

## **Item 7. AONB Management Plan review**

### **1. Summary**

This paper sets out some background and suggestions around the process for the forthcoming five year AONB Management Plan review.

### **2. Background**

The AONB Management Plan is on a five year cycle due for approval of the next Plan for 2019-2024 by the end of March 2019. This is now 18 months away, which is roughly the time period over which the previous Management Plan reviews have been conducted.

Previously, where circumstances have prevented some AONBs from completing their plans by the set dates, agreement has been reached with Defra to vary the timetable. The potential creation of a Conservation Board for the Shropshire Hills AONB may be a reason for us to do this.

Provisions in the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 regarding Management Plans are different for Conservation Boards. The most relevant clauses are as follows: (from Section 89)

*(1) Every conservation board shall, within two years after the date on which they are established, prepare and publish a plan which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it.*

*(6) A conservation board may, within six months of the date on which they are established, adopt an area of outstanding natural beauty management plan prepared for their area of outstanding natural beauty by the relevant local authority as their area of outstanding natural beauty management plan, and publish it under subsection (1).*

*(7) Subject to subsection (8), a conservation board shall review their area of outstanding natural beauty management plan before the end of the period of five years beginning with the date on which it was published and, after the first review, at intervals of not more than five years.*

*(8) Where a conservation board have adopted a plan under subsection (6), the first review must take place before the end of the period of three years beginning with the date on which the plan was published.*

It is probably preferable, if the Conservation Board goes ahead, for it to approve the new 2019-24 Plan, even if this is slightly delayed from the March 2019 timetable. Subsection 6 above allows for an alternative if the Board was going ahead but subject to delays, meaning the Plan should be approved by the local authorities in order to progress.

### Post Brexit targeting of government funding to support land management

The National Association for AONBs in their current discussions with Defra are promoting the idea that:

***AONB management plans should provide a key framework for the development of a post Brexit agri-environment support scheme.***

- *AONB Management Plans are statutory documents with a democratic basis rooted in evidence based policy*
- *The integrated nature of AONB management plans ensures that agricultural policy is cross referenced to wider environmental, social, and economic outcomes, the outcome of which will result in more productive and prosperous rural areas*

- *Integrated delivery at the local level will improve opportunities for simpler, cheaper, more effective delivery*
- *The AONB management plan is a plan for sustainability.*

We have been asked to consider whether we will need to adjust the structure and content of the next round of management plans in order to support this 'offer', or whether we are comfortable that our next plans will be able to act as the framework for the targeting of agri-environment and rural development funding as is. Some others have referred to their Plans having, for example "detailed landscape management prescriptions for sub-character areas of the AONB". We do not currently have this level of detail in our Management Plan. There would certainly be some pointers for targeting in our plan, but we would almost certainly need to take a different and much more thorough approach if the next Plan was going to be used directly for this purpose. This is obviously more challenging for larger AONBs.

#### Process and timescale

To inform the discussion about process for this Plan review, Appendix 1 shows the process and timetable set out for the previous Management Plan review five years ago (which in practice was slightly streamlined as the process went through).

The current AONB Management Plan, having been produced electronically as a 'text only' document is a good deal less 'visible' than the previous Plans, and arguably achieves less influence as a result. This next review should be used as a way to raise the profile of the Management Plan again. A revised 'State of the AONB report' looking at statistics and trends was worked on but unfortunately not completed as part of the last review, and this should be done as a precursor to inform the next review.

While there is uncertainty at present around the approval process and timetable, it seems clear that the process of the Plan review must get under way soon. We are likely to know within a few months or weeks whether the Conservation Board dimension to this is relevant. A sensible balance will need to be struck between putting the appropriate work into the review to achieve a good, influential Management Plan, and other priorities such as new funding bids.

### **3. RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Transition Board is recommended to comment on the issues raised and proposals for the Management Plan review.**

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### **Appendix 1 Process and timetable for previous review of the AONB Management Plan**

#### **Further Information:**

Current AONB Management Plan and supporting information can be found at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/a-special-place/management-plan/>.

## Appendix 1

### Stages and outline timetable for review process for the 2014-19 Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan

TASK	WHO	EXPECTED TIMETABLE
<b>FORMALITIES AND NOTIFICATION</b>		
Authorisation from local authorities to undertake review on their behalf	AONB Team	June 12
Agree process and timetable of review	Partnership	June 12
Notify Natural England S90(1). Other stakeholders – identify any beyond Partnership.	Partnership	July 12
Announce requirement for SEA	Partnership	July 12
<b>SCOPING</b>		
Evaluation workshop on current Plan.	Partnership	Oct 11
Discussion of Plan review priorities among Team, Partnership, Management Board, Working Groups and with key partners.	Partnership	June-Aug 12
Analyse key stakeholders in Management Plan review process	AONB Team	June-Aug 12
Report on impact and strengths/weaknesses of Plan.	AONB Team	June-Aug 12
Gather information relating to new evidence/ issues	AONB Team	June-Aug 12
List and assess relevance of new strategies/ plans, including in Wales	AONB Team	June-Aug 12
Collate community views on issues from existing sources	AONB Team	June-Aug 12
Write scoping report for SEA, setting context and objectives, establishing baseline evidence and indicators (stage A)	AONB Team	June-Aug 12
Consult on scoping report for SEA	With statutory agencies	Sept 12
Publish update to State of the AONB report	AONB Team	Nov 12?
<b>REVIEW</b>		
Assess individual sections of plan and agree main areas for revisions and structure (S89(10a)).	AONB Team/ Partnership	June 12
Undertake specific targeted consultations /participatory workshops with relevant groups	Partnership & wider	Summer 12
Reassess main issues, aims and objectives. Redraft, and discuss with relevant groups.	Partnership	Summer 12
Work on topic sections with relevant groups (Working Groups, Area groups, etc) – detailed issues, policies and updated actions.	Partnership	Autumn 12
Assess effects of objectives, policies & actions and for SEA and develop alternatives. (Stage B) Element of independent review required.	AONB Team	Winter 12/13
Collate new draft plan and get designed. Prepare Environmental Report for SEA (Stage C) and non-technical summary.	AONB Team	Winter 12/13
Approve Consultation Draft	Partnership	March 13
<b>CONSULTATION &amp; APPROVAL OF FULL PLAN</b>		
Run public consultation on new draft plan and SEA report (Stage D). 12 week period.	AONB Team/ Partnership	March/Apr 13
Consider comments from consultation and amend plan	AONB Team	May 13
Report on consultation and suggested amendments	Partnership	June 12
Send to Natural England for formal observations	AONB Team	July 13
Consider comments from formal observations and amend plan	AONB Team	Sept 13
Get new plan formally approved through Cabinet of local authorities	Local authorities	Oct 13 -
Printing and distribution	AONB Team	Early 14
Send approved Plan to Secretary of State	AONB Team	By March 14
Publish Statement on how SEA taken into account and changes.	AONB Team	March 14
Implement and monitor Plan and its effects (SEA Stage E).	Partnership	March 14 on