

FOREST OF BOWLAND AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

AONB Management Plan Review Update

Issue for consideration

The following reports summarise progress towards the final approval and adoption of the Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan (2014 – 2019).

Background

The Countryside and Rights of Way 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.

In January 2013, the Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee agreed to carry out a review of the statutory AONB Management Plan on behalf of the partner local authorities to be completed by April 2014.

Progress update

The key stages completed since the last AONB JAC meeting in October 2013 are set out below:

1. Formal consultation on the draft AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019 was held from Monday 4th November – Friday 13th December 2013. The AONB Unit received 27 formal responses from local authorities, statutory agencies, voluntary and community organisations and individuals. A summary of these responses is available on request from the AONB Unit.
2. Revision of the draft Plan during January 2014, based on formal responses and any known changes to projects/organisations etc. This involved numerous minor amendments, additions and corrections. More significant changes included:
 - change to the structure and ordering of the report to include section called 'Policy Context for the Management Plan'
 - five additional actions on:
 - SSSI condition targets within the AONB
 - support for local actions to provide suitable conditions to re-establish hen harrier as a breeding species in the AONB
 - identification and management of designated heritage assets 'at risk'
 - raising awareness and improving understanding of the historic environment of the AONB
 - monitoring of geodiversity actions within the AONB

A summary of the revisions made to the draft Plan following consultation is available on request from the AONB Unit.

3. An initial Environmental Report (including a Sustainability Appraisal [SA]) was completed during January 2014 to meet statutory requirements for the review relating to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

The AONB Management Plan puts the environment at the heart of the plan-making process and it was agreed during the SEA/SA scoping consultation that alternatives to the draft objectives and actions would only be developed and assessed if they were identified as resulting in partial or significant negative effects on the environmental and/or sustainability objectives. None of the draft objectives and actions has been assessed as having any negative effects, so no alternative policies have needed to be developed or assessed.

The Environmental Report will be published for formal consultation shortly, concluding in early March 2014."

4. A Screening Report for Habitat Regulations Assessment and an Equality Impact Assessment have both been completed and forwarded to the appropriate authority for consultation.

a) AONB Management Plan – Final Draft
(Appendix 'A' refers)

The final draft Plan is now complete. The final draft is only likely to receive minor amendment if the formal consultation on the Environmental Report raises any issues. This is not anticipated to be the case.

If approved by the AONB Joint Advisory Committee, the final draft plan will be forwarded to AONB partner local authorities and statutory agencies for final approvals (ideally before 31st March 2014). Partners have been forewarned and efforts are being made to ensure wherever possible that the necessary approvals can be secured within the proscribed timetable.

b) Revised AONB Management Plan Review Timetable
(Appendix 'B' refers)

The review timetable sets out both completed stages/milestones in the review process and also the next steps towards completion of the review.

Decision to be taken

The Committee is asked to:

- i. note the report and offer comments on the review of the AONB Management Plan;
- ii. approve the final draft of the Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan (2014 – 2019), to proceed for final approval by partner funding authorities and statutory agencies.