

Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Outline Methodology for the AONB Management Plan Review 2013-14

Introduction

AONB Management Plans are statutory plans whose purpose is to provide a framework document for ensuring delivery of the statutory purpose of AONBs: that of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of their designated landscapes. The Management Plan guides the work of the AONB Partnership. It sets the framework for activity by local authorities, government bodies, partner organisations, landowners, farmers, businesses, communities and visitors.

The function of the AONB Management Plan should not be a static one, it must respond appropriately to new challenges (such as climate change and major land use change) or changing political and regulatory conditions (for example, in EU agricultural and rural development funding or new primary legislation). The Plan's focus, however, remains on the primary purpose of conserving the qualities of the designated area.

The first statutory AONB Management Plan was published in 2004 and was subsequently reviewed and revised after five years as required by the CRoW Act 2000. The Management Plan published in 2009 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 sets out an outline review methodology and proposed timetable for consideration by the AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

AONB Management Plan Reviews – a national context

The National Association for AONBs and Defra published an "*Advice note to AONB Partnerships, Conservations Boards and Relevant Authorities on Management Plan Reviews*" in June 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.*

The bedrock of the plans should be purpose of AONB designation in the context of an individual AONB’s special qualities. There should be a golden thread linking these through to policies and to actions. It is accepted that the purpose of designation needs to be seen in a wider sustainable development context.

Existing Management Plans, as ratified by Natural England, are fit for purpose and meet the standards required. We do not intend to produce new guidance or seek to impose a standard national template. Management Plans rightly reflect local circumstances and respect the principles of plan making. Revised Plans will need to address and be relevant to changed context and priorities, but will also contain tried and tested policies which do not need changing.

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.

AONB Partnerships should be mindful of the high level collective objectives agreed across the AONB Family and the potential value in communicating a national shared direction, namely:

- *Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK’s Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, ensuring they can meet the challenges of the future;*
- *Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty;*
- *Promote public understanding and enjoyment of the nature and culture of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and encourage people to take action for their conservation;*
- *Value, sustain, and promote the benefits that the UK’s Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty provide for society, including clean air and water, food, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation’s health and well-being.*

Background on the current Management Plan

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 responsible for the production of the Plan and are required 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 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 stakeholders.'

In implementing the current plan the Partnership agreed four key AONB outcomes as part of a business planning process carried out in 2011:

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 AONB Business Plan identifies strategic priorities under each key outcome and actions link directly to the implementation of the Management Plan. It therefore seems a logical step to adopt these four key outcomes as the framework for the Management Plan review, particularly as there is a fairly close fit with the National AONB Family objectives outlined above.

The existing AONB Management Plan includes statements regarding the significance of the landscape designation, the special qualities and important habitats and landscapes, and sets out the vision for the area. These statements will largely be replicated within the proposed Plan, although some amendment of content will be necessary to accurately reflect new changes or challenges facing the AONB.

The current plan outlines six objectives, each with a specific vision of the AONB in 2014. These main themes are set out in Table 1 below, with objectives rationalised to fit under the four key outcomes above. In addition, the table also lists a summary of important changes since 2009:

Table 1

2009-2014 Plan Objective	2014 -2019 Key Outcome	Summary of important changes
Natural and Cultural Landscape	1. An outstanding landscape of natural and cultural heritage	Biodiversity 2020: A strategy of England's wildlife and ecosystem services, European Landscape Convention, Flood and Water Management Act 2010, Lawton Review: Making Space for Nature, UK National Ecosystem Assessment, National Planning Policy Framework, Natural Environment White Paper 2011, NE Uplands Policy and Delivery Reviews, EU Water Framework Directive
Enjoyment, Health and Well-being	3. A strong connection between people and the landscape	AONB Sustainable Tourism Strategy, Lawton Review: Making Space for Nature, Local Transport Plans, RoWIPs.
Economy	2. Resilient and sustainable communities	AONB Sustainable Tourism Strategy, Comprehensive Spending Review 2010, Economic situation, EU CAP Reform and Rural Development Regulation, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Rural Economy Growth Review 2011
Community	2. Resilient and sustainable communities	Localism Act 2011, Public Services (Social Value Act 2012, Sustainable Communities Act 2007
Working in Partnership	4. A dynamic and effective AONB Partnership	Comprehensive Spending Review 2010, NAAONB Strategic Plan, Transition from Natural England to Defra funding,

2009-2014 Plan Objective	2014 -2019 Key Outcome	Summary of important changes
		Tripartite agreement between Defra, NE and NAAONB
Responding to Climate Change	Cross-cutting all four key outcomes	AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement 2011, Draft Energy Bill, Energy Act 2011, Feed-In Tariffs, Green Energy (Promotion) Act 2009, Green Deal, Renewable Heat Incentive, North West Coastal Connections Project

Review process – next steps

The first stage of the Review process will be to establish a small review working group (ideally officers and JAC members), which will undertake an examination of the current plan and report to the Joint Advisory Committee on the scope and extent of the Review.

In light of the flexibility offered by Defra in its advice on the extent of the review, where issues and actions are well-established and agreed upon by AONB partners, a 'light touch' approach will be adopted. Other sections may require a more in-depth review to reflect policy, regulatory or societal change and the challenging economic conditions.

Once the scope and extent of the review has been agreed by the JAC, the second stage for the working group will be to develop a draft plan, ideally adopting the four key AONB outcomes as its framework.

Table 2 overleaf attempts to summarise a proposed timetable for the Review of the Plan, detailing the various stages. Each of these stages will be open to widespread comment from all interested parties, partly through circulation of review documents, but also using on-line consultation, public consultation events and local information.

Table 2 – Proposed Review Timetable

Review Stage	Timetable	Comment
Agree outline Review methodology	29 th November 2012	AONB Funders Group
Launch of Management Plan Review	January 2013	Extraordinary AONB JAC meeting
Agree extent of the Review	January 2013	Preliminary consultation with AONB JAC at meeting
Write to the local authorities to agree terms of reference for the preparation of the Review	January 2013	
Issue statutory notice regarding the Review	January 2013	MP Review Working Group
Outline Plan produced	March 2013	MP Review Working Group
Public consultation events	April 2013	
Draft Plan produced	May 2013	
Public on-line consultation on Draft Plan	May – June 2013	
Technical consultation events	June 2013	
Full Draft Plan produced	July 2013	
Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA)	August – September 2013	
Sustainability Appraisal (SA)	August – September 2013	
Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	September 2013	
Natura 2000 sites Appropriate Assessment (AA)	September 2013	
Public on-line consultation on Full Draft Plan and SEA/AA/SA/EqIA	September – October 2013	
Final Management Plan produced	December 2013	Final version of the Plan
Final Management Plan to Local Authorities for adoption	January 2014	Plan adopted by LAs after confirmation by Defra/NE that plan satisfies statutory requirements
Presentation to Minister/Defra of approved plan	March 2014	Plan forwarded to Defra