

North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024

Report of the Planning Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

That the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 – 2019 (Annex to the report), in accordance with the duty under Section 89 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, be adopted.

SUMMARY:

- Following public consultation on a revised management plan to cover the next five years, a final version has been submitted to the Council for adoption, prior to its formal submission to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for approval.
- Once adopted by all the local authority partners within the designated area of the AONB and approved by the Secretary of State, the management plan will replace the existing management plan adopted in 2014.
- It is considered that the revised management plan is in a form which is acceptable for adoption. Such adoption will meet the statutory duty on the Council to prepare a management plan for the AONB, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council adopted the first management plan for the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 2004. This was in line with the requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, which strengthened and brought together previous legislation regarding AONBs. Section 89 of the Act placed a duty on local authorities within a designated AONB area to prepare and publish a management plan.
- 1.2 It is a statutory requirement that management plans are reviewed every five years. This is to ensure that they remain relevant to key partners in the light of changing circumstances, new knowledge and feedback from implementation. A new fourth revised management plan has been prepared for the period 2019 – 2024. This would supersede the current 2014 – 2019 management plan.
- 1.3 The Council is required to formally adopt the new revised management plan, prior to its submission to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for approval, in order to fulfil its duty under the CRoW Act. Each of the other constituent local authorities within the designated area must also do likewise.

2 Background

2.1 AONB status is a nationally important landscape designation for areas of high scenic quality that have protection in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of their landscapes. This includes: landform and geology, flora and fauna, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries. They differ from national parks due to their more limited opportunities for extensive outdoor recreation, although have the same status and the landscape qualities are equivalent. Together the 34 AONBs and 10 national parks in England provide a 'family' of protected landscapes, which collectively cover 23% of the country's land area. AONBs have two purposes of designation:

- Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB, and
- Increasing the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the AONB.

If it appears that there is a conflict between these two purposes, greater weight is to be attached to that of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

2.2 Unlike national parks, recreation is not in itself an objective of designation, although AONBs should be used to meet the demands for recreation as far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty. Account should also be taken of the need to safeguard agriculture, forestry and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities.

2.3 The North Wessex Downs AONB was designated in 1972, it the third largest AONB in England and covers a significant area of Test Valley to the north of Andover, including the parishes of: Faccombe, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Linkenholt and Vernham Dean, and also parts of the parishes of Smannell and Tangley; approximately 26 square miles in total. The designated area extends into Basingstoke and Deane, Wiltshire, West Berkshire and Oxfordshire. A formal joint management structure for the AONB the 'Council of Partners' was established in 2001, of which the Council is a funding member. The body comprises each of the nine local authorities within the designated area, together with Natural England and representatives of the following interests: local communities, farming and rural business community, nature conservation, heritage and landscape interests, and recreation interests.

2.4 The Council's then Executive resolved on 10 October 2001, that the Council's statutory duty to prepare a management plan for the AONB should be undertaken jointly by the Council of Partners on its behalf. Such joint working mechanisms between local authorities on the preparation of management plans are recommended by Government.

2.5 The Council of Partners undertook public consultation on a revised management plan (attached as the Annex) which was approved and endorsed on 5 March 2019. It has now been submitted to the Council for its formal adoption. It is intended to guide the activity of all who live, work and visit the protected landscape, in order to help conserve and enhance its natural

beauty. Natural England's Position Paper on Protected Landscapes, 2010, states that;

"The most important document for AONBs...is their management plan which, through its development engages and gains support from all relevant stakeholders, importantly including local communities. It co-ordinates and integrates other plans, strategies and actions, sets the vision and objectives for the area, frames policy and activity and indicates how the social, economic and environmental agendas will be delivered through sustainable development."

2.6 The management plan will:

- Seek to support a viable rural economy, so as to provide resources for those who manage the area's landscapes,
- Outline the principles regarding development that may affect the beauty and tranquillity of the North Wessex Downs,
- Identify priorities for resources, including staff and money, that will maximise conservation and minimise damage, and
- Inform people about the unique landscapes of the area and how best to enjoy these beautiful landscapes and support their conservation.

2.7 Taking the above principles into account, the management plan is divided by topic into the following chapters: Landscape, Rural Land Management, Biodiversity, Historic Environment, Natural Resources, Development, Communities, Tourism, Leisure and Access and Stakeholder Responsibilities.

2.8 The management plan is supported and accompanied by an Appropriate Assessment (AA) document, as is required by the Habitats Regulations (and European Directives).

2.9 Once adopted by all the local authority partners and approved by the Secretary of State, the revised management plan will replace the previous one adopted in 2014, and provide the policy context and framework for management of the AONB until 2024, but will not override other statutory plans or strategies prepared by the Council, such as the Local Plan. However, as a statutory document in its own right and formally approved as guidance to inform relevant decision making, it should be a material consideration in the planning process and an instrument for securing consistency across the AONB in planning matters.

