

AONB Memorandum of Agreement

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Background

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to act jointly to produce and review management plans for the AONBs within their administrative boundaries. By agreement with the local authorities this duty is being performed by the Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee. A staff unit for each AONB carry out the work for the management partnerships and core costs are covered by the relevant local authorities and Defra. Management Plans for each AONB were adopted by the Council in 2009/10. At this time a new Memorandum of Agreement was entered into which indicated the level of funding the County Council would provide from 2008/9 - 2010/11.

Defra's Commitment to AONBs

In the past Natural England was the body appointed by Government to fund AONB Partnerships alongside the relevant local authorities. In December 2010 this responsibility was moved to Defra. Defra has made clear its intention to continue to provide a 4-year indicative grant allocation to AONBs in a recently signed tripartite agreement with the National Association for AONBs and Natural England. In future Natural England will provide a specialist advisory role to support project development and delivery within the AONBs in the future.

Defra has committed to provide funding to cover 75% of the core costs of staff units that are supporting AONB Partnerships to prepare, deliver and review Management Plans. It is anticipated by Defra that local authorities will continue to provide match funding towards the remaining 25% of the core costs. Defra would like to see local authority funding to be maintained at the same levels that have previously been provided.

Memorandum of Agreement 2011 – 2015

A revised national template for AONB Memoranda of Agreement has been provided by Defra (Appendix X refers). The Agreement provides a framework for the delivery of duties and obligations arising from Part IV of the CROW Act 2000 including the operation and management of an AONB Partnership, a staff unit to act on behalf of the Partnership and the publishing, reviewing and monitoring of the Management Plan. The Agreement is intended to bind partners to give medium-term security, matching Defra's commitment to the AONB funding programme over the 4-year Comprehensive Spending Review period. The intention is for the Agreements to be approved by each Joint Advisory Committee by December 2011. In order for the AONB Partnerships to draw down Defra's funding the Memorandum of Agreement must be agreed and signed by all relevant authorities.

Defra has requested that local authorities enter into a 4-year Memorandum of Agreement that includes a commitment to funding the AONB Partnerships for the 4-year period. The term of the Agreement is for the period of four years (FY2011/12, FY2012/13, FY2013/14 and FY2014/15). It is intended for the term to run from 1st April 2011, rather than from the date they are actually signed. Although a 4-year commitment is being sought through the Memorandum of Agreement, it is worded to

enable funding for 2012/13 onwards to be subject to annual reviews for both Defra and the relevant local authorities in recognition of the current financial climate.

Decision required

The Committee is requested to:

- i. note the report and provide comments on the revised national Memorandum of Agreement template for AONBs
- ii. ask funding authorities to seek approval within their own authority to sign a new Memorandum of Agreement for Forest of Bowland AONB, based on the national template.