

FOREST OF BOWLAND AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE THURSDAY 19 OCTOBER 2023

AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

Introduction

AONB Management Plans are place-based plans derived by local consensus. The plans seek to define the approach to conserving and enhancing natural beauty of the AONB landscape through the delivery of local solutions to local challenges that also respect the national and international importance of each AONB. It is a plan for the AONB, not just the Partnership or Team.

The function of the AONB Management Plan should not be a static one, it needs to respond appropriately to new challenges or policy agendas (e.g. climate change, continuing biodiversity declines and equality, diversity and inclusion), or changing political and regulatory conditions (e.g. new domestic agricultural and environmental policies following the UK's departure from the EU).

The Plan should also provide the policy context, key forces or drivers for change affecting the AONB and a delivery plan to guide the work of the AONB Team and wider Partnership, which includes local authorities, government bodies, landowners, utility companies, farmers, businesses, communities, and other non-governmental organisations.

The Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan 2019 - 2024 is now due for review and the following report provides the context for the Review and an outline methodology and timetable for consideration by the Committee.

National Guidance on AONB Management Plan Reviews

Since 2004, the National Association for AONBs, Defra and Natural England have jointly published advice and guidance for AONB Partnerships on carrying out a review. The most recent published guidance dates back to 2012.

However, following the Landscapes (or Glover) Review published in September 2019, Natural England has been tasked by Government with providing updated guidance for AONB Management Plan. These are currently in draft and unpublished but are expected to be finalised and available shortly.

The following are key extracts from the (soon to be extant) advice note, which outline the context for reviewing AONB Management Plans:

'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's Action Plan which is more responsive for dealing with transitory or emerging issues.'

Considering the many new challenges and policy changes that have emerged since the last review concluded in 2019, it is likely that a more comprehensive review will be required. That said, the recent work to develop and publish an AONB Nature Recovery Plan will be influential and instructive for substantial sections of the Management Plan dealing with biodiversity conservation and farming and land management. The review maybe more 'light touch' in these areas.

The Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan

The first statutory Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan was published in 2004 and has subsequently been reviewed and revised three times, within the five-year period as required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The current AONB Management Plan runs from April 2019 to March 2024 and provides the policy framework for achieving the Partnership's vision for the AONB landscape.

Vision

The vision for the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty outlined in the current Plan is as follows:

'The Forest of Bowland landscape retains its sense of local distinctiveness, notably the wide-open moorland character of the Bowland Fells, undulating lowland farmland, clough woodlands, traditional buildings and the settlement patterns of its villages, hamlets and farmsteads.

It is a landscape valued for the range of services and benefits it provides for society, with a functioning, diverse natural heritage where land management practices allow opportunity for natural processes to develop and flourish; and where partnership-working between land managers, conservation bodies, communities and businesses is focused on delivering more for nature together.

The rich cultural heritage of the area is also better understood and managed; and both the nature and culture of the area help to support a resilient and sustainable local economy.

This vision will be reviewed to ensure it still holds and that it adequately reflects the character and special qualities of the AONB.

Outcomes

The current plan has three key outcomes 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:

At present, it is proposed to retain these for the purposes of reviewing the Management Plan and to review each objective within these outcomes. Careful consideration will be given as to how the climate change adaptation and mitigation is treated within the plan, but at present the intention is to integrate these concerns into the existing three outcomes, rather than create a standalone outcome.

Plan context

The current plan also includes statements regarding the significance of the landscape designation, the special qualities and important habitats, landscapes and ecosystem services. Much of this information is still relevant for the revised plan and is likely to be retained, although some enhancements and amendment of content will be necessary to accurately reflect changes or new challenges facing the AONB.

Delivery plan

The 'delivery plan' section of the plan will require amendment and revision based on objectives/policies agreed during the review. The end product will be a five-year programme of activity to guide the work of AONB Partnership from April 2025 – March 2030.

Outline Methodology and Timetable

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.

Decision Required

The Committee is requested to:

- note the report, offer any comments and, if minded, approve the initial methodology and timetable outlined.

Review Stage	Review Phase	Timetable	Lead & key partners	Action	Communication Channels	Audience
Agree scope and outline methodology for the Review	1	19 th Oct 2023	AONB JAC			
Write to the local authorities to notify the AONB Partnership's intention to carry out the Review	1	Nov 2023	AONB Team			
Carry out scoping and evidence gathering for the Review	1&2	Nov 2023 – May 2024	AONB Team			
Statutory notice issued to Natural England (NE)	1	Jan 2024	AONB Team and NE			
Establish MP Review Working Group	1	Jan 2024	AONB Team and JAC			
Consultation on Statement of CommTeamy Involvement	1	Jan 2024	AONB Team and NE			
Consultation on Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report (SEA)	1	Mar 2024	Consult with NE, EA, HE and key partners			
Initial consultation with public on key issues	1	Feb – April 2024	AONB Team	Produce short online survey to present 4 key issues for consideration in the review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature • Climate • People • Place 	Web survey promoted via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press release • E-bulletin • Social media • Email to partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General public • Partners
Further consultation on key issues	1	May 2024	AONB Team	Hold face-to-face meeting in various different locations across the AONB to engage the public in	Meetings promoted via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press release • Social media • Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General public • Partners

				discussing the key issues, along with issues raised in the online surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email to partners 	
Draft Revised Plan produced	2	June 2024	MP Review Working Group	Draft a revised plan based on feedback from online surveys and face-to-face feedback		
Produce Environmental Report for (SEA)	2	July – Aug 2024	AONB Team			
Sustainability Appraisal (SA)	2	July – Aug 2024	AONB Team			
Appropriate Assessment for SPA/SAC designations (AA)	2	July – Aug 2024	AONB Team			
Formal consultation (published online) on Draft Revised Plan Environmental Report (SEA) and AA	2	Sept – Oct 2024	AONB Team	Draft plans published on website. Includes comments boxes for the public to feedback.	Plans & web form for comments published online and promoted via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Press release E-bulletin Social media Email to partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General public Partners
Prepare Final Draft	2	Nov – Dec 2024	AONB Team			
Final version of Management Plan published and approved by AONB JAC	3	Jan 2025	AONB JAC & Team	Produce final web based and print version of the plan. Seek approval from JAC	Email & face to face meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JAC
Approved Management Plan to Local Authorities for adoption/approval	3	Jan – March 2025	Plan adopted by local authorities after confirmation by Defra / NE that plan satisfies statutory requirements	Circulate final plan	Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LAs
Publish Approved Management Plan and	3	April 2025	Plan forwarded to Defra	Publish on website with final designed	Published on web and promoted via:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General public Partners

submit to Secretary of State				layout/imagery to engage the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Press release• E-bulletin• Social media• Email to partners	
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