2.10 Successful implementation of the management plan will require collaborative working and the participation of all those involved in management of the AONB and who play a role in shaping its future. The document is therefore designed for the designated area as a whole and not for any single organisation within it.

- 2.11 Section 85 of the CRow Act requires that in exercising or performing any functions affecting land in the designated area, that the Council 'have regard to' the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB and provides the powers to take action in order to achieve this objective. The management plan will assist in assessing the significance of such decisions and the need to consider an AONB-wide perspective where this is appropriate and in satisfying this duty.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 3.1 The Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023 priority of growing the potential of the local environment for current and future generations will be furthered through adoption of the management plan. Working together through the Council of Partners should assist in promoting the protection of the landscape and other environmental assets, and the wellbeing of communities across the AONB as a whole. The management plan presents an agreed agenda for the AONB, setting out objectives and policies for the partner organisations that are believed to be realistic and deliverable in the next five years.

4 Consultations/Communications

- 4.1 The revised management plan was subject to public consultation as is required by the CRow Act and guidance prepared by Natural England. The consultation period was for 12 weeks, ending on 23 November 2018. The Council submitted comments on November 21 2018 suggesting a number of minor amendments and points of clarification. These have been taken into account in the final version of the revised management plan, which has been approved by the Council of Partners, prior to its submission to the local authority members for their formal adoption.

5 Options

- 5.1 In considering the revised management plan, the only option to assess is whether or not it is appropriate that it should be adopted by the Council.

6 Option Appraisal

- 6.1 Option 1 – Adopt the management plan – This would satisfy the statutory duty on the Council to prepare and publish a management plan for the AONB. The current 2014 – 2019 management plan needs to be reviewed, as five years have now passed.
- 6.2 Option 2 – Do not adopt the management plan – Failure to adopt the revised management plan would lead to non-compliance with the statutory duty on the Council to prepare and publish a management plan for the AONB under the CRow Act.
- 6.3 Option 1 is recommended, as it is considered that the management plan has been prepared in line with the requirements of CRow Act and relevant guidance, it has been the subject of appropriate public consultation, such that it is in a form and standard eligible to be put forward for adoption, and with this established, as the statutory duty ought to be complied with.

7 Risk Management

- 7.1 Option 2 – An evaluation of the risks associated with the matters in this report indicate that further risk assessment is not needed because the issues covered do not represent significant risks for the Council.

8 Resource Implications

- 8.1 The Council is a local authority funding member of the Council of Partners of the AONB and currently contributes 1.5% of the total core activity costs. For the currently financial year 2019/20, this equates to funding of £3,938.66 and provision is made for this in the Planning Service budget. Overall, 25% of costs are split between the nine local authority members, with the remaining 75% met by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).
- 8.2 The costs associated with the preparation and publication of the management plan are included within the budget of the Council of Partners and there are therefore no additional direct costs to the Council as a result of its adoption.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 Adoption of the management plan will fulfil the Council's statutory duty under Section 89 CROW Act to prepare and publish such a plan for the AONB and which should be reviewed every five years.

10 Equality Issues

- 10.1 Option 3 – An EQIA screening has been completed in accordance with the Council's EQIA methodology and no potential for unlawful discrimination and/or low level or minor negative impact have been identified, therefore a full EQIA has not been carried out.

11 Other Issues

- 11.1 Community Safety – None
- 11.2 Environmental Health Issues – None
- 11.3 Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate – Sustainable development includes protecting the environment assets of the AONB, whilst meeting the social and economic needs of its communities. This is in line with the overall purpose and aims of designation. Managing and adapting to the impacts of climate change on the natural environment of the AONB is one of the issues the management plan seeks to address.
- 11.4 Property Issues – None
- 11.5 Wards/Communities Affected – Bourne Valley Ward. The parishes of: Facombe, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Linkenholt, Vernham Deam and parts of Smannell and Tangle.

12 Conclusions and reasons for recommendation

- 12.1 It is considered that the revised management plan for the AONB is in a form which is appropriate for adoption by the Council. Adoption is required in order to fulfil the statutory duty under Section 89 Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 to prepare a management plan, prior to its submission to the Secretary of State for approval.
- 12.2 The management plan has been the subject of public consultation, has been prepared in line with the CRoW Act and relevant guidance and is supported and accompanied by an Appropriate Assessment (AA) document, as is required by the Habitats Regulations (and European Directives).
- 12.3 The management plan provides a valuable assessment of AONB-wide key issues of importance, identifies the objectives and policies to protect this nationally importance landscape and guide the actions to be taken by the Council of Partners and member organisations over the next five years.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A Guide (CA23),
Countryside Agency, 2001

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Guide for AONB Partnership Members
(CA24), Countryside Agency, 2001

Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans (CA221), Countryside
Agency, 2006

Position Paper on Protected Landscapes, Natural England, 2010

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	1	File Ref:	pt4.6
(Portfolio: Planning) Councillor Adams-King			
Officer:	Timothy Goodridge	Ext:	8612
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	12 June 2019