

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment
Date:	1 April 2014
Title:	Adoption of North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) 2014-2019 Management Plan
Reference:	5706
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek the adoption by the County Council of the 2014-2019 Management Plan for the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (the background document to this report).
- 1.2. Adoption of this AONB Management Plan will enable the County Council to meet its statutory responsibility to produce and adopt strategic land management plans for AONBs within its geographic area and help in delivering the council's corporate aims.
- 1.3. The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan is a strategic plan that sets out a vision and policy framework for the delivery of actions to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape as well as take account of local communities, with particular regard to the promotion of sustainable forms of economic and social development.
- 1.4. The policies of the Management Plan reflect the nature of the area; its economy, communities and land use management. In so doing the policies cover a diverse range of topics including: landscape, land management, biodiversity, historic environment, natural resources, development, communities, and leisure and tourism. These policies will be delivered by the wider partnership through actions that will be developed as part of the AONB's Business Plan.
- 1.5. The review, production and publication of this strategic Management Plan, together with the coordination of its delivery, has been delegated to the North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership (Council of Partners) on the

County Council's behalf, through a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), signed in 2013.

- 1.6. Local Authority contributions to the AONB enables the Partnership to draw-down significant additional match funding. For instance, for every £1.00 paid by local authority partners to the North Wessex Downs AONB in 2012/13, the AONB generated £6.81 to enable the delivery of Management Plan objectives.
- 1.7. This Report sets out the contextual information on Hampshire's AONBs and how this strategic Management Plan delivers Hampshire County Council priorities.

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by Government, under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, for the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape. The Government provides up to 75% funding for AONB partnerships, with local authority partners (constituent local authorities) sharing responsibility for at least 25%. Defra has secured its funding for AONBs for at least the next two years.
- 2.2. Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 places a statutory duty on constituent local authorities to publish Management Plans for AONBs within their administrative areas and to review and publish them at five yearly intervals. AONB Management Plans were first published in 2004 (2004-2009) and following a review and update, published again in 2009 (2009-2014). The current plans have undergone 'light touch' reviews to update them for 2014-2019.
- 2.3. A Partnership, underpinned by a small AONB delivery team, was established to coordinate the preparation, publication and implementation of the statutory North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan.
- 2.4. A copy of the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, adopted by the constituent local authorities, is required to be sent, by the AONB Partnership, to the Secretary of State. It is intended that the plan will be sent to the Secretary of State by July 2014.
- 2.5. It should be noted that Hampshire's other AONBs (Chichester Harbour AONB and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB) are working to an earlier timetable and went to the 4th March 2014 Executive Member meeting for adoption.
- 2.6. Since the adoption of the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan in March 2004, the AONB delivery team and wider partnership have been undertaking activities to deliver Management Plan actions (set out in the AONB Business Plan). The delivery of policies and actions for the AONB is

reviewed and evaluated annually through a review of Business Plan implementation.

- 2.7. Hampshire County Council has been actively engaged with the North Wessex Downs AONB and Management Plan via:
- (i) Member and officer steering of the Council of Partners;
 - (ii) Officer input via Management Plan workshops;
 - (iii) Facilitation by officers of an AONB Management Plan consultation 'surgery' day at Ell Court West;
 - (iv) Officer response to the first draft of the revised Management Plan;
 - (v) Officer technical response to formal consultation on the final draft of the Management Plan; and
 - (vi) Formal adoption (this part of the process).

3. Finance

- 3.1. Hampshire County Council contributes around 3% of the AONB's core budget based on an agreed formula, which amounted to £9,255.63 for 2013/14. Defra's contribution to the AONB in 2013/14 was £251,227.31. The County Council's contribution will fall by approximately 6% in 2014/15 to correspond with the intended fall in Defra funding in 2014/15 by approximately 6%. A breakdown of the Partnership contributions to the North Wessex Downs AONB is provided in Appendix 1.
- 3.2. Funding arrangements are set out in a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), signed by constituent local authorities and Defra, which run until 31st March 2015. Defra match funding is confirmed on a three year cycle and is secured for the next two financial years after which Defra will review the next three year funding cycle.
- 3.3. The Management Plan does not commit the County Council to any further expenditure beyond the contributions outlined above.

4. Performance

- 4.1. Although the primary purpose of the AONB designation is to 'conserve and enhance natural beauty', the CRoW Act makes clear that in pursuing this primary purpose account should be taken of the needs of local communities and that particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development. The Management Plan contains policies to support sustainable local businesses and sustainable development.

