

Management Plan Review – Outline Plan

Introduction

AONB Management Plans are statutory plans which provide a framework for delivery of the statutory purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscape. The Management Plan should provide a policy context, key forces for change and provide an action plan to guide the work of the AONB Unit and Partnership including local authorities, government bodies, landowners, farmers, businesses, communities and other interested organisations.

The function of the AONB Management Plan should not be a static one, it needs to respond appropriately to new challenges (such as climate change and the increased impacts of flooding) or changing political and regulatory conditions (e.g. agricultural and environmental policy following the UK's departure from the EU, or new primary legislation).

The first statutory Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan was published in 2004 and has subsequently been reviewed and revised twice (during 2008-9 and 2013-14), within five year period as required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The Management Plan published in 2014 is now due to be reviewed under the periodic review timetable set out in the Act. This report provides the context for the Review and an outline plan and timetable for consideration by the Committee.

The national context for the Review

The National Association for AONBs and Defra has previously published an "Advice note to AONB Partnerships, Conservations Boards and Relevant Authorities on Management Plan Reviews" back in 2012. The following are key extracts from this advice note:

'The CRow Act 2000 provides the statutory basis for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of AONBs, and:

- *defines the role of the statutory agencies, in particular their responsibilities for the designation of AONBs and as consultees in planning matters;*
- *requires local authorities and Conservation Boards to state their policies for management of their AONBs through preparing and publishing a Management Plan; and*
- *requires all relevant authorities to demonstrate their commitment to AONBs by having regard to AONB purposes in their plans and activities.*

Specifically, and in relation to Local Authorities Section 89 requires the relevant authority [i.e. the local authority or local authorities jointly], or Conservation Board to "prepare and publish a plan which formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and for carrying out their functions in relation to it", within three years. The plan must be reviewed within five years of its original publication and at similar intervals thereafter.

It is important to stress that the designation of an AONB:

- *gives formal statutory recognition to these nationally important landscapes;*
- *requires special land use planning policies to apply; and*
- *encourages an integrated approach to land management.*

...Individual AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards should decide the extent of a review required. An appropriately “light touch” approach may be taken by some, whilst others may decide a comprehensive review is needed and justified. AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards will know those areas of their Plans or themes which are constants and do not need re-visiting. They will also have a good idea of the deficiencies and issues to be addressed under the review. Actions will be more readily refreshed in the Management Plan Action Plan / Business Plan, which are more responsive for dealing with transitory or emerging issues.'

Background on the current AONB Management Plan (2014 – 2019)

The CRoW Act 2000 established the requirement for all AONBs in England and Wales to have an up-to-date Management Plan in place, and provided a timetable for the review and updating of plans. The Act also required that the local authorities are jointly responsible for the production of the Plan to establish a long-term vision for the AONB.

The Management Plan provides the policy framework for achieving the Vision. The Vision as set out in the current Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan states:

'The Forest of Bowland retains its sense of local distinctiveness, notably the large-scale open moorland character of the Bowland Fells, traditional buildings and settlement patterns of villages, hamlets and farmsteads. Natural and cultural resources are sympathetically managed and contribute to a sustainable and vibrant local economy. The management of the Forest of Bowland AONB has improved the quality of the landscape for all.'

The current plan has four key AONB outcomes. It is proposed to retain these for the purposes of reviewing the Management Plan and are as follows:

1. An outstanding landscape of natural and cultural heritage;
2. Resilient and sustainable communities;
3. A strong connection between people and the landscape;
4. A dynamic and effective AONB Partnership.

The existing AONB Management Plan includes statements regarding the significance of the landscape designation, the special qualities and important habitats, landscapes and ecosystem services and sets out the vision for the area. Much of this information is still relevant for the new plan and again will be retained, although some enhancements and amendment of content will be necessary to accurately reflect changes or new challenges facing the AONB.

Review process and next steps

In light of the flexibility offered by Defra in its advice on the scope and extent of Management Plan, it is proposed that where issues and actions are well-established and agreed upon by AONB partners, a 'light touch' approach will be adopted. Other sections, where it is felt there are policy weaknesses or where changes are needed to reflect policy, regulatory or societal changes are likely to require a more in-depth review and scrutiny.

The Review process can be split into three principal phases:

1. Scoping and preparing the Review
2. Undertaking the Review
3. Publishing and adopting the Review

The table below attempts to summarise the key review stages and offers an outline timetable for the Review of the Plan. Several of the review stages will be open to wider comment from all interested parties, partly through circulation of review documents, but also using on-line consultation, public consultation events and local information.

Review Stage	Timetable	Comment
Agree scope and outline methodology for the Review	19 th Oct 2017	AONB JAC
Write to the local authorities to notify the AONB Partnership's intention to carry out the Review	Oct 2017	AONB Unit
Statutory notice issues to Natural England (NE)	Nov 2017	AONB Unit
Carry out scoping and evidence gathering for the Review	Nov 2017 – May 2018	AONB Unit
Establish MP Review Working Group	Dec 2017	AONB Unit and JAC
Consultation on Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report (SEA)	Feb – Mar 2018	Consult with NE, Environment Agency and Historic England and key partners
Public and partner consultation events	April – May 2018	AONB Unit
Draft Revised Plan produced	June 2018	MP Review Working Group
Produce Environmental Report for (SEA)	July – Aug 2018	AONB Unit
Sustainability Appraisal (SA)	July – Aug 2018	AONB Unit
Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	July – Aug 2018	AONB Unit
Appropriate Assessment for Natura 2000 sites (AA)	July – Aug 2018	AONB Unit
Formal consultation (published online) on Draft Revised Plan Environmental Report (SEA) and AA	Sept – Oct 2018	AONB Unit
Prepare Final Draft	Nov – Dec 2018	AONB Unit
Final version of Management Plan published and approved by AONB JAC	Jan 2019	AONB JAC & Unit
Approved Management Plan to Local Authorities for adoption	Jan – March 2019	Plan adopted by LAs after confirmation by Defra/NE that plan satisfies statutory requirements
Publish Management Plan and submit to Secretary of State	April 2019	Plan forwarded to Defra

The initial stage of the review process is to notify the relevant local authorities of the AONB Partnership's intention to review the Management Plan and to request the local authority's support for the establishment of a 'Management Plan Review Group'. Subject to agreement

by the Joint Advisory Committee, this will be carried out by the AONB Principal Officer as soon as possible following this meeting.

Recommendation

The committee is requested to:

- i) Note the report and offer comments
- ii) Approve the outline plan for the Review
- iii) Agree for the AONB Principal Officer to notify partner authorities of the Committee's intention to carry out the Review