executive, Northumberland CC, dated 12 January 1983, giving him the Commission’s decision to withdraw the Northumberland Coast extension from the AONB programme. (Un-numbered folio in Commission file N/V/2.)

40. Countryside Commission “Paper 92/33 North Northumberland Heritage Coast – Definition of Inland Boundary” with Minutes of the 210th Meeting of the Countryside Commission (M92/36) held on 2 April 1992.

41. Countryside Commission “Paper 95/69 Northumberland Coast – Extension of Heritage Coast Boundary” Paul Mutch Northern Regional Office, with Minutes of the 234th meeting of the Countryside Commission (M95/80).

42. Northumberland AONB Partnership “Northumberland AONB Management Plan 2004-2009” (pp1-11) October 2004.

Folios

All the references above are included as folios in the four hardback, black-bound copies of the history (two in the Countryside Agency Resource Centre Library in Cheltenham, one with the Countryside Agency’s Finest Countryside Section in Cheltenham, and the other in the Library of the AONB Staff Unit at County Hall, Morpeth) Comb-bound copies, with all folios, have also been produced, while shorter versions of the history, without the folios, but including the three maps, have been circulated among interested parties.

Maps

Map 1 – Extract from map (at an enlarged scale) contained inside the back cover of the “Hobhouse” Report (ref 3).

Map 2 – Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Scale ¼ inch to 1 mile: Map on page 77 of the Ninth Report of the NPC for the Year Ending 30 September 1958.

Map 3 – Extract from the Northumberland AONB designation map (as confirmed) at the scale of 1 inch to 1 mile, showing the Farne Islands.

Files

The following files have been consulted in the writing of this history:

Title	National Parks Commission or Countryside Commission file number	The National Archives file number
Northumberland National Park – Designation Stage 1 – Draft Map	ND/1/1	COU1/596
Northumberland National Park – Designation	ND/1	COU1/597
Northumberland National Park – Designation Northumberland CC	ND/1/6	COU1/598
Northumberland Coast AONB – General	AB/24/1	COU1/336
Northumberland Coast Consultation with Local Authorities	AB/24/A	COU1/337
Northumberland Coast AONB – Proposed Extension	V/148 N/V/2	N/A
AONB Designation Policy: correspondence and discussion papers covering objectives for existing AONBs, administrative arrangements and future designation programme	V/98 Part A	COU6/195
AONB Designation Policy: correspondence and discussion papers covering objectives for existing AONBs, administrative arrangements and future designation programme	V/98 Part B	COU6/196
	and also	
File	MHLG file number	The National Archive file number
National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949 Section 87(1) – Proposed Northumberland Coast AONB	91808/10/16	HLG 92/164

