

**CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND WASTE-
CLLR BRIDGET WAYMAN**

SERVICE AREA: RIGHTS OF WAY AND COUNTRYSIDE

OFFICER CONTACT: Richard Broadhead
Tel: 01225 713875
email: richard.broadhead@wiltshire.gov.uk

REFERENCE: HTW-13-19

**ADOPTION OF THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL
BEAUTY 2019 - 2024**

Purpose of Report

Wiltshire Council is required by Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and publish a management plan for any and all AONBs in its area. The plan has to be reviewed every five years. The existing plan covers the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2019, so the council must prepare and publish a new plan for the five years 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2024. The report explains how the council meets this duty by adopting, as a joint signatory, to a management plan for the full extent of the AONB, prepared by the AONB Council of Partners and adopted by all of the local authorities parts of whose areas lie within the boundary of the AONB. The existing Management Plan covers the years 2014-2019, so the authority now needs to adopt the next generation plan for the years 2019 - 2024.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

The Business Plan has an underlying theme of creating strong communities and working in partnership. Conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB contributes to these objectives through encouraging a sense of belonging, improves health and wellbeing and attracts visitors, businesses and new residents to the area which helps to protect and build the local economy.

Main Considerations for the Council

Under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 Wiltshire Council as a "relevant authority" is required, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB, to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB".

Section 89 of the Act requires the council to, "prepare and publish a Management Plan which formulates [their] policy for the management of the AONB and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it."

AONB Management Plans are required to be reviewed every five years. The existing plan covers the period from 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2019, so a new plan is required for the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2024.

Background

Wiltshire Council meets its duty by adopting, as a joint signatory to, a management plan for the full extent of the AONB, prepared by the AONB Council of Partners and adopted by all of the local authorities parts of whose areas lie within the boundary of the AONB.

The AONB Partnership works for everyone who lives and works in the AONB. It also welcomes visitors to the area and other interested parties, be they individuals, government or non-governmental organisations or an interest group.

The Council of Partners is an alliance of local, regional and national organisations which steers the implementation of the AONB Management Plan. The council has an independent Chairman, acts as the governing body for the AONB Team, and meets two to three times a year, overseeing the implementation of the Management Plan.

A Management Working Group, which sits between the Council of Partners and the AONB officers, provides advice and support to the officers and meets two to three times a year and helps to ensure targets in the Management Plan are met.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

There are no issues requiring consideration.

Safeguarding Implications

Adoption of the AONB Management Plan does not have any safeguarding implications.

Public Health Implications

Residents and visitors alike turn to the landscapes and scenic beauty of the AONB to refresh the spirit, and to enhance health and well-being. Panoramic views, dark skies awash with stars, the wealth of wildlife, plethora of historic sites, ancient droves and routeways, all offer opportunities for exploration, relaxation, walking and cycling.

Procurement Implications

None

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

There is no requirement to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment. However, it is worth noting that adoption of the AONB Management Plan will have no adverse impact upon equalities and may have a positive impact from continuing to conserve and enhance the landscape, enabling everyone to enjoy and better experience the natural beauty of the area through improved access, both in respect of physical measures and interpretation.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

Conservation and Enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB will include measures to address environmental and climate change considerations.

Risk Assessment

Failure to prepare and publish a management plan for the portion of the North Wessex Downs AONB that lies within Wiltshire Council's area will place the council in breach of Section 89 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Financial Implications

The AONB receives annual funding contributions according to DEFRA funding formula, 75% central government, 25% combined local authority.

Wiltshire Council contribute to the AONB in line with the above and cover the costs of hosting the service by way of employing staff. This is budgeted for within the Countryside revenue budget.

The AONB mitigate future redundancy risk by way of Memorandum of Understanding with contributing Local Authorities and by contributing to a reserve.

There are no other financial implications of adopting the Management Plan 2019 – 2024.

Legal Implications

Wiltshire Council is required by Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and publish a management plan for any and all AONBs in its area. The plan has to be reviewed every five years. The existing plan covers the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2019, so the council must prepare and publish a new plan for the five years 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2024.

Options Considered

The following options have been considered:-

- 1) To adopt the Management Plan 2019 - 2024 prepared by the AONB Council of Partners.
- 2) Not to adopt the Management Plan 2019 - 2024 prepared by the AONB Council of Partners.

Reason for Proposal

Wiltshire Council has a statutory duty to prepare and publish, at five year intervals, a Management Plan for the proportion of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which lies within the authority's boundary. The authority delivers this duty by adopting, as a joint signatory to, a management plan for the full extent of the AONB, prepared by the AONB Partnership Board and adopted by all nine of the local authorities parts of whose areas lie within the boundary of the AONB. The existing Management Plan covers the years 2014-2019, so the authority now needs to adopt the next generation plan for the years 2019 – 2024. Not to do so would place the council in breach of Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Proposal

To adopt the Management Plan 2019 – 2024 prepared by the AONB Council of Partners.

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

Appendices

1 –North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019 - 2024