- 4.2. In addition, the CRoW Act makes clear that recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the needs of the rural economy, including agriculture and forestry and the conservation of natural beauty.
- 4.3. Hampshire County Council's contribution to the North Wessex Downs AONB of £9,255.63 for 2013/2014 has enabled the AONB to draw-down nearly seven times that figure in other funding for core and project activities.
- 4.4. Some examples of recent North Wessex Downs AONB project activity include:
 - (i) The funding of community, business and tourism projects across the AONB through the European funded North Wessex Downs LEADER programme;
 - (ii) The funding of community projects across the AONB through the AONB's Defra funded Sustainable Development Fund;
 - (iii) The provision of comprehensive tourism information to local businesses through the AONB 'Our Land' initiative;
 - (iv) The provision of integrated land management advice to farmers and landowners.
 - (v) Assessment of the AONB's important horse racing industry.
- 4.5. The delivery of the AONB Management Plan is monitored by the Partnership through an annual review of the delivery of the AONB Business Plan, and achievements are reported through the AONB's [Annual Report](#).

5. Other key issues

- 5.1. Although there is a statutory duty on constituent local authorities to review AONB Management Plans on a five yearly basis, the advice from Natural England is to undertake a 'light touch' review only, in order to avoid diverting resources away from delivery.
- 5.2. An initial review of the current North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan (adopted by Hampshire County Council in 2009) reflected the national guidance that substantial re-drafting is not required. The overall vision for the AONB, together with objectives and policies remain relevant, but the plan requires updating to take account of changing local, regional and national policy, new legislation, and to ensure that the actions for the next five years are fit for purpose.
- 5.3. The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership considered that the current adopted plan would benefit from being more concise and easily accessible and the redrafting has also reflected this.

6. Other options considered

- 6.1. Option 1: Do not adopt the Management Plan. Rejected as this would leave the County Council in breach of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, and create a high risk of damaging its reputation and leadership in this field.
- 6.2. Option 2: Further substantive amendment of the Management Plan. Rejected as substantive amendments are not required by Natural England, and with the modifications recommended by officers that have been incorporated, the Management Plan is considered fit for purpose.

7. Future direction

- 7.1. Once adopted, the AONB Management Plan will operate for a five year period. The process of reviewing the adopted plan will begin in late 2017 or early 2018 and include the County Council's involvement. A reviewed and updated Management Plan for the North Wessex Downs AONB will then be published in 2019.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1. That the 2014-2019 Management Plan for the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) be adopted.

Rpt/ref/GK

APPENDIX 1 North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - Partnership and Defra funding 2013/14

Organisation	2013/14
Hampshire County Council	£9,255.63
Wiltshire Council	£17,061.15
West Berkshire Council	£13,808.85
Oxfordshire County Council	£7,629.48
Swindon Borough Council	£5,352.87
Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council	£4,117.00
South Oxfordshire District Council	£4,117.00
Test Valley Borough Council	£4,117.00
Vale of White Horse District Council	£4,117.00
<i>Total Local Authority Funding</i>	<i>£69,575.98</i>
Defra Funding	£251,227.31
Total Partnership and Defra Funding	£320,803.29

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	no
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Date</u>
North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan	819	28 July 2009
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives		
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>	
National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act	1949	
Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act	2000	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2014-2019	Strategic Environmental Delivery Group

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA):

- 1.1 An EqIA for the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan is not a statutory requirement and has not been undertaken for this reviewed plan. However, voluntary EqIA were undertaken recently for both the Chichester Harbour AONB and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB 2014-2019 Management Plans.
- 1.2 These EqIA assessments concluded that the objectives and policies of those AONB Management Plans would have no negative impacts on those groups of people identified in law as being at risk of discrimination or on poverty or rurality, and this conclusion applies equally to the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 2.1. It is considered that adoption of the AONB Management Plans will have no impact on crime and disorder.

3. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA):

- 3.1 In order to comply with the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, an SEA was undertaken for the 2009-2014 AONB Management Plan, which concluded that the objectives / policies of the plan are neutral, supportive or strongly supportive of the SEA objectives. As the objectives of this reviewed 2014-2019 Management Plan remain unchanged Natural England has confirmed that a new SEA is not required.

4. Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA):

- 4.1 In order to comply with The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended), an HRA must be undertaken where a plan may potentially have an impact on the integrity of a Natura 2000 Site (European protected site for nature conservation and Ramsar sites). HRA was undertaken for the 2009-2014 North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan by the AONB Partnership in compliance with AONB specific guidance provided by Natural England.
- 4.2 The HRA concluded that the 2009-2014 Management Plan was unlikely to have any significant adverse impacts on Natura 2000 sites. As the objectives of the reviewed 2014-2019 Management Plan remain unchanged, Natural England has confirmed that a new HRA is not required.

5. Climate Change:

5.1. How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

Climate change has been identified in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 as one of the key forces for change that will affect both AONBs into the future and that there is a need to affect positive change through more sustainable lifestyles. Policies contained in the Management Plans help to promote sustainability and would not lead to an increase in carbon footprint or energy consumption.

5.2. How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

Adaption to climate change and increased resilience in terms of its affects on the natural environment and communities is a key thread that runs through the Management Plan.