

**CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET**

Background Papers, if any, are specified at the end of the Report

**CHILTERN AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB)
Management Plan 2014-2019 – Consultation Draft September 2013**

Contact Officer: David Waker (01494 732267)

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That Cabinet support the draft AONB management plan**
- 2. That a letter supporting the plan together with any other comments is sent to the AONB Board. The precise wording of the letter delegated to the Head of Sustainable Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development**

Relationship to Council Objectives

*Objective 3: to conserve the environment and promote sustainability.
Objective 3A – Protect the Green Belt, conserve the areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) and enhance the environment*

Implications

- (i) A key decision.*
- (ii) Within the Policy and Budgetary Framework.*

Financial Implications

None specifically in relation to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan although the Council does contribute to the costs of operating the Chilterns Conservation Board.

Risk Implications

No known risks to this Council at this stage.

Equalities Implications

The AONB Management Plan relates to the management of the AONB as a whole and access to it. It is unlikely to give rise to significant equality issues. In any event the Council has a statutory duty to conserve and enhance the Natural Beauty of the AONB.

Sustainability Implications

The Management Plan reflects the AONB Board's duty to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. Particular reference is made to the issues of climate change, sustainable management of landscape and water resources and sustainable access to the AONB. The use of sustainable materials is promoted through the use of local resources with renewable energy encouraged in suitable locations. The management plan is considered to make a positive contribution to sustainability.

Report

- 1 The Chilterns Conservation Board (AONB Board), are consulting on their draft Management Plan. As part of the consultation this Council has been invited to comment.

Background

- 2 The Chilterns AONB area was originally designated in December 1965. The Chilterns Conservation Board was established by Parliamentary order in 2004. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act places a duty on conservation boards to produce a plan which sets out their policies for the management of the AONB. Management plans must be reviewed every 5 years.
- 3 Chiltern District Council has supported the AONB since its original designation. The Council's own objectives specifically refer to the conservation of the AONB (Objective 3A Council Key Objectives 2012 to 2014).
- 4 This is the third Management Plan produced by the Board with the first being produced by the then shadow board in 2002 and a further plan produced in 2008 and adopted in 2009. The current Plan was reported to Cabinet as a draft on 2nd September 2008 (minute 65 refers). Following adoption of the plan by the AONB Board the Council was asked to endorse the plan which was reported to the Cabinet in April 2009 (minute 200 refers). The draft Plan, the subject of this report will replace the 2009 plan once adopted by the Board.

The draft Management Plan

- 5 As the draft plan forms a revision and update to the current management plan much of the content is the same or similar to that document. In some cases facts and figures have been updated and in others sections have been re-ordered.
- 6 The Plan describes the vision for the AONB on which the Plan is based. It then describes the special qualities of the AONB. The plan then sets out the cross cutting themes which will have a significant

influence on the management of the AONB. These repeat the 4 cross cutting themes of the 2008 plan –

- Climate change,
- Social inclusion,
- Health and well-being, and
- Lifelong learning

and add two new themes,

- Ecosystem services and
- Environmental sustainability.

7 Ecosystems services are explained as the many services the environment provides in the form of benefits to wildlife, water, minerals, public enjoyment, flood protection, food timber and other natural resources. The aim of such a category is to ensure that any proposal with environmental impacts assesses all these interlinked ecosystems services. The issues of environmental sustainability relates to the use of resources which can be renewed rather than those that will be exhausted if their use is not stopped. Therefore the priority is to minimise the use of non-renewable resources and increasing the use of renewables.

8 The document then goes on to deal with the key issues relating to the duty to conserve and enhance the natural beauty. With chapters covering the following

- Landscape
- Farming, Forestry and other land management
- Biodiversity
- Water environment
- Historic environment
- Development

9 In Relation to landscape and farming the plan recognises the effects of climate change will have on the landscape with changing mix of woodland species becoming more likely and in relation to farming a change in the crops being farmed. The plan notes the decline in Cherry Orchards and suggests there is growing interest in trying to preserve some of the remaining best examples of these orchards. It also considers it unlikely that there will be any applications to erect wind turbine farms in the AONB because of low wind speeds but that there may be places where smaller wind turbines could be located without intrusion in the landscape. It notes that there are likely to be pressures to allow the development of other renewable energy sources which could be acceptable provided they are of an appropriate scale and located in non-sensitive locations.

- 10 HS2 - a consistent thread running through the plan is the AONB Board's opposition to HS2. In relation to landscape it notes the impact of HS2 on the Misbourne valley will be severe and considers the current designs could not be satisfactorily mitigated. The plan states that the Conservation Board opposes HS2 because the case for it has not been justified and in the Boards view the track could be re-located outside of the AONB. It states that if the line is finally approved by Parliament it should be set in a full length bored tunnel through the AONB.
- 11 In the farming section the document notes the significant reduction in the number of individual farm holdings since the last management plan. This has resulted in an increasing issue of contracted farming on the larger holdings with a smaller holdings more likely to be run as lifestyle or hobby type farms. In relation to woodland the low prices for commercially grown wood has meant a reduction in the management of woods however the growth in demand for wood fuel as a renewable fuel may encourage the re-introduction of woodland management. The previous document was not in favour of horse-culture, however, there is a recognition that careful horse grazing may help to maintain grassland given the reduction in livestock farming. However intensive equestrian within its associated ranch style and tape fences is still resisted.
- 12 The plan recognises the importance of the internationally important chalk streams and that over abstraction is still an issue. In relation to the historic environment the plan states that the construction of HS2 will result in considerable destruction of features of the historic environment. It states a key challenge for HS2 will be to avoid and not just mitigate the damage to the historic environment.
- 13 The development section makes reference to the Chilterns Buildings Design guide and the need to ensure high standards of development within the AONB. As members will be aware the Council has endorsed the Design Guide and it is a material consideration in all planning applications made within the AONB area.
- 14 Other than HS2 other threats to the tranquillity of the AONB are listed at increase flights across the area particularly the expansion of Luton Airport and possible additional runways at Heathrow. Also the possibility of a review of flight paths across the region to accommodate more flights may result in more aircraft crossing the AONB.
- 15 Generally the management plan sets out all the issues you would expect the document to cover and can be supported. One slight concern is the number of policies include in the plan. The 2008 plan included 93 policies which in itself was a lot but the 2013 draft includes 113. It is questioned whether all of these policies are necessary and if some could be dropped or merged with policies covering a similar issue. It seems difficult to see how the effectiveness of such a wide

range of policies could be monitored or even used effectively by planning officers who are trying to implement the plan.

- 16 There are a number of small typos within the document and therefore it is suggested that these together with the councils formal response to the Consultation are set out in a letter with the precise wording to be delegated to the Head of Sustainable Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development

Conclusion

- 17 The plan is comprehensive with full coverage given to the various issues facing the AONB now and potentially in the future. There is clear evidence of the cross cutting themes with many of the issues highlighted in this report appearing in several sections of the management plan. Subject to the concern highlighted above the draft management plan can be supported.

Background Papers:

Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 to 2019 Consultation draft September 2013 – <http://www.chilternsaonb.org/management-plan